

Parkgate Society

Newsletter 46

SPRING 1994

President	J.R. Cochrane CBE
Chairman	G.W. Place
Vice-chairman	M.S. Potts
Secretary	A.M. Clarke
Treasurer	S.C. Edwards

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

(8 pm at the Parkgate Hotel unless otherwise stated)

Monday, 7th February

'*Maritime Wirral*' a talk by our friend, the local author, Pat O'Brien.

Monday, 14th March

'*900 Not Out*'. June Lancelyn Green will be visiting us to talk about the story of Poulton Hall and the Poulton family history.

Monday, 18th April

'*The Great Exhibition*'. Bill Hawkin will tell the story of the famous Victorian event in the Crystal Palace.

Monday, 4th May - 6.30 p.m. meet at car park Ness Gardens.

Guided tour of Ness Gardens, led by the garden's Director, Dr. Rob Marrs during the very popular rhododendron flowering season. Booking slips for this visit will be sent out nearer the time.

Monday, 23rd May

'*The Future of the Dee Estuary*'. A must for all who are interested in the Dee. Dr. Alan Jemmett is the project officer of the Dee Estuary Strategy who will be reporting on the results of his two year research project.

Membership: The subscription rates:

£3 Single or Family
£1.50 Senior Citizen

Mrs. Valerie Place will be pleased to receive your subscriptions at our meetings or at her home (Pendmore, Station Road, Parkgate). If you have new neighbours, please encourage them to attend our interesting meetings.

If you need transport to reach our meetings, ring Angela Clarke (336 1069).

ROUND-UP OF AUTUMN MEETINGS

The September meeting's topic **Charles Kingsley 'A Victorian Naturalist'**, provided important insights to the man who, although known mainly as the author of 'The Water Babies' and other novels, made many other contributions to his own and future generations, including setting in motion the formation of the Grosvenor Museum in Chester.

It all began in 1869 when Charles Kingsley, at the age of 50 years, was appointed Canon of Chester Cathedral and came to live in "The Residence", 11 Abbey Square for three months each year until 1873. From the moment of his arrival in Chester he is said to have felt at home. His family claimed descent from the Kingsleys of Kingsley or Vale Royal in Delamere Forest and in 1844 he had married Fanny Grenfell, cousin to the Grenfells at Mostyn House School. Although no records exist to confirm it, there is every possibility that he was a visitor to Parkgate.

As well as his Cathedral duties, he started botany and geology classes for young men, meeting in a small room in the City Library. The increasing popularity of these weekly lectures and the opening of attendance to lady friends, required movement of the venue to the more spacious Lecture Room at King's School. Walks and field excursions also became part of the programme.

This was the beginning of the Chester Natural History Society. Field trips included visits to Helsby Hill, Burton Point, Church Stretton and Hilbre Island, by steamer. As many as 60-100 members could be seen on the platform of Chester Station, clutching geological hammers and collecting boxes, all travelling together on friendly terms, in second-class carriages, without distinction of rank or position, thus uniting Cathedral and town.

Six lectures (The Soil of the Field, The Pebbles in the Street, The Stones in the

Wall, The Coal in the Fire, The Lime in the Mortar, The Slates on the Roof) were published by Kingsley in 1872 as "Town Geology" and were dedicated to the members of the class he loved so well.

In 1873 Charles Kingsley accepted the Canonry of Westminster Abbey and severed his connection with Chester. He died two years later at the age of 55 years.

Chester Natural History Society continues to this day, so, like the museum, it serves as a lasting memorial to a remarkable man.

We are indebted to Steve Woolfall, curator of natural history at the Grosvenor Museum, for giving this memorable illustrated talk.

Shirley Britt

At the October **AGM** Harold Loughran retired from the committee and was thanked for his service. James Pratt was elected in his place to serve alongside the remaining committee members, who were voted in *en bloc*. Our President, Jim Cochrane, thanked the committee for its efforts, in particular Geoffrey Place who has now served as Chairman for the past 10 years.

After the well-attended AGM, Jeff Clarke, countryside ranger from Stanney Woods, Ellesmere Port, gave a well illustrated talk about ***Herbs and wild flowers of the Wirral***, with frequent references to their supposed medicinal properties as described by the famous herbalist Culpepper. A remarkable number have reputed efficacy in alleviating the discomfort of haemorrhoids - a condition which gives rise to considerable mirth, in all but the sufferers!

Our November talk ***The colourful world of insects*** by W. Hubbert lived up to its title in the collection of delightful slides presented to the accompaniment of incidental music by the enthusiastic speaker.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

A Parish Council for Neston and District?

The Local Government Commission set up to review the organisation of local government in the shire counties of England and Wales must decide shortly on a new structure for Cheshire. Since Central Government is looking for a simplification of current provision, it seems likely that any new plan will involve abolition of the County Council as presently constituted and mergers of existing District Councils into a smaller number of larger unitary authorities with responsibilities for providing all services which are at present shared between County and District Councils. The changes may necessitate minor adjustments to present county boundaries in order to ensure that newly created authorities are of appropriate size in terms, particularly, of population.

Cheshire County Council is not convinced of the need for reform and will argue for maintaining the *status quo*.

If change for the county is approved by Parliament, the existing eight Districts are likely to be reduced to five or even less. Ellesmere Port and Neston, the smallest of the Districts both in population and area, cannot remain untouched. Merger with either Chester (including the whole of west Cheshire) or Vale Royal (the "Heart of Cheshire") or even both seem the most likely options to produce a unitary authority of suitable size. At the same time, it is suggested that both National Government and the Commission are strongly supportive of Parish, or Town, Councils the lowest tier of present local government and the one nearest to the people.

There are many who feel that the coupling of Neston with Ellesmere Port in the present Borough Council has hardly been beneficial to either town; the two ends of the Borough have little in common in nature and needs. The voice of Neston and its neighbours (including Parkgate, Ness and Little Neston) may be heard in EP&NBC but how strong will it be in a new mega-district?

Cheshire in general is rich in Town and Parish Councils. Within EP&NBC only Ince has a functional Parish Council. Perhaps it is time for a revival of others, to help avoid issues of local significance being overlooked or decided by remote, uninterested parties. There is a cost to local communities (for tiny Ince, this amounts to £17 per annum per head of population, but with larger populations the unit cost is less). The people of Neston and district should decide for themselves, and ask for the right to do so, but first they need to be informed of the precise cost and benefits - in particular what powers and responsibilities would be devolved from the unitary authority.

David P Britt, December 1993.

S.O.S.

In April last year the RSPB launched its Save our Shorebirds (S.O.S.) campaign. This was in order to protect internationally important coastlines for millions of migratory birds. The Mersey and Dee estuaries are two of the most 'bird rich' areas in the UK.

Did you know?

The Dee estuary is home to 90,800 waders and 26,300 waders in the important winter/passage periods. Important species include: 8,300 Pintail (12% of NW European total), 30,400 Oystercatchers, Shelduck, Knot, Dunlin and Redshank.

Pressures include: recreation, shellfish harvesting, hydrocarbon developments, power station developments and coal waste tipping.

(Birdwatchers Diary, September to December 1993 produced by a consortium of local and national organisations)

"Who is Tamsin Cooke?" you may have wondered when these notices appeared in what is now Cooke's Voyages restaurant in Mostyn Square. We are told this young lady lived in Parkgate in the 1800s before embarking on a journey to Ireland to visit her lover. She subsequently travelled the world in search of romance and adventure, during which time she also became fascinated by the diversity of food in the countries she visited. It is said she kept a journal in which she recorded recipes of the dishes she encountered and these are now on offer at the restaurant. No information is available as to where precisely in Parkgate Tamsin Cooke resided. I was informed that her great-great nephew, William Cooke, still living in the south of England, allowed the owners the pleasure of reading Tamsin's beautifully kept journal.

Shirley Britt

In its newsletter 'Wirral Matters', Summer 1993, the Wirral Society (as the Wirral committee for the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England) has come out strongly against the proposed new trunk road through Wirral's Green Belt.

The Department of Transport has modified its original proposals for the 7 mile road, which will cost £19.3 million at today's prices and cut through seven farms destroying three of them.

The residents' committee, called SWATHE, set up by concerned residents of Hooton, Willaston and Eastham to fight the proposed road, say that the Department of Transport is using forecasts of traffic growth which have not materialised with the M53 being the most under used motorway in the country.

The CPRE nationally is trying to raise funds to mount a campaign against the government's frantic road-building programme, spending £5.5m daily on road construction and maintenance. Thousands of miles of roads and motorways are to be built or widened and CPRE estimates that 800 scheduled ancient monuments and 30 National Trust properties are under threat.

The outgoing chairman of CPRE claims that most new roads do not solve traffic problems. They move problems elsewhere and actually increase traffic.

NEWS AND VIEWS

Paths in the area are getting a high profile recently. *Earle Drive* is sporting a much-improved pavement with edging kerbstones surrounding the grass verges. Glorious to walk on, I only hope tree roots were not disturbed along this very pretty road.

The Ropewalk is to be re-tarmacadamed during the course of 1994 which will bring relief to all who use it. *Drop Kerbs* are being introduced around Parkgate, which will help the disabled and the pushchair-using public.

The *Back Path*, which runs between Bevy Road and Brookland Road, much used by local school children, will receive regular cutting back of undergrowth but will not now be gravelled as had been mooted.

The new school nursery of Mostyn House School is now operating from the premises of the former *Brynhir* school.

We will all sadly miss the closure of *Tony Smith's shop* in Station Road. The Parkgate Society committee said farewell to Tony and Norma at a gathering in the shop when it ceased trading at 5.00 p.m. on Saturday, 4th December after 26 years.

A small presentation was made and the couple were wished well in their future plans to settle in Scotland.

Children from Parkgate Primary School and local residents recently planted over 2000 *daffodil bulbs* in the garden of St. Thomas' Church. They were given by the Marie Curie charity as part of a Wirral-wide planting. Look out for the Spring-time flowering.

The *Parkgate Primary School* held a celebration of its 25th anniversary with a week-long series of events in the summer. This culminated in a social evening where people who had attended the school and its predecessor, the Infant School were invited back to share memories.

The iron railings near the *Middle Slip* are resplendent in their fresh coat of paint - black with golden knobs.

Our newly designed sign for Mostyn Square appeared just after we last 'went to press', so if you want a Ron Wright limited edition of the old view of the lamp post



With thanks for permission by Bill Stott:
'The Funny Side of Wirral'.

'AROUND CHESHIRE' Quiz

1. A fragment of the wedding bouquet of Nelson's Lady Hamilton was once auctioned by Sotherby's. How much did it fetch?
 - (a) £10
 - (b) £100
 - (c) £1000
 - (d) Nothing
2. Chester's race course, 'The Roodee' was formerly a Roman ?
 - (a) Baths
 - (b) Harbour
 - (c) Market Place
 - (d) Amphitheatre
3. What Roman relic can be seen in the basement of 39 Bridge Street, Chester?
 - (a) A furnace for heating baths
 - (b) A wine press
 - (c) A massage parlour
 - (d) A complete skeleton
4. Sir George Beeston who lies at rest in Bunbury Church yard performed what amazing feat at the age of 88?
 - (a) Killed a bear with his bare hands
 - (b) Commanded a ship against the Armada
 - (c) Rescued almost forty people from a blazing mill
 - (d) Sired his fourteenth child
5. Sir Phillip Brocklehurst, the Cheshire explorer, is best remembered for accompanying whom to where?
 - (a) Hunt to Everest
 - (b) Grenfell to Labrador
 - (c) Livingstone to Africa
 - (d) Shackleton to the Antarctic
6. In Bunbury Church can be found the tomb of Hugh Calveley, who was?
 - (a) The inventor of clockwork mechanisms
 - (b) England's first archaeologist
 - (c) The founder of the freemasons
 - (d) A 14th Century 7 foot giant
7. The Manchester Ship canal owes its existence to the fund raising efforts of one man. Was it?
 - (a) Richard Trevithick
 - (b) Daniel Adamson
 - (c) Thomas Telford
 - (d) James Brindley
8. In the chapel of Eastham church yard rests the tomb of Sir Rowland of 1613 whose claim to fame is that?
 - (a) He saved the life of James I
 - (b) He was over 8 feet tall
 - (c) He was the oldest knight in England
 - (d) He was the first man to swim across the Mersey
9. Which river is said to claim a human life as a sacrifice every 5 years?
 - (a) Mersey
 - (b) Bollin
 - (c) Dee
 - (d) Weaver
10. Frodsham can lay claim to having?
 - (a) Been the birthplace of Cheshire cheese
 - (b) More pubs per head of population than any Cheshire town
 - (c) The oldest surviving stocks in the N.W.
 - (d) One of England's widest main streets.

If you want to test yourself further read:

'So you think you know all about Cheshire', Compiled by Debbie Thompson. Published by R.E.T. Publications, Bolton, Lancs.

Answers on page 9.

WIRRAL'S ANCIENT WOODLAND

Around 7000 years ago, 3000 years after the retreat of the last ice age, Wirral was covered in woodland. This included areas now under the Dee Estuary and the Irish Sea.

The sunken forest at Meols and Leasowe, now occasionally exposed at very low tides, makes some sense of the old saying 'from Blacon Point to Hilbre, the squirrels leapt from tree to tree'. This area, prone to flooding, was eventually covered by the rising sea levels.

Large numbers of tree trunks could be seen at low water in 1796. By 1850 the upper layer was beginning to disappear. One stump could be seen 43 yds below the high water mark with bark still on it. Many of the stumps were removed and used by villagers as fuel after drying and cutting like peat. The largest stumps were near the Dee, becoming smaller but more numerous towards Leasowe.

The library room at Leasowe Castle is said to be fitted with timber from the submerged forest and many trinkets were also made from it.

Woodland was being cleared 5,000 years ago by 'Stone Age' farmers from the sandstone hills by fire, stone axes and grazing livestock. Because the light soils were quickly exhausted by agriculture, further clearance was necessary. With the invention of iron tools the heavier clay soils in the vales and near the coast also became workable.

Saxon and Scandinavian settlements led to the development of many of the Wirral villages, though the place names rarely suggest settlement in woodland clearings as in other parts of the North West. This might suggest that the woodland had been largely cleared by the Dark Ages. In 1086 AD, at the Domesday Survey, Wirral is thought to have had 3% woodland compared to Cheshire's 27%. It was certainly one of the most densely populated areas. Some manors and estates were well developed such as Thurstaston.

The Royal Forest of Wirral is said to have come into being around 1289 AD, as a means of raising taxes and imposing fines rather than caring for trees. The 'Forest' was stocked with both red and fallow deer. Throughout medieval times trees were exploited to provide firewood, charcoal and fencing.

The Dungeon, off the Wirral Way between Thurstaston and Heswall, is one of the few remaining pieces of ancient woodland. Its awkward location in a steep-sided dell saved it from the effects of felling. The fault line running through the woodland has resulted in Wirral's only real waterfall, while experts can find the fossilised traces of raindrops which fell on the dry desert sands that covered the area millions of years ago. The name 'Dungeon' is not a reference to any past use of the cave but an old English word for a wooded dell. Wirral's one large area of ancient woodland is Dibbinsdale.

Wild flowers growing in woodland can be indicators of its age. These can vary in different parts of the country. If a wood contains several 'indicator species', especially inconspicuous ones like moschatel (mentioned by Jeff Clarke in our October talk) then it is probably an ancient wood.

The species that the Cheshire Wildlife Trust look for in Wirral are:-

wood sorrel	wood anemone	golden saxifrage
yellow pimpernel	moschatel	ramsons (wild garlic)
sanicle	wood speedwell	bluebell
dog's mercury	wood millet (sometimes planted as pheasant food)	

and two that sometimes also grow in other long-established habitats such as old grassland - primrose and pignut. These species are bad at spreading because they produce little seed and have very precise habitat requirements.

1993 was Wirral's Woodland Year and, although much of the old woodland has gone, West Wirral is quite well wooded. From the Dee Estuary a dark green canopy extends along the skyline and down the course of streams to the shore, only broken by the lighter green of the fields above the boulder clay cliffs and the sandstone outcrop of Thurstaston Common. As the old forest disappeared so did the bears, wolves, otters and wild boars making today's countryside walks more peaceful if less exciting! (Wirral Countryside Newsletter - Summer 1993)

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WIRRAL WAY - SURVEY OF ITS USAGE

During Summer 1993, in co-operation with five other schools adjoining the Wirral Way, Parkgate County Primary School conducted a survey of usage of the Wirral Way. The survey looked at what the area was used for, how often it was used and whether people were happy with the condition in which it was maintained.

140 people were questioned and the great majority of these used the Wirral Way mainly as walkers or for exercising their dogs. Four of the respondents were joggers.

The condition of the park was a cause of concern for most. Dissatisfaction was expressed about dogs fouling the pathway, litter and vandalism. When asked whether dogs should be allowed along the Wirral Way, three-quarters agreed that they should. The same proportion agreed that bikes should be allowed. The Ranger service was generally thought to be adequate.

The eight and nine year old children conducting the survey have written their own impressions of the Wirral Way. Two are reproduced here:-

*Listening to the blackbird singing
Busy little buzzing bees dancing around
Listening to the summer whispers at the ground
People talking, having fun, summer just begun.
I see the greenery, I smell too
Summer flowers pretty and blue
The different kinds of swaying grass
A little light breeze to last and last.
I see people walking around
Trees swaying to and fro.
Deep blue sky way up there
White puffy clouds beyond it.*

Emma Chubb

*We went to the Wirral Way yesterday
 I could hear the blackbirds singing
 A tractor in the distance
 The wind blowing the trees
 Leaves shaking in the wind
 The bees buzzing around
 Insects playing in the grass
 Cars driving along the road
 And the footsteps of people walking
 I would see the grass waving in the wind
 Flowers blowing softly in the breeze
 Until I heard a voice say
 "Come on children
 Did you have a nice day?"*

Samantha Newman

Having the Wirral Way on our doorstep is a valuable asset for our school children. It is a wildlife haven useful for a range of work within the school.

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The Wet Summer. Yes, we did have a wet summer - it wasn't just imagination. According to rainfall figures from the meteorological station situated at Ness Gardens, rainfall for May was over three times the local average and above average figures continued until September. The wet summer followed a dry spring, so that the 25 inches total rainfall to the end of November was still slightly below average for the year. (Wait until December's figure is added on!)

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WHAT'S ON 1994

High Tide Birdwatch - Parkgate
 (Meet at Old Baths car park)

Jan. Sat. 29th - 10.30 am (9.8m)
 Sun. 30th - 11.00 am (9.9m)
 Feb. Sat. 26th - 9.30 am (9.8m)
 Sun. 27th - 10.00 am (10.1m)

The Working Woodland
 (Rivacre Valley Country Park,
 Ellesmere Port).

Feb. Sun. 13th: 10.30 am - 3.00 pm

See a host of yesteryear practices
 (working horses, hedgelaying, bodging,
 coppicing) and traditional costumes.

Answers to quiz: 1(d), 2(b), 3(a), 4(b), 5(d), 6(d), 7(b), 8(c), 9(a), 10(d).

Items for inclusion in the Autumn Newsletter should be handed to any committee member by 30th June 1994.

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 Newsletter Editors: B. Ford, D. and S. Britt.