

PARKGATE SOCIETY

Newsletter 36

Spring 1989

President	JR Cochrane CBE	
Chairman	GW Place	336 2891
Vice-chairman	SC Edwards	336 1190
Secretary	Mrs AM Clarke	336 1069
Treasurer	EPD Taylor	

OUR FORTHCOMING PROGRAMME

Monday, 13th March, 8 pm at the Parkgate Hotel

Adrian Jarvis, Keeper of Social and Industrial History at the Merseyside Museums, will talk about his new museum display,

Opening locked doors

Monday, 24th April, 8 pm at the Parkgate Hotel,

Harry Jones, well known as a local sailor, formerly coxswain of the Hoylake lifeboat, will tell us about

The work of the Lifeboat Institute

Monday, 22nd May, 8 pm at the Parkgate Hotel

Martin ^{Samison} James, from the Wirral Country Park, will describe

A Cumbrian peregrine watch

We hope, as always, that we have provided an enticing selection of varied and interesting talks. If any of you have a problem with transport to reach our meetings, do please telephone Mrs Clarke, 336 1069.

Volunteers Requested

We need a few kind people who are prepared to deliver a few copies of the Newsletter for us. At the moment there are three copies to be delivered in the West Vale area of Little Neston, and four copies in Gayton Parkway, at the top of Boathouse Lane. If you are willing to deliver in either of these areas, usually only twice a year, please contact our secretary, Mrs Clarke, 336 1069.

Subscriptions

It has proved necessary to raise our rates for subscription, and the reasons are detailed overleaf. If you now pay by Bankers' Order, we must ask you to sign a new form. You will find a Bankers' Order form enclosed loose with this Newsletter.

If at present you don't pay by Bankers' Order, please consider doing so, as it saves us a great deal of work.

Our Meeting Place For years we have been meeting in the comfort of the Trafalgar Room at the Parkgate Hotel, free of charge, which has not only made for very agreeable meetings, but has kept our subscriptions down.

The new manager of the hotel, Mr Dobson, is still most generously prepared to house us free of charge, but if he can let the Trafalgar Room, we would have to move elsewhere. For this reason, we found ourselves unexpectedly in the bar for our AGM. Rather like meeting in a railway carriage ! So we have decided that it would be better for the Society to know for certain that we were meeting in the very attractive and suitable Trafalgar Room, and fairer to the Hotel that we should pay for it.

We feel it is right that the running costs of the Society should be met from subscription income, leaving our other income, derived from the sale of our publications, free for projects such as the Saxon cross fragments or Mostyn Square. Therefore, from the date of this Newsletter, our subscriptions must rise to:

£3 single or family membership
£1.50 senior citizen membership

Our Meetings

The Annual General Meeting was held on 24th October 1988. The officers and committee members of the Society were re-elected as follows:

Geoffrey Place (chairman), Clive Edwards (vice-chairman)
Angela Clarke (secretary), EPD Taylor (treasurer)
Shirley Britt, Valerie Place, Michael Potts,
Sheila Syngé, Muriel Tinker, Geoff Topp, Leonard Walker.

Since then, Geoff. Topp has felt obliged to resign because of pressure of work. It is typical of his integrity that he should say that he should not remain on the committee if he could not attend its meetings regularly. We are very sorry to lose him and are grateful for all his past help.

We are very pleased to report that Mr Taylor, our treasurer for many years, is now fully restored to health after his recent illness. His wife reported that he had 'passed his MOT', and we are delighted to have him back on the committee in excellent working order !

With formal business at the AGM over, we heard an illuminating talk on Stained Glass by Bill Davies, showing us both its history and the work he produces in his studio in Irby.

In November Canon Bidell gave us a fascinating talk on Chester Cathedral. He clearly loves his subject and conveyed his enthusiasm to his audience. Some of us were surprised to learn that the cathedral created out of St Werburgh's Abbey is not in fact dedicated to St Werburgh.

In January our joint meeting with two other local Societies insured that every chair we could cram in, nearly one hundred, was filled. Professor Leonard Broadbent, chairman of the management committee of Ness Gardens, outlined 'Chemical Warfare in the Garden'. Professor Broadbent, to the possible disconsolation of our greener members, is all in favour of such warfare, pointing out that our ability to feed the world's soaring population rests on our ability to control our animal, herbal and fungus competitors.

The Birds and the Problem of Parkgate:
an Outsider's View

by W. Victor Smith, a vice-president of the Wirral Society

The Dee estuary, including its marshes, is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Within this huge SSSI, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds owns a reserve of 5040 acres, known as the Gayton Sands Reserve. The marsh adjoining Parkgate front is part of this reserve. The whole SSSI is also what is known as a Ramsar site, so named after the place where an international conference was held about the threats to the world's wetlands and the remarkable wildlife.

There are still lots of people - perhaps even in Parkgate - who haven't a clue what all this is about. They are blind to the attraction of wetlands, although artists for generations have been attracted by their wide skies and water reflected lights, and they are deaf to the astonishing beauty of the calls of the wading birds often heard against the roar of the sea on distant banks and the hiss of the approaching or withdrawing tide over the nearer shore.

On a grey winter's day, with no light to turn the wet mudflats into silver, the estuary may seem dreary, until you hear the sweetly haunting call of a redshank across the wilderness or the more solemn call of the curlew, both so evocative of the spirit of these wild places. Equally evocative in their more gentle way are the calls of the ringed plover and grey plover. If you have ears to hear, the effect is sheer magic.

Sheer magic, too, is the massed flight of knot, dunlin or sanderling, in a vast 'corps de ballet' having a precision of movement unknown to a human one.

On New Year's day this year, I walked at low tide from Caldy, along the inner shore, towards Parkgate. The wintering knot - which I think move around between here and the Ribble - were on this day present in great numbers. In what must have been a communal urge to change feeding places, at least ten thousand of them, at a modest estimate, rose in the air together. With occasional flashes of light when their white under-wings caught the low winter sun, their close-packed clouds split and reunited, suddenly changed direction, soared and swooped, to the accompaniment of the wild piping of oyster catchers. Several of us watching gasped at the wonder of the spectacle.

Past Thurstaston I reached the expanding marsh and the gutter, or tidal creek, which runs along its inner side close to the Heswall shore, a fascinating place both for its boats and its birds, much of it within the RSPB reserve. There are commonly shelduck near the mouth of the gutter and curlew and redshanks all along it. The thousands of pintail and wigeon for which the estuary is famous, tend to distance themselves on the far side of the marsh, but the gutter is frequented, whether or not the tide is in, by hundreds of that charming little duck, the teal - almost as far as Parkgate.

Almost - "ay, there's the rub". Nearing Parkgate, one quite suddenly loses touch with the gutter, its teal and other birds, as its upper end turns westward and out of sight from

Parkgate. The marsh in the foreground of the view from the front is, to my mind, dreary, and that is what is seen by the thousands of visitors to historic Parkgate. There is no tidal crest nor pool of any consequence in view, to reflect light or attract the birds I have been writing about - nothing to break the monotony of the outlook. It is not of course entirely birdless. There are, for example, the water rails, flushed out of the marsh by the occasional very big tide and seeking cover under cars parked on the Parade. And in late spring and early summer, when most of the waders and duck are far away from the estuary at their breeding places, the marsh here, as elsewhere, is a potential or actual breeding place for redshank and larks and, where reeds exist, other species. Nevertheless, the place compares unfavourably with the rest of the Wirral shore of the estuary and also with the marsh fringe beyond Parkgate, before Neston and Ness, where the Denhall gutter heads inshore, attracting waders and duck in winter, and where in summer there are shelduck and lapwing, breeding in the vicinity.

Well, what can be done about the view from the front, which at present is a bad 'shop front' for nature conservation and for Parkgate ?

The land in question has been acquired by the RSPB as part of their reserve. As I see it, the Society would be in breach of its charter if that land were used for other purposes, quite apart from the objections to such use which the Nature Conservancy Council would have to make because of the status of the area. So those who, totally ignoring the RSPB or NCC, have in recent years sought to promote ambitious schemes to "bring the water back to Parkgate" and make it a place for 'watersports', have been wasting everybody's time. It follows that anything to be done must either directly contribute to conservation on the reserve or, at any rate, help to promote a good image of conservation to the uncommitted public. The RSPB itself, I think, points the way in its book, 'RSPB Nature Reserves', published in 1983. The book has this to say about the management of the Gayton Sands reserve:

Management. Although it is planned that most of the reserve will remain in its semi-natural state, management of the upper shore by creation of bunded freshwater pools and scrapes will add brackish and freshwater to the reserve and add to the variety of birds.

A 'bunded' pool is one where the water is contained by means of an embankment, rather than by excavation, in this case to keep salt water out. A 'scrape' is a place cleared of vegetation in order to attract feeding waders.

The RSPB's proposals are designed to attract more birds rather than improve Parkgate, but it would be worthwhile siting two or three of the bunded pools close to the front to improve the scene and, incidentally, help to deflate calls for unwanted development there. It might be difficult to channel fresh water into position by the Parkgate front, but I feel it is so important to do something that salt water pools, fed by spring tides, would be better than nothing. The public would enjoy seeing the gulls there, and some of the estuary's duck would reach the pools - a good shop window for the RSPB.

The Changing Face of Parkgate We always try to represent the Parkgate Society at local events wherever possible. Committee members attended the Fair to celebrate the centenary of Neston Town Hall on 10th September, and also helped to provide, with other Societies, a display of local history in the Town Hall. Our chairman helped to address an audience of two hundred in the Civic Hall on Neston a hundred years ago.

The Open Evening in November was especially interesting to newcomers. Various societies ranging from music to rambling were represented, as were local services like the police. Your editor certainly came away feeling that there was a wide range of activities on offer in our area.

There has been renewed discussion in the local papers about car parking problems at Parkgate, and we took the opportunity to remind our two councillors of our long standing suggestion that a suitable car park site would be the ground between the Boat House and the Old Baths. The land, which is not part of the marsh and is a mess, would look no worse if made into a car park and, if well handled, could be improved.

Mostyn Square We have been pressing for some time for a facelift to Mostyn Square, and after protracted negotiations, the Council agreed to do the work we suggested if we paid £500 towards it. We think the money has been well spent. The bus shelter has been repaired and painted, new seats have been placed inside and out, the odd collection of obscured glass in its windows have been replaced by clear glass, a new litter bin and flower tubs have been provided, and the rather anonymous sign saying 'The Square' is to be replaced by one saying 'Mostyn Square'. As part of the same agreement, a new litter bin has also been put on the pavement in front of the Old Quay.

We are pursuing a few other ideas whereby, for the expenditure of a little of our funds, Parkgate may be brightened up, and we hope to report on these in the next Newsletter.

'Sanctuary by the Sea' was the name of a programme in Granada TV's 'Down to Earth' series, which involved a walk by the presenter, Bob Smithies, along the Wirral shore from Hilbre to Shotwick, with much interesting information on the way. Geoffrey Place was induced to join the walk along the Parkgate Parade.

Parkgate Remembered It is always fascinating to look back over the years and see the changes occurring in the district. Therefore, we are very fortunate to have an expert photographer in our midst. Leonard Walker has spent the past two years compiling a detailed photographic record of every aspect of Parkgate, and before long it should be ready for exhibition.

At the local history talk in the Civic Hall in November, the audience took an impromptu collection to provide some memento of the centenary commemoration. It has been agreed by the three societies involved that the money should be used to make a similar photographic record of Neston, and Susan Chambers has just begun this considerable task. In another hundred years, our successors should be glad of our foresight as the study ancient Parkgate and Neston.

Welsh Connections by Clive Edwards

Driving down Boathouse Lane at night and seeing the lights along the Clwyd shore twinkling like chains of stars; the first glimpse of the hills and estuary on the daily walk with the dog along Wood Lane; or Flint Castle caught in the binoculars while birdwatching by the reed bed - we must all have our special views, from Moel Famau to the Point of Ayr, and it is usually not long before we are tempted to visit and explore the land at the other side of our estuary.

In the days when Parkgate was a port or at least a fishing village, the estuary was a place of communication, joining not separating England and Wales, and Harold Gill in the book 'Dee Wildfowler' tells of punting for duck on the Welsh side at Llanerchymor, Mostyn and Bagillt, and he used to stay overnight sometimes at Connah's Quay. Traders from Wales used to come over to Parkgate, by ferry or on foot, to sell their wares.

Today we can walk part way to Wales along Harold Gill's 'Fisherman's Path' from the bottom of Moorside Lane, but do not venture out on to the sands unless you have studied the tide tables ! It is actually not as far as you think from Parkgate to Wales, as the Welsh border still follows the old course of the River Dee.

Parkgate itself was once in the ownership of the Mostyn family, and then put up for sale and invested in Llandudno instead ! They just left us their name for the school and the square. The name of the house 'Pengwern' echoes one of the ancient homes of the Mostyn family.

The Wirral itself has a Welsh name, Cilgyru (pronounced Kilgury) and it is thought that Welsh was still spoken in Anglo-Saxon times in the isolated 'Welsh Island', now called Wallasey. Also, Landican probably is the site of a Welsh religious settlement, and was once possibly Landican named after a little known saint.

To help you avoid making the worst howlers in pronouncing Welsh placenames on your visits to Cymru, here are some clues:

- DD This is not D, but the sounded the of 'the',
eg. Dolgeddlu, pronounced Dolgethli.
- U This is not the English U, but our I,
eg. Ruthin, pronounced Rithin, or Llandudno - Llandidno.
- Y This is usually as the (southern) English U
eg. Cymru (Wales) - pronounced Kumri.
- LL and CH Ask me at a meeting !
- F English V, as in Moel Famau (pronounced Vama)
- FF English F, hence Fflint.

I hope this short article will reawaken interest in our Welsh connections and make you look a little longer at our wonderful views to the 'other side'. How about visiting the Welsh National Eisteddfod in Mold in 1991 ?