

Parkgate Society Newsletter

Spring 1998

Issue Number 54

Meetings

We meet at 8pm at the Parkgate Hotel. If you need help with transport please ring our secretary Angela Clarke (336 1069) giving 24 hours notice.

Diary Dates

Monday 9th February

"Chester" by W. Foden

Monday 16th March

"150 years of music in Liverpool" by
TE Brobelt.

Monday 20th April

"History of Birkenhead Park" by
J Lester

Monday 18th May

"Travelling to Parkgate" by
GW Place

Subscriptions

Subscriptions for 1998 are (per house)

£4.00 Family or single

£2.50 Senior Citizens

They may be paid at our meetings or
to Mrs V Place, Pendmore, Station
Road, Parkgate.

Donations are welcome.

NEWS AND VIEWS

Our **AGM** was attended by about 50 people. The business was swiftly discussed and was followed by many questions from the floor and a lively discussion on topics such as daffodil planting, the Donkey Stand plaque/plinth, the church, traffic and design students theses and the coming of Nynex cables.

Daffodil Planting on the approaches to Parkgate has been continued this Autumn with two different colours of flowers.

The long awaited plinth and plaque was constructed on **the Donkey stand** in December. We hope the people of Parkgate like it. The plinth was designed to be low in height so as not to interrupt the views of the estuary for those sitting on the benches.

Nynex cables are coming to Parkgate. Our Chairman walked the area with the maps showing the proposed nodal box sitings. Unfortunately, there is no option but to have several of these boxes along the Parade, but the Society has suggested slight amendments to the positioning of one or two, which we hope will be an improvement.

Heritage road signs. The committee are currently looking at the possibility of producing some new road signs in Parkgate which give short details concerning the history of the road name. One will be purchased soon and if that proves popular then a further five are under consideration for the future as funds allow.

NEWS AND VIEWS

Wirral Way Cycle Route. The section of Wirral Way between Boathouse Lane and Heath Lane (Willaston) is being proposed by the cycling organisation Sustrans as a new cycle route. This will entail widening and upgrading the path.

Friday nights seem to be the night for "rowdies" in Parkgate. Worse still vandalism has been on the increase. Parked cars have been targeted with body panels dented, and Christmas time saw serious problems with literally dozens of window panes smashed along Parkgate front. Police are aware of this and are encouraging anyone seeing or experiencing vandalism to ring either Neston Police (01244 612530 central control) or Ellesmere Port Police (355 4066).

According to an article in the Wirral Globe there are now public order patrols being carried out in the Neston areas at weekends. Hopefully they will come to Parkgate and restore the peace for the Neston end of the Parade.

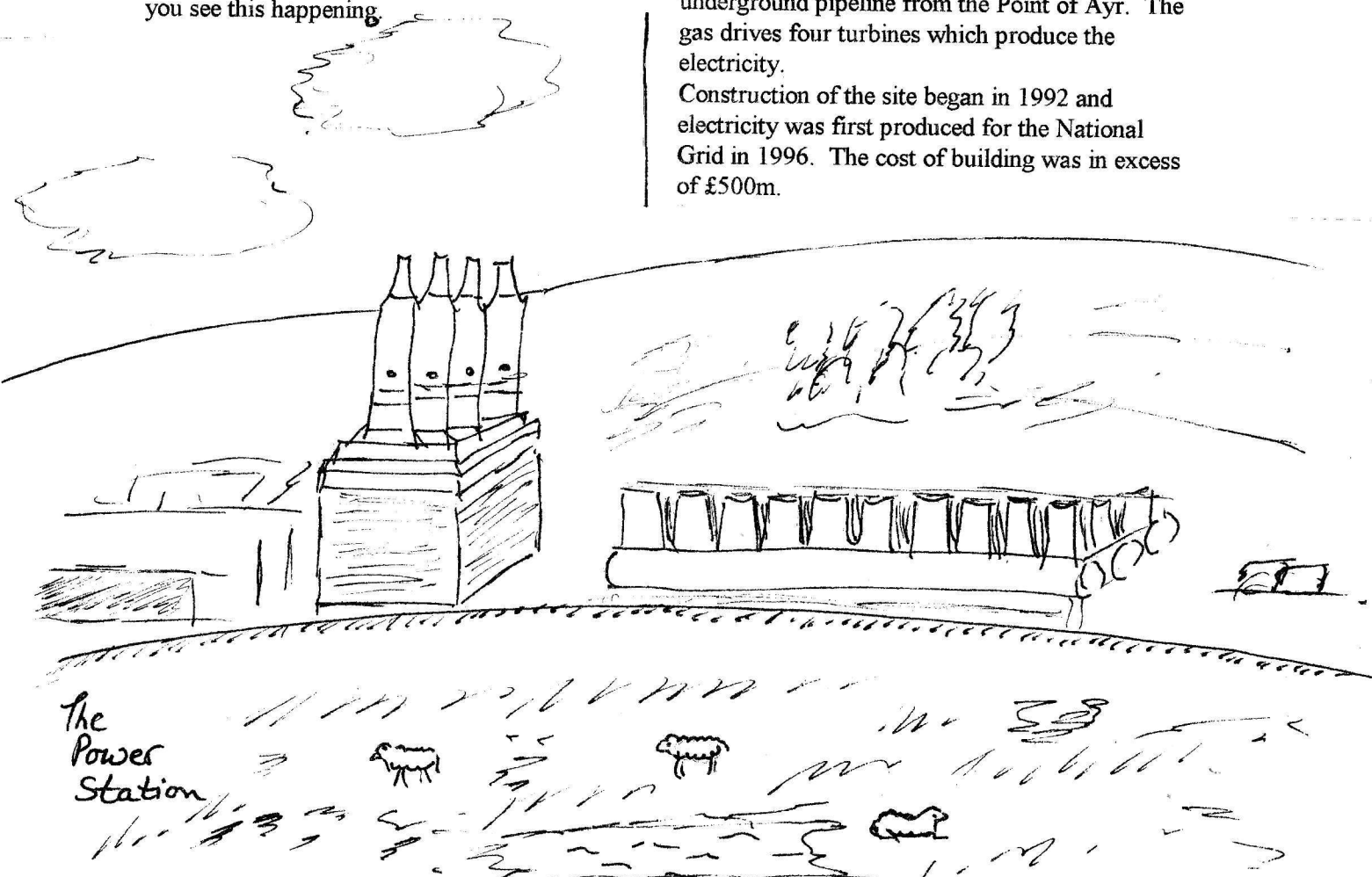
Also, there was illegal tipping of garden refuse (on a commercial scale) in Wood Lane some months ago. Please phone the above numbers if you see this happening.

The church. The latest position is that the PCC have produced a declaration (1st Dec) stating that they intend to sell the building and site and will not restore it as a church. The PCC propose to "establish a sub-committee for the purpose of building bridges with the people of Parkgate" who would be "distressed by these resolutions".

The Badger Pony Sanctuary that is now established in Boathouse Lane has changed its name to the **Parkgate Pony Sanctuary**. Established in 1984, it has a publicity leaflet advertising its aims, and giving contact numbers for the committee who run it. For £10 / year you can adopt a pony. Chairman Richard Bamford tel:625 8677.

Connah's Quay Power Station, a new addition to the view down the river, was opened officially on July 4th, 1997. It is adjacent to the site formerly occupied by the coal-fired power station (closed 1984) whose cooling chimneys were part of the skyline. The new power station is one of the most technically advanced in the World and meets the annual energy needs of virtually half of Wales. It is powered by gas via an underground pipeline from the Point of Ayr. The gas drives four turbines which produce the electricity.

Construction of the site began in 1992 and electricity was first produced for the National Grid in 1996. The cost of building was in excess of £500m.



The Power Station

THE "JOY" OF HOUSE RENOVATION IN PARKGATE

Any refurbishment of an old house including the renewal of all plaster in every room, is likely to reveal a few surprises. I feel some of the discoveries here could be classed as extraordinary.

Revelations We begin in the cellar where a large fireplace appeared, possibly used formerly as a laundry boiler by the "downstairs" staff. The old World War 2 air-raid shelters seating and toilets were removed from two cellars but the soakaway in the cobbled floor of a third cellar must remain as no-one can trace the entry or outlet points! There used to be windows in the front two cellars, which are half underground.



In the ground floor kitchen appeared a traditional inglenook fireplace and the wood frame of a long narrow window, perhaps used many years ago by fishermen mending their nets. The scullery had a bread oven but what had happened to its chimney was never solved.

The front lounge had a complete door frame with beautifully arched lintel once leading to the outside world. There was also another complete frame once leading into the scullery. We knew the bay windows were a 19th century addition but it was interesting to see the ship's timbers forming the shape of the original front window. The hall revealed stud walls and handmade nails and bricks were apparent here and everywhere.

Throughout the house, the old blocked-up firegrates were re-discovered complete with surrounds, decorative tiles and some slate mantle shelves, now all restored.

We had believed the three storey front part of the house was original and the back two storeys added later. Not so! The front must once have been two storeys because the former ceiling beams were uncovered around the walls. The ceilings must have been lifted by a previous owner. The third floor was added where, about three feet up the walls were the original roof beams. There were so many ceiling beams and old courses of differing bricks and mortar at each level. The builder is convinced that, at some stage, the house lay derelict as there is much evidence of the interior brickwork becoming weathered, from being open to the elements.

The woodwork restorer is delighted that nearly all the window frames, every internal door, skirting, newel post, hand rail and spindle on two flights of stairs can now be seen in their original natural wood grain.

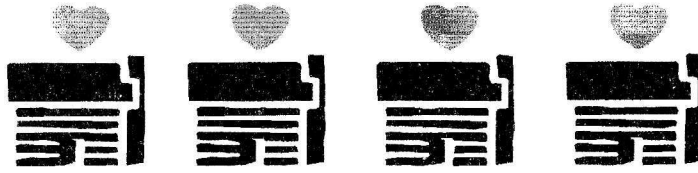
Disasters I shall recount only two! On the roof adjoining the adjacent property is a large chimney stack with three flues, all of which required lining with modern material. On the ground floor, one builder lights the essential smoke bomb in the firegrate and up the scaffolding on the roof another watches for the tell-tale smoke. The flue is located and the liner dropped - never to be seen again! The smoke continues, consternation ensues and the liner is retracted. Some time later after much detective work, the answer is apparent. Somehow, six firegrates merge into one flue, the second is defunct and the third flue serves our neighbour's house. The absentee landlord next door was very surprised!

Whilst doing a minor repair to one cellar wall, the builders were horrified to look up and see the ceiling beam was some 2-3 inches below the floor it should have been supporting. Above was the scullery, believed once to have been a small shop. A previous owner over 50 years ago, must have

decided the increased use necessitated the wood floor would benefit from having eight inches of concrete added, topped with red quarry tiles. Foolish man! Out came the tiles, reserved for further use, and the solid concrete. In went a steel girder, four inches of concrete and the quarry tiles. The scullery floor is now level with the adjacent kitchen, the one step up made redundant.

The sound condition of the old timbers, nails and bricks, however irregular their shape, pays tribute to the original construction of this building, now some 250 years old. I wonder how many properties built today will be so solid and stable in the year 2247 ?

Due to the quick sale of their previous home, the new owners had to move in before all the renovation was completed. The workmen are still omni-present, now encouraged to carry out their tasks in their socks, as the carpets have been laid! However, the friendly old house is gradually becoming a happy family home once more and should remain so for many years to come.



THE THEATRE AT PARKGATE

There was never a permanent theatre at Parkgate, but a temporary theatre was set up in a room belonging to one of the inns during the summer season of several years in the early 19th century.

The first record found of acting in Parkgate is in the *Chester Chronicle* for 13th June 1788: "A very respectable company of comedians intend opening in the course of a few evenings - to this purpose, two very convenient and commodious temporary theatres are now fitting up, one in Parkgate, the other in Neston, at each of which the company mean to perform twice a week."

Later, something more permanent was arranged. We do not know exactly where it was, although we have some clues. There was correspondence on the subject in *Notes and Queries*, (1905, pp 289, 355, 397, 457). One correspondent said that the theatre was in the former herring house, near the Union Hotel, which is now and would then have been the Ship. Another quoted an article in the *Chester Chronicle* 1881: "... some enterprising priest devoted to the worship of Thespis ((presumably a figure of speech, not an actual priest)) erected on the site of the Herring Curing House, that stood where Mostyn House schoolroom stands, a small theatre, where a small company from Chester, and occasionally actors from Liverpool, would furnish amusement for visitors." A writer to the *Cheshire*

Sheaf (W Monk Gibbon) in 1879, said the theatre was "situated in the lane above the Union Hotel" and he added that it had formerly been the herring curing house.

The herring house, recorded in a lease of 1767, was used to salt and smoke herring, but was leased to the Parkgate Packet Company between 1804 and 1809, so that any theatre must have been created in it after that lease expired. But where was it? If it was behind the Ship Inn up the lane called Drury Lane locally (perhaps because there was a theatre there), then it was probably in a room later used as a Masonic meeting place. But if it was in a room later turned into the Mostyn House schoolroom, it was on the south side of the Mostyn Arms. Hilda Gamlin states in *Twixt Mersey and Dee* (1897) that "in the centre of the herring yard was the public pump" which suggests the yard of the Mostyn Arms (next to Prospect House and now the school's covered playground) in which it is known that there was once a well. The hotel had a room for dances and functions next to this yard, and before 1890 this room was the schoolroom. There is no reason why both places should not have been used as a theatre at different times.

The earliest surviving evidence of the theatre is a set of six playbills of 1811. They are headed "Theatre Parkgate" and were printed in Holywell. Tickets

could be obtained from one of the actors staying at an address in Drury Lane, and from a local grocer and a milliner. Prices were 2/- for the pit, 1/- for the gallery. The company seems to have been led by Mr C Walsh. The performances were roughly a fortnight apart from July to September but fell on various days in the week.

Monk Gibbon in his *Sheaf* article implied that he had seen playbills of Samuel Ryley presenting his "New Brooms", apparently at Parkgate, and stating that the entertainment was under the patronage of Sir Thomas Hesketh or Sir Andrew Corbett, said to be constant visitors to Parkgate.

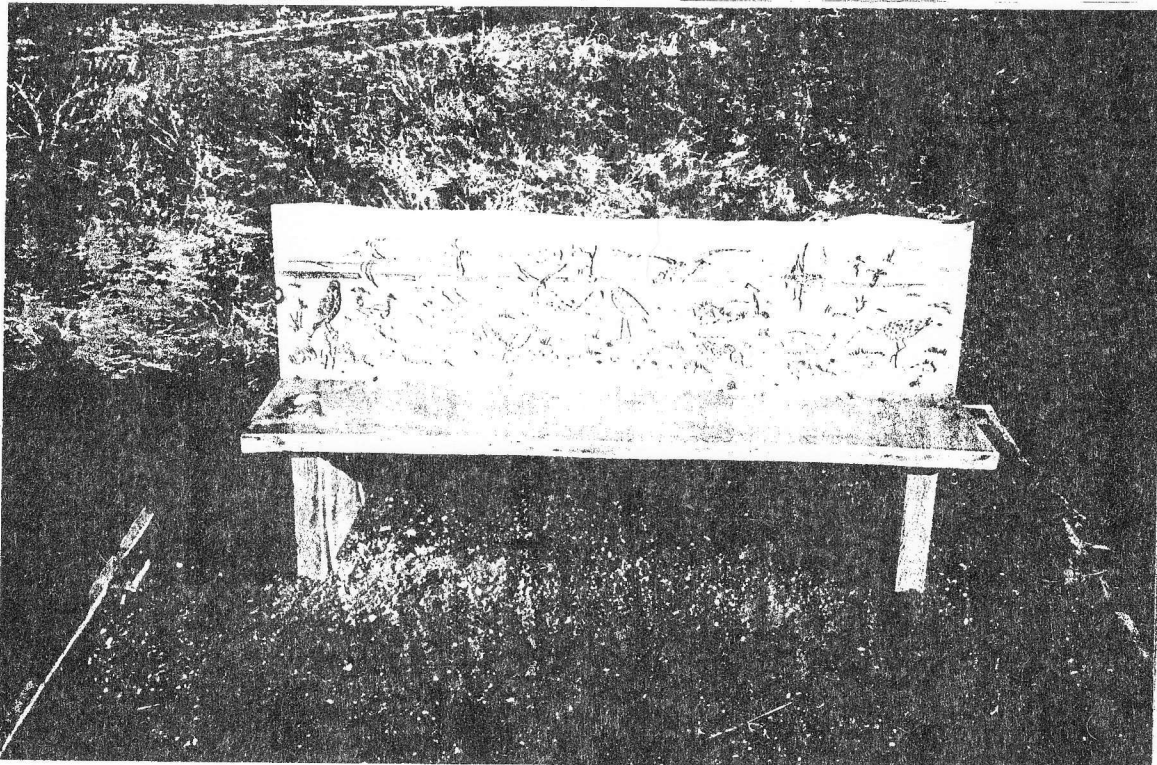
In 1815 the *Chronicle* reported (11th August), "a theatre is opened at Parkgate, but we have not heard anything respecting the professional ability of its corps dramatique." These actors were managed by Samuel Ryley, as is evident from a press report dated September 22nd: "Mr Kean ((in Chester for one night)) will be supported by a detachment from Mr Ryley's corps theatrique at Parkgate, in *Richard III*" described damningly on 29th September as "by no means worse that what we have had here." There was another damning comment, by implication, in the report a year later, (28th June, 1816): "Parkgate will shortly possess a respectable theatrical company under the management of Mr Bennett, of the Bath Theatre."

article by Geoffrey Place

That is the latest reference found for a theatre in Parkgate.

THE SEAT

Beyond the Old Baths there is a new seat apparently carved (but actually sand blasted) to reveal the bird/animal life of the estuary. On your next outing we recommend that you visit the seat. Hopefully there will be no-one sitting on it. Try to name the different animals or try adding how many birds/creatures are depicted. It is not easy and must have been quite a task for whoever drew the original and set up the machinery to make the design. Congratulations to the RSPB and to the WCP rangers who installed it. We will try to find out the answers to these questions for the next newsletter!



The Membership Secretary

by Valerie Place

I joined the committee of the Parkgate Society as membership secretary in 1978, so that I am now entering my twentieth year in the post. This seems an appropriate moment to say something about our membership over the years.

We do not have any records of membership numbers during the first six years of the Society's existence, but we do know that when we were campaigning against the threatened Dee Barrage in 1972, immediately after the Society's launch, our membership was quoted as "about 200". It soon settled down to just below that figure, between 180 and 190, and that figure has been maintained with negligible variation ever since.

As many of our members hold family memberships, and all members are welcome to bring their guests, our effective membership is much more than 200. It is a good thing they do not all come to our meetings at the same time!

Attendance at our meetings is very good for a place the size of Parkgate: an average of about 50 can be expected. We have occasionally had a 100 or so, and in filthy weather we have sometimes sunk to about 30. But overall the response to our lecture programme, ably managed by Angela Clarke, has been very pleasing.

There are several stalwarts who have been members for the full 26 years. All I can tell you for certain from my own records is that 46 members who joined between 1972 and the end of 1978 are still with us today.

The Society apologises for the talk that followed the AGM not being as advertised. The advertised talk **Birkenhead Tramways** by Mr J Coles was replaced by Mr D Hillhouse talking on the Birkenhead Museums. The replacement of the advertised talk was not made known to us beforehand. We thank Mr Hillhouse for stepping in with his excellent talk and we apologise to those who came specifically for the "Trams".

We try to recruit members actively by delivering leaflets every few years to each house in Parkgate (about 850 houses in the area we consider can reasonably be called Parkgate) but these do not have a dramatic effect. They do however keep our flag flying. Much the best way of recruiting members is by the recommendation of you, the existing membership.

Subscription may be paid at any time within the calendar year. Reminders are sent, if necessary, in August. If at the end of December we have received no indication that you wish to continue your membership, then regretfully, we have to suppose that we have lost contact and your name goes into the "past members" file. Quite often, people decide to rejoin at a later date, and of course we are always delighted to renew their membership. The subscription has been kept very low, as it has been subsidised for many years by the sale of our publications.

The membership secretary needs to have a good working relationship with the Society's Treasurer. I have been fortunate to work with two excellent treasurers: Peter Taylor and now Clive Edwards.

We are always very pleased to see new and old friends at our meetings and, as I am usually near the door, sitting at the receipt of custom, it gives me particular pleasure to welcome you.

EDITOR'S NOTE Having worked as acting secretary for the society for a few months I can add that about 60 - 70 members live outside the local area and still maintain their memberships and interest in the Parkgate Society, having their newsletters forwarded by post.

New members are always welcome.

Samuel Ryley and his "New Brooms"

Part one of a two part article

by Geoffrey Place

Samuel Ryley was an actor who made his home Parkgate for some 25 years before he died in 1837. A portrait of him and his house appears in our guidebook, "This is Parkgate".

He was born about 1756, the son of a London grocer who moved to Chester because the cost of living was cheaper there. Samuel's real surname was Romney, but he adopted Ryley as a stage name and then lived with it. As a teenager, Samuel began attending the theatre. One night, not having the entrance money, he and a friend crawled into the back of the theatre and hid behind the scenes. Samuel hid inside a large figure of the giant Magog, designed for a pantomime, which would fall to pieces when a rope was pulled. When he was inside he heard the manager say that an actor was ill; he could not stage the expected farce but would instead put on the pantomime. So Samuel was stuck inside the giant for three hours, he was soaked when a bowl of punch was poured down the giant's throat, and was finally revealed, wet and filthy, when the rope was pulled. So his first appearance on stage was involuntary.

He then fell in love with one Eliza and his family thought it best to send him away. He was apprenticed to a woollen manufacturer, William Kenworthy, at Saddleworth on the Yorkshire/Lancashire border. He did not like the work but then his employer's eldest daughter Anne came home from school. That altered everything! Mr Kenworthy died in June 1776, and only a few weeks later Samuel eloped with Anne to Gretna Green where they were married over the anvil by the blacksmith. They had a second wedding at Clifton, near Preston.

Samuel ran through the fortune left to him by a cousin in four years, and then became an actor/manager. He devised an act called "New Brooms" which, in various guises, served him for many years. It started as a song, "New brooms sweep clean", written for the opening of a rebuilt theatre in Manchester. According to his autobiography, the act was a one-man show involving "about 40 pasteboard figures,

emblematic of the characters introduced in the lecture". These figures were transported on tour by his servant George. The year was 1793, when the Terror of the French Revolution was much discussed and everyone was on the look-out for "Jacobins" or revolutionaries. George got drunk in a pub in Royton, near Manchester, and announced, "there are a King and a Prime Minister at the door, mounted on an ass." These words were thought treasonable; the donkey's panniers were searched and the figures found. Two of them had "Louis XVI" and "General Dumourier" written on them, and most of the figures were set on fire while the people joined hands and sang "God save the King". The constable was called and arrested George. Ryley consulted a lawyer who advised him to itemise his losses, which he did as follows:

To maiming, burning and otherwise ill-treating, a king, 4 tailors, 2 generals, one prime minister, an old man, 5 psalm-singers, and a parish clerk - 10 guineas.

The bill was paid, George was set free and new figures were made. Later George was seized by the press gang. He got away because he had only one eye, and being double-jointed at the wrists, he was able to persuade a doctor that he was unfit for service.

Ryley was glad to bring his "New Brooms" to the Theatre Royal in Chester, the scene of his schooldays, but his receipts were less than his expenses. This is surprising in view of the good review that his act, described as a set of songs and monologues, received in the *Chester Chronicle* in August 1793: "Ryley's New Brooms, for sweeping away dull care, combining song, sentiment and



satire, furnished as rich a fund of laughter and amusement, as mirth without ribaldry, humour without buffoonery, and satire without acrimony can convey."

But apparently here too he ran foul of over-zealous patriotism. His show ended with the figures of five tailors, with hands and arms worked by wires, illustrating a story and song as follows: A master tailor took his men to the theatre. They were most impressed by "God save the King", and throughout the following year they sewed in time to its slow tune. The master lost £200 because of their slow output. The next year he determined to fill their heads with a more lively tune. He took them to the theatre again, where they were impressed this time by a song called "Nancy Dawson". This had a faster tune and the master more than made up his losses in the next year.

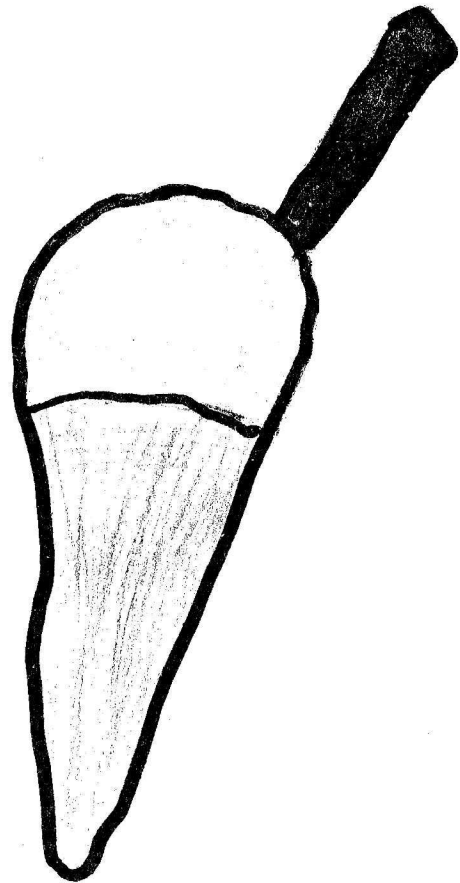
Unfortunately for Ryley, this story was considered disloyal in the inns of Chester. He was branded a Jacobin and soon thought it wise to tour in Wales. But in later years Ryley became a popular favourite in Chester. He kept "New Brooms" going for many years. In 1812 (24th November) the *Chester Chronicle* reported, "For the benefit of Mr Ryley, a concert. In the interval, his entertainment New Brooms". In 1816 the *Liverpool Mercury* (5th January), stated: Mr Ryley delivered his comic lecture an oratory called the Brooms, accompanied by a select band of music, at the Great Room, Marble Street, Liverpool." And according to a writer in the *Cheshire Sheaf* in 1879, Ryley presented a version of the same entertainment at Parkgate, in a room behind the Ship Inn. We do know that a group of actors managed by Ryley performed at Parkgate in 1815.

Parkgate

I like living in Parkgate because ;

it's in the country,
it's not too busy,
the ice cream,
it's quiet,
all my friends live here ,
and the shrimps.

By Ella Ford - Jones.

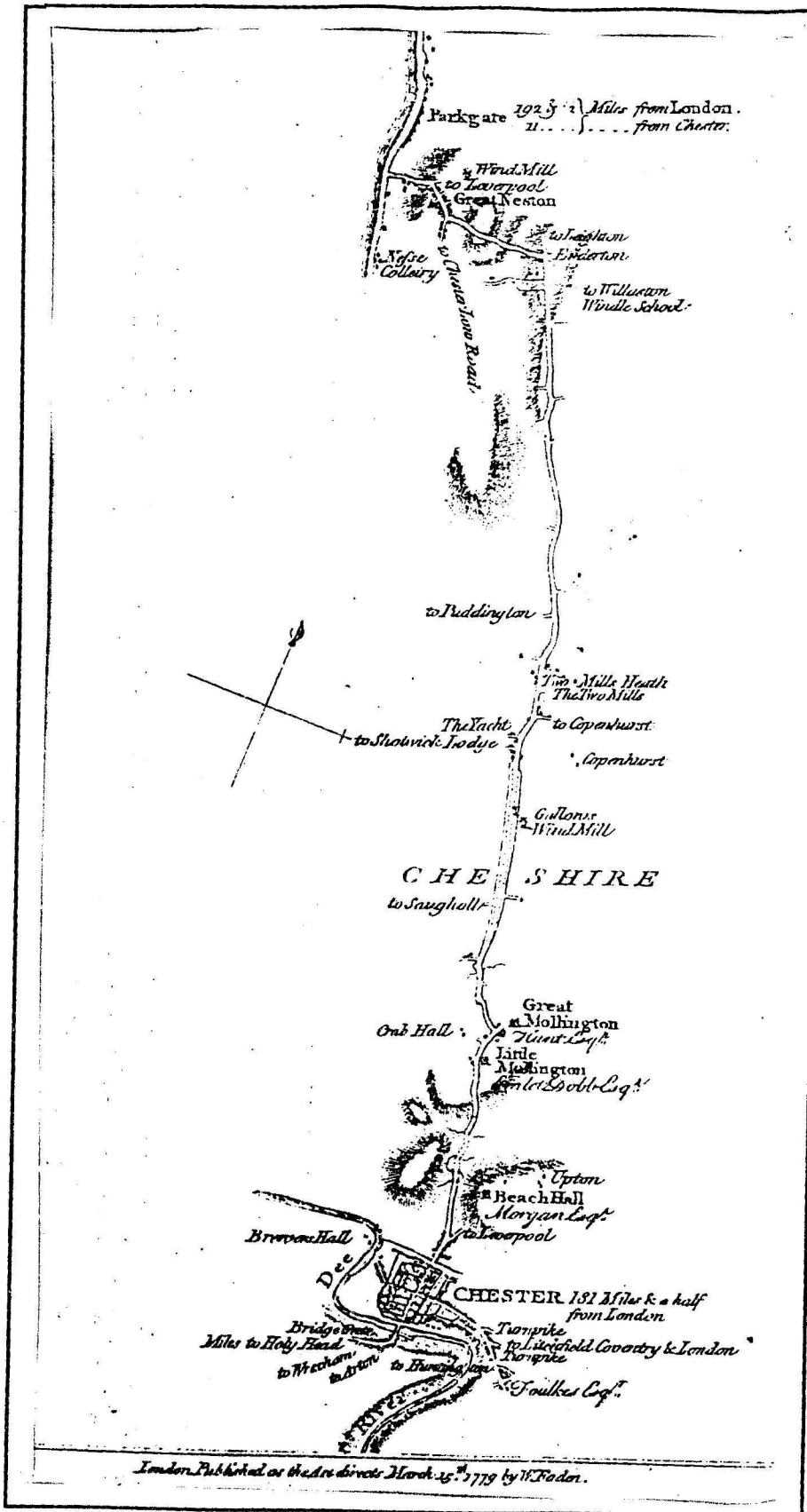


Editors: Becky Ford (336 5088) and Anne Williamson (336 6146)
Secretary: Mrs A. Clarke (336 1069)
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CHESTER TO PARKGATE ROUTE 1779

NOTE

From Chester the route followed fairly closely along the "Chester High Road" (using modern names) down "Hinderton Road" into "Neston" and from there down "Parkgate Road" to its junction with "Moorside Lane". At this point "Parkgate Road" finishes and the route passes down "Moorside Lane" to the Dee banks and along the front to Parkgate.



London Published as the directors March 25. 1779 by W. Faden.