

Parkgate Society

Newsletter 48

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G.W. Place
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Spring 1995

Forthcoming Meetings

(8pm at the Parkgate Hotel unless otherwise stated)

Monday, 6th February
'Speke Hall'

Richard Bartley will be giving details of the history of a premier Elizabethan mansion on our doorstep.

Monday, 13th March
'Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King'

An illustrated talk about the Liverpool landmark by Kevin Ford.

Monday, 10th April
'Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral'

The second of two talks giving the history of the Liverpool Cathedrals.

Sunday, 30th April, meet 10am at the slipway by the Old Quay pub.

Come and 'do your bit' for the Spring *Marsh Clearance*. Bring wellies and gloves for some exercise and fresh air after the Easter break.

Monday, 22nd May
'Parkgate and the Sea-bathing Cure'
Geoffrey Place will be entertaining us with his wealth of knowledge about Parkgate.

Membership

1995 subscriptions are now due. Mrs Valerie Place will be pleased to receive your subscriptions at our meetings or at her home (Pendmore, Station Road, Parkgate).

£3.00 per family
£1.50 concessions

If you require TRANSPORT to reach our meetings, ring Angela Clarke 336 1069. Please give 24 hours notice.

An early note for your diary:

Monday, 18th September, Antiques expert Kevin Whay will be speaking and giving valuations at our charity buffet supper.

An evening not to be missed

In the autumn Newsletter we advised you that a letter had been received from a regular visitor to Parkgate. We thought you might like to read it in its entirety, and reproduce it below

Memories of Parkgate in the 1920 s

By Mrs Kate Ryder of Nottingham

My Aunt Sarah Brazenell had two sons and one daughter. The elder son was killed in a road accident. The daughter married a James Woodhouse and had four sons. She is now dead but I think I can contact one of the sons, although there are several family offshoots in the Neston area.

In my case it has taken a lifetime to appreciate what, for many years, I took for granted. On my recent visit to the Wirral, Parkgate in particular, I appreciated the beauty of it because I was looking at it in a mature, detached way, not through a child's mind and senses.

From the age of five years until I was fourteen, I spent every August there. As I shall soon be 79 I will write down some of my memories over that period of nine years (1920 - 1929), hoping that they may be of a little interest to your Society members.

My mother had three daughters within four and a half years. My eldest sister Winifred and I always travelled together unaccompanied to Hooton, where Aunt Sarah met us. As we lived in an isolated village south of Shrewsbury, the contrast between the two ways of life was profound. My memories, therefore, and emotions are clear and vivid, tinged with apprehension often, nevertheless precious to me in old age.

Their first home was an end cottage of a row in Leighton Park. To reach it we walked from Parkgate Station where Uncle Jack was signalman, along the main road towards Neston, turning left through a big iron gateway up a long drive, rather than a road, obviously a former private estate (? up Earle Drive and into Leighton Road). Indoors I felt secure and recollect that their three young-adult children were very kind to me. Outside I tailed the big children, the Kameens and Cottrells, whenever they played or wandered. Their way of talking disturbed me. I couldn't understand it and despised it. I knew it was ugly and wrong. It was an introduction to the Liverpool accent. Of course, I did not realise that my Shropshire accent may have had a similar effect on them.

Shortly afterwards my Aunt took over Balcony House, the left side, and it was there we went for many years. The Maddocks family lived next door, I believe, but I never saw them. Three storeys deep at the front, the wrought iron and wooden balcony was in a poor state and out of bounds to us. To get in by the back entrance one went up the lane at the side to reach big double doors. In one of them was a little doorway which opened easily. I loved this little doorway, sheer magic, like Alice in Wonderland. But there was an easier way in. Just round the corner, into the lane, was a very low window which opened by lifting the sash. Inside and just below were a couple of chairs, so that we could crawl through and

step from the chair into a gloomy kitchen, half underground. There the family and visitors, mostly children, lived, up to sixteen of us, and in quite a civilised way. We each had our place at table and we could always nip in through the window for a jam butty between times.

A cold, dank, dark staircase led up into a beautiful, sunny spacious hall. To the right, up a few steps, was a wide entrance from the front door, on to the balcony and looked over the Donkey Pier to the muddy sands stretching to North Wales. A few yards from the sea wall a broad shallow stream flowed and one could tell when the tide was beginning to flow in when a deeper and stronger wave bubbled along. High tides twice a day one week, alternate with low tides. This stream broadened and deepened rapidly, encircling a vast area of hard sand rippled by waves. In high tide week the sands were completely covered, the waves pounding into the shore against the sea wall and in rough weather showering over the wall and across the road, powerful, roaring, majestic.

What I really wanted to do was walk across the sands, paddle through the River Dee, walk the shore on the other side and into Wales. Today I marvel that I was not drowned but aunt had one inviolable rule, we must consult her about the times of the tides, which changed daily. As busy as she was, she would stand, hand to face, pondering, working out the tide schedule in her mind for that day. What trust on both sides! One or two of us would set off, down the wall, across the muddy sand and the stream and then the open flats were before us. It was further than we thought: sometimes we gave up and turned for home. Twice however, I think we reached the Dee and that turned out to be as wide as the sea. But the edge was shallow and we paddled forwards but soon had to acknowledge we were beaten and turned to face the doll's house sized Parkgate. Returning to Parkgate recently and seeing it overgrown my first urge was to start walking again. How wide is the Dee? Can one cross it to Wales? The salmon are no more, I hear. One year there was a record catch and it was noted in a newspaper. In 1935 I made a brief visit to Parkgate and was amazed to see a sailing boat travelling across the sand. It was a sand yacht!

To return to Balcony House, at the top of the kitchen stairs and turning left along the wide passage, I seem to remember a big bathroom but I certainly recall a big sitting room. I think it was meant to be a common room for the permanent lodgers living out their lives very comfortably, looked after by Aunt, or for temporary summer visitors who brought and bought their own food and handed it through the kitchen door to be cooked and presented at table in their private rooms. (This was the recognised way to take a holiday).

I never remember anyone using the common room so after dinner I had it all to myself, to tinkle on the untuned piano but better still, wind up the old gramophone, change the needle, select a record and enjoy the popular songs of the day.

This room I think, was under the big assembly room. Aunt Sarah's sons were authorized, as they were in the building trade, to partition the assembly room into about nine bedrooms. Perhaps cubicles would be a better description. All the family residents who lived in the kitchen slept in one of these wooden boxes. The wooden partitions did not reach to the ceiling and lying in bed at night, I would watch the giant-like shadows moving about the great ceiling in the flickering candlelight.

Round-up of Autumn Meetings

In September a very informative Dr Joan Fairhurst spoke about *Cheshire County Council's* response to the U.N.'s Earth Summit in Rio in 1992. The council are involving local communities, to encourage more wildlife, less waste, cleaner water, transport and air, education and efficient energy use.

Malcolm Ingham spoke to us in October about his *Animal Hospital*. Anne Williamson writes: 'The talk kept a large audience entertained after the Society's A.G.M.. His interest and enthusiasm in his pioneering work with sick and injured wild creatures was infectious. The slides revealed the wonderful work of the unit

- hedgehogs bottle fed hourly through the night
- badger ready for release but needing a family group to be established before possible return to the wild
- how to make an artificial badger sett
- how to build up flight muscles and train birds of prey to hunt
- how to release birds that live in coniferous woodland (travel to North Wales repeatedly)
- what dosage and medication do injured animals need?
- how to train others to set up similar units abroad and to train veterinary students in the care and treatment of wild creatures.

We were enthralled by the 'guess what it is' slides of an ugly, orphaned bird with large eyes, affectionately called ET, from day old to football size and shape, culminating in magnificent adulthood as a snowy owl with a wingspan of over 5 feet.

A questioner at the end of the evening summed up the feelings of many by requesting that Malcolm Ingham writes a book - a best seller, no doubt. "

Conservation in the Wirral was the theme of the talk in November. Rod Tann of the Wirral Society gave examples of threatened buildings and their subsequent reprieve. Threats to trees in the landscape and inappropriate siting of buildings were other areas of interest.

Since our last Newsletter we have unfortunately to pay a charge for the use of our meeting place. We have decided to keep our current subscription charges for this year without increase. In order to continue our low charges we must make great strides to increase our membership. We would like everyone to endeavour to enroll an additional family-neighbour or friend. If we do not increase numbers we must raise our subs. to a far more realistic amount.

To further our attempt to increase membership we want to bring the local community together to enter the Best Kept Village competition. This will be a great challenge to us all - some more than others !

Please spread the word and think how we can all do something to improve our surroundings. We will write to you with further details shortly.

My First Visit To Parkgate

Having been transported to Merseyside by my company in 1929, I was in "digs" in New Brighton and joined the Rugby Club. One Saturday after a few jars with our opponents before they left for home, four of us decided to visit the "Union" in Parkgate. (The Union is now The Ship). It was known that the landlady's two daughters, of Cochrane's Young Ladies Dance Team, were home on a break! The car was mine, but I did not know Parkgate, so I was directed in the dark by the locals.

At 10pm closing time, after a convivial evening, I was directed towards home along The Parade and at the Watch House I drove straight on - down the slip way! The sandstone blocks were not there then.

When the headlights showed the tide was in and our wheels were paddling, the rugby song suddenly ceased! But we managed to back out and continued on our way.

I often recall that first trip to Parkgate when resting my weary legs - and sticks - on the wall opposite the Watch House and I observe the present blocks.

Sea View had an oil stove with oven when we came here in 1948. Noni, my late wife, used it a couple of times before gas was put in but wasn't very happy with it! Our galvanized egg bucket was used for the hot ash out of the fires before rolling into the garden paths. Incidentally, the Braznells told me the first electric supply to Sea View came from the private plant at Mostyn House. How true - I don't know.

Iceberger Rapid freezer might have been one of those containers filled with ice when the ice-man calleth!

We still have our meat safe - and earthenware bread bin for the home-made bread ... somewhere!

The last Newsletter reminded me of our knife-cleaning machine which came from my grandmother's house. It was one of my jobs to use it. A wooden drum some 20 inches in diameter and 6 inches deep, it stood on edge on a wooden stand with shelves underneath. Less elegant models were on a flat base for table-top use.

Through metal-ringed slots on the top, the knife blades were slotted between two brushes. A handle on the side revolved the brushes and polished the blades. There was a small aperture for a little powder to be put in occasionally, by my mother, not me! A small drawer at the base collected dirt to be emptied out. The handle side was held on by large base screws, but I never saw it open.

from
Ted Gooding

Some years later Aunty moved further along the front to a smaller red-brick house called Sunnyside. She boasted that she knocked on Mr Purgold's door and told him his room was ready and he picked up his newspaper and walked from Balcony House to Sunnyside and went on with his reading. His brother joined him later; he had been a big-game hunter at one time and lost a leg. At night sitting in the kitchen, there would be a loud bang. "There goes Mr Purgold's leg", someone would say. Another character was Mrs Dymmock. One teatime she sent a message to the kitchen at 4pm, was she going to have her tea or not? Aunt Sarah took the boiling eggs straight out of the pan and poured the egg water into her waiting teapot. "Why, Sarah Ann," someone said, "she'll have warts." As quick as a flash Aunt said, "The warts will be on the inside, not out." and walked off.

So far I have not mentioned village life. There were so many nieces and nephews from Shropshire that we formed a gang. There was a big family called Mealor and the only reason for causing trouble between us was our accents. They teased us for being Welsh, which we weren't, but to oblige we gabbled nonsense loudly between ourselves. They thought we were speaking Welsh. Only once was there violence. One of them threw a dead plaice at the group and a dead plaice's fin can cause a sharp cut!

Shops I remember, especially Monkey Jacket's. He was a little hunchback and not very amiable. When one opened the shop door a little bell tinkled. It was thought his prices were rather high, for he sold buckets, spades, toys and ice cream. It was very good ice cream and now and again we treated ourselves to a little luxury - a twopenny cornet. Usually it was a penn'orth of palm toffee from a sweet shop lower down the front. Sometimes we were sent to the fishing boats coming in on the tide for small plaice which Aunt fried for tea, or for a pot of shrimps. Passing the fishermen's cottages I saw all the children round a big table in their living room shelling shrimps. Sunnyside was smaller, homelier, so I was surprised when Aunt moved to Sea View lower down the front. I disliked it before I saw it. I thought she must be lowering her standards, and beyond a shabby greyness everywhere I do not recall anything of it.

One final memory, which changed the course of my life. I was swinging from a lamp post on the front when a voice from across the road called, "You've won a scholarship." It meant nothing to me and yet the fact that I remember it means that subconsciously I was aware that it was significant. All so long ago. Dear Aunt Sarah and Uncle Jack. Did I ever say thank you? This brief recollection is my tribute to your memory now.

My aim has been to give short insights rather than a lot of details.

1. The isolation, caused by lack of means of transport, except by train, causing insularity between villages, hamlets, little towns.
2. Accents and dialects also resulted from this. Anyone speaking differently frightened me.
3. Balcony House. It was mentioned, I remember, in a Down Your Way programme. I am delighted it has been saved.

News and Views

Balcony House stands resplendent in its renovated condition. A new lease of life for a building almost given up on.

St Thomas's Church is threatened; it is closed and the Church authorities have no plans to repair it in the near future, so it will be left to decay. We are very concerned about this.

Mostyn House School has hit the national press recently. Its carillon of 31 bells is one of only 14 in the country, and is in need of restoration. We are lucky to be entertained by such an instrument and hope that money can be raised for its overhaul.

Springcroft is presently having its paved footpaths resurfaced with tarmac. The section of The Ropewalk between Little Lane and Springcroft is to be renewed also. We must wait for the middle section, perhaps the roughest stretch, to be done.

Wirral Way - our local ranger is topping the hedge between Brookland Road and Boathouse Lane, to a height of about 6 to 8 feet. The countryside ranger Bernie Mc Linden is looking for volunteers to join a group to do practical work in the country park. Adults meet approximately once a month to litter-pick, fell trees, repair fencing etc. Each meeting is on a particular theme and a commitment is being sought. A children's group might be formed if a demand exists. Please contact Bernie on 327 5145 for further information.

Cycling the local authority is taking cycling a little more seriously by encouraging bikes to use certain quiet roads, and they will consider putting in cycle lanes when highway improvements are looked at. A series of leaflets called "On your bike" are available free from libraries. These cover 'The South Wirral Way' (14 miles), 'The Country Village Way' (8 miles) and 'The Willaston Way' (5 miles).

A guidebook entitled "The Wirral Shore Way" by Carl Rogers details the footpath routes between Chester and Hoylake. The 20 mile walk can be tackled as four shorter sections or as one complete walk.

The work on the replacement Gas Main along The Parade went reasonably smoothly considering the task at hand. Unfortunately, while filling in the trench it appears that they filled the main sewer with concrete for a distance of 20 feet, extending the disruption. A large amount of sewerage flowed out on to the marsh.

A wall built from sleeper blocks used to support the first public railway has been discovered at Weatherstones Farm, Neston. John Pye Bibby, who constructed the wall, used sandstone blocks found at the bottom of the embankment of the Liverpool to Manchester railway at Huyton. The wall has been listed on the Site & Monument Record by Cheshire County Council.

The Committee

Leonard Walker, having served the committee well for several years, has felt that the time has come for him to retire. He will be missed partly because of his photography skills, having compiled the photographic record of Parkgate for the Society. This will be a permanent snapshot of Parkgate during the mid 1980's. Leonard is still a busy man and we wish him well.

Stepping into the breach we have Jerry Harris who has volunteered to fill the vacancy. A man always to be seen lending a hand at the marsh clearance and a regular face at our talks.

Our Chairman Geoffrey Place has been made a governor of Parkgate County Primary School to serve as a representative of the Society for a four year period, hopefully fostering closer community links.

Gill Milburn has kindly agreed to type the Newsletter on a regular basis, for which we are very grateful. The final presentation is a world away from my humble typewriter!

Committee Business

We met with Tom Miller, head of Planning Services of the borough council, in June and expressed our concern that there was a lack of coordination and overall view of the Conservation Area. Shirley Britt had prepared a detailed list of problems along the Parade, all of a minor nature, but overall showing a lack of attention.

Mr Miller stated that the Heritage Fund which provides money for Conservation Areas, is split equally between east and west of the borough, saying it would be Parkgate's turn soon!

He followed up our concerns which included traffic calming measures, Mostyn Square resurfacing work and coordinating litter bins. Plans produced by the Conservation Officer of the borough council for the Square were to be looked at afresh and finance sought. Bins would be replaced as necessary. The council are considering introducing chicanes and pinch points along the Parade, being more acceptable to the emergency services than humps and rumble strips which have caused hazards to their vehicles and increased the time taken to reach emergency situations.

The question of the Middle Slip has still not been resolved. We had wanted to replace the sandstone blocks with 3 black bollards. It appears that the slipway is part of the highway and a traffic regulation order has to be made to close it. The cost of approval is said by the Borough Solicitor to be in the region of £1500 just for the closure! Crazy!

Angela and Geoffrey have attended the meetings to plan events for the Ellesmere Port bi-centenary in the summer.

Geoffrey and Valerie have spoken to our M.P., Mr Andrew Miller, concerning the existing policy of listing buildings. This has been taken up by Mr Miller at the House of Commons.