

Parkgate Society Newsletter

Spring 1999

Issue Number 56

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.

AGM REPORT

About 45 members attended the AGM. The accounts were presented, the changes in the committee were dealt with and F.Gow and E.Marrs were elected as new committee members. The President, Jim Cochrane, then gave his report in which he thanked Shirley Britt for 17yrs and Ron Wright for 8yrs work for the society. He mentioned the work the society carries out, the newsletter, the hardworking chairman, the thwarting of plans for the heritage road signs and the forthcoming sequel to the book "Neston 1840-1940", namely, "Neston at War" due to be launched in September.

"The Swans fly In" by David Cummings, that followed the AGM was an absolute winner of a talk with a fascinated audience enjoying a wealth of slides of local swans, the development of the pond at Christleton, the swan ringing scheme and the distances and routes that swans travel.

Diary Dates - 8pm Parkgate Hotel

1999

- 11 Jan. Hooton Park part 2
by Steve Parsons
- 15 Feb. Wildlife in Rivacre Valley
by Jeff Clarke
- 15 Mar. Local Movie Memories
by Angus Tilston
- 19 Apr. Monastic Houses in Cheshire
by Elizabeth Davey
- 24 May Knowsley Park
by Colin Dive

NON-MEMBERS ARE WELCOME

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Contact Valerie Place at Pendmore, Station
Rd., Parkgate or at our meetings.
£4.00 Family or Single/year
£2.50 Senior Citizens/year
Donations are always welcome.

NEWS AND VIEWS

Heritage road signs (as reported in the 1998 newsletters). So far we have not been granted permission for the proposed sign for Mostyn Square. We have handed photos of some in Norfolk to our Council to see if they approve.

The dangerous **broken gully covers** dotted along the edge of the Parade pavement have recently been repaired.

We still await a full time **ranger** for the Cheshire section of the WCP.

Planning permission has been granted for a house on the former **Bath House** site. The site has been empty since the Bath House was destroyed by fire in May, 1995.

The **WCP** fence and gate on the north side of Station Road have been renewed.

Proofs have been prepared for a new edition of the Society's Parkgate guide book, "**This is Parkgate**".

There has been an **RSPB** notice on the marsh at Mostyn Square showing boundary changes to the site of special scientific interest (SSSI) in the Dee Estuary.

RSPB Warden, Colin Wells, says birdwatchers visiting Parkgate have been keen to see 3 **Little Egrets** (like small white herons) in the region of the Boathouse "lake", 2 **Hen Harriers** roosting regularly on the marsh off Parkgate Old Baths, and up to 5 **Spoonbills** seen throughout last year up until October. Herons have been seen to eat the marsh birds that many birdwatchers like to see when they visit Parkgate, the **Water Rails**.

PARKGATE SCHOOL

It was suggested at the last committee meeting that members may be interested in the plans for the development of Parkgate School grounds. Some of the work has already been carried out by the pupils and interested parents, for example tree planting. The Parkgate Society donated £ 100 to this project, with the stipulation that a Horse Chestnut tree be planted for the future enjoyment of children in the community. Three Horse Chestnut trees, of a type that were likely to provide conkers, were planted. This donation was very much appreciated, and will be appreciated by the children even more once they start to produce conkers!

The aim of the Grounds Development is to celebrate the new Millennium by providing a stimulating, enjoyable and safe outdoor learning environment for the pupils at the school and the wider community. The plan contains areas for both quiet and imaginative play, seating with shelter and shade, plus facilities for disabled and very young children. The overall theme of the design reflects the maritime heritage of Parkgate area; e.g. boat shaped seats and 'shipwreck' play area.

It is envisaged that the pupils and parents will carry out some of the work including clearance and planting; some of this will be done in conjunction with the "Groundnuts" gardening club held after school. However, some aspects will have to be done professionally. We have already had considerable professional help from a Landscape Architect, who has designed the outline plans and provided accurate costings. It is likely that it will take several years before the entire plan is implemented, but at present the school is raising funds for the first phase of this project. If anyone would like more information about the project, please contact the Headteacher, Mrs Downey, at the school (0151-336-1609).

THE TOWNSHIP AND MANOR HOUSE OF LEIGHTON

- part two - (three part article)
by Clive Edwards

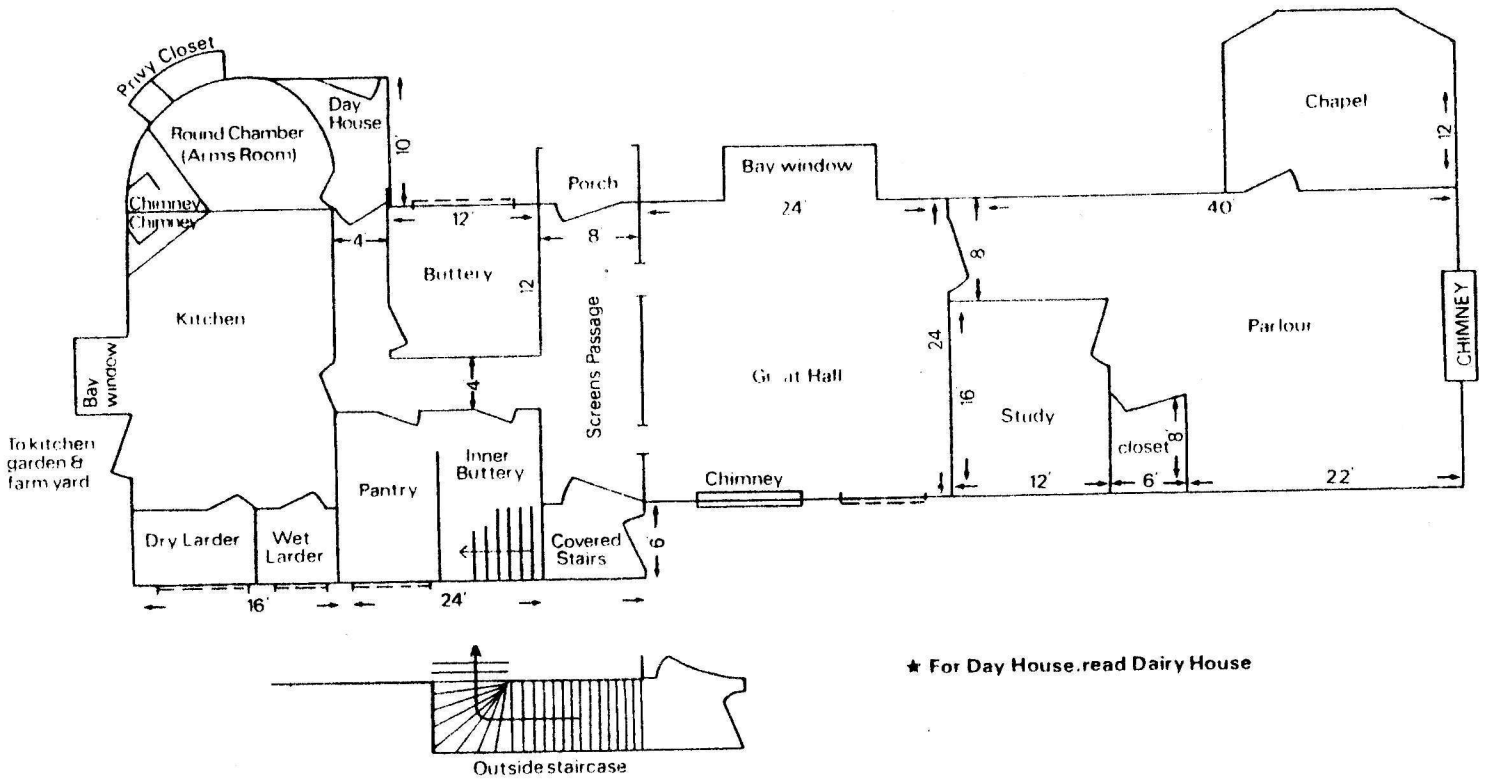
Part 1 covered the layout of the Manor House buildings and courtyards and its connected agriculture. In part 2 you will see plans of the Manor House itself, its ground and first floors and learn about its contents. The rooms of the house were all named in the Leighton survey, and the location of the major ones was given. The smaller rooms were all put onto the plan in what seemed the most appropriate positions. The staircase was not mentioned at all, and as there must have been one, it was included in the plan as a covered stairway up the back wall of the house.

The contents of the Manor House were listed in the 14th December 1574 inventory following the death of Richard Hough. (Partly put into modern English):-

	£	s	d
2 folding tables (bordes)			
3 long tables			
1 square table with 6 carpets			
6 forms of "joyned" work			
1 "glandiron" with the hangings in the hall and parlour			
	2	16	10
20 "guys shines"	1	0	0
6 chairs	0	5	6
14 feather beds			
3 whole beds with bedcase and other furniture			
The "henges" and cupboards in the chamber			
	25	8	8
10 chests	2	0	0
12 pairs of spits	4	0	0
10 table clothes	2	0	0
60 table napkins	1	0	0
12 towels	1	0	0
The plate in the buttery, pantry and other furniture			
The larder house, kitchen, dairy house and arms house with their furniture	1	0	0
A frame of a house to make two bays and a bridge	8	0	0
1 chain of gold	26	13	4
5 rings and one cross of gold	3	6	8
brass: 4 pans, 3 pots, 1 chafron and 3 candlesticks	1	0	0
His apparel	6	13	4
His money	20	0	0
There were also many items of bedding, towels, table cloths, dishes, etc. at his old house at Prenton (some with unreadable value)	9	13	0
Total non-agriculture	116	6	4
Agriculture (see part 1)	150	15	0
"Missing" value to add up to grand total	33	10	8
GRAND TOTAL	300	12	0

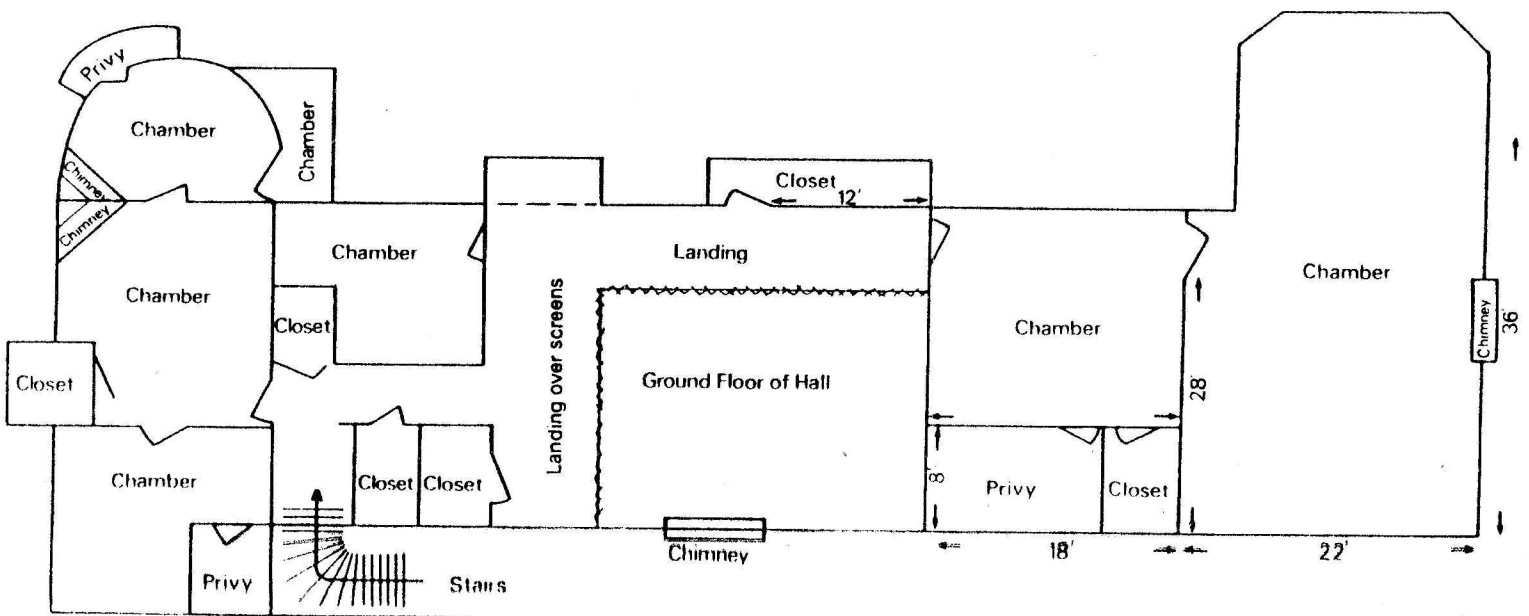
Leighton Manor House c.1583

Ground Floor Scale $\frac{1}{10}$ inch - 1 foot
 1 Bay = 16 foot N →



Leighton Manor House

1st Floor - Scale $\frac{1}{10}$ inch - 1 foot



J. Philip Dodd (see part 1) observed :-

“Mention of the framing for a house of two bays suggests that the premises at Leighton were to be extended at some time but whether the structure had been acquired locally, or was in course of construction, or had been brought from Prenton, has to remain a matter for conjecture.

Certainly the house at Leighton was comfortably furnished and had a touch of class in that there were two folding tables, which at this date were somewhat out of the run of household furniture even of the gentry. Moreover the six “carpetes” which were tapestry coverings for the tables when not in service were also unusual and the large number of table napkins, five dozen are listed, suggests a fair degree of entertaining as the family itself would hardly need so many for daily use. It would have been interesting to have had a list of the ewers which would have accompanied the use of the napkins at meal times.

Another indication of affluent living is the value of the plate stored in the buttery and pantry, which from the appraisal at £20 must have been silver plate. This is in contrast with the Prenton utensils which were dominantly of pewter. The total value of the inventory at £300-12s-0d underlines the relative affluence of Richard Hough and of this total 16.5% in the form of gold and money reinforces the impression that he was a man of some standing in the Wirral. His stock of linen and bedding at the two houses represented 12.4% of the total and as all the furnishings and the domestic side of the inventory made for just over half the total value it is fairly clear that unlike many of his contemporaries the farming basis was less important at this date.”

**Part 3 in the next newsletter will include a map of
Leighton in 1732 and tell of the family's greater
affluence by 1620 and of the house's later history.**

HAROLD GILL

by Geoffrey Place

Harold Gill lived in Parkgate for the first sixty years of this century and was remarkable as the last professional wildfowler on the Dee.

His father was a cotton merchant who moved to Neston about the time in 1892 when Harold started school at Mostyn House. He had been born in 1883 and his mother considered him delicate. She therefore did not allow him to go to a public school and he remained at Mostyn House until he was 16. It was against the rules of preparatory schools to have boys over the age of 14, and this rule was circumvented by calling him, with several others, a “private pupil” of the headmaster, AG Grenfell.

One day in 1896 Grenfell took a party of boys to a wreck which was obstructing the channel. It was an Irish turnip boat, the *Britannia*, which had sunk two years before, and Grenfell planned to blow it up.

We went down into the fore-cabin, where we placed the gun-cotton. Grenfell got the boys out and said, “Are you ready, Gill?” As we made for the hatchway which was covered with green slime we both fell down to the bottom again with the the fuse hissing behind us. When we got up he said, “Run like hell, Gill,” and we ran. As she went up a length of pipe just missed us by feet.

At some time between 1902 and 1905 Gill's father, Henry T. Gill, moved house from Hinderton Road to the Warren, Parkgate. He intended to repair the house but the walls would not take the strain and it was demolished about 1906 and rebuilt. Harold Gill inherited this house and lived there with his wife Rosina until his death in 1961.

When he was 15, Gill started to shoot wildfowl on the estuary, following the example of Leonard Brooke, a friend of his father. Brooke then lived in the sandstone house beside the Neston & Parkgate Laundry in Old Quay Lane, where he kept his gun punt, 22 feet long and 3 feet broad. Young Harold built one for himself. He was also friendly with the Kemp family of Burton Point Farm, sons and grandsons of 'Billy the Duck', the first recorded wildfowler on the Dee. Brooke's friend John Dockray also taught him shooting lore.

When he left school, Gill embarked on an engineering course at Liverpool University but did not complete it. His father left him sufficiently well off to have no need to work for his living, and he became a professional wildfowler, hunting on the estuary for seven days a week during the shooting season, September to February. Like Brooke, Gill employed a boatman, and for 33 years his boatman and constant shooting companion was 'Monk' (Sam) Jones. Gill was very skilful with his hands; for example he built a sand yacht and raced it on the hard sand then in front of Parkgate up to 60 mph. He taught Mostyn House boys sand-yachting and how to use a lathe.



The object of punt-gunning was to stalk a whole flock of duck and kill as many as possible with a single blast of shot. His highest bag was 125 duck in one day. According to his niece, Mrs Doreen Bannister, Gill was a simple man who would not have understood the modern distaste for such slaughter, but he respected the birds and tried for a clean kill rather than risk wounding or 'messing them up'. He said, "I would never kill birds unless I knew they were for food". He would not talk about the numbers he had shot, let alone boast. He sold his catch to hotels but he said, referring to Monk and himself, "There was never enough money in it to keep two of us alive."

In his early years he used to launch his punt from the North Slip by the Boat House Cafe but when silting made that difficult he moved to Moorside and made a path, known as Gill's Road, across the marsh in about 1930.

During the Second World War, Harold Gill served in the Home Guard, despite the fact that he had been a conscientious objector during the First War. When two German aircrew baled out over the estuary and waded ashore in March 1941, they were taken to Gill who herded them to Neston police station with a shotgun.

In 1952 the Dee Wildfowlers Club was formed with Gill as one of its original members. The Club bought all the shooting rights and policed the marsh, keeping the cowboys away. Just before his death, Gill allowed his friend Leslie Brockbank to record his reminiscences, and these were published in 1982 as *Dee Wildfowler, the last professional*.



The Pubs and Hotels of Parkgate - Part 2

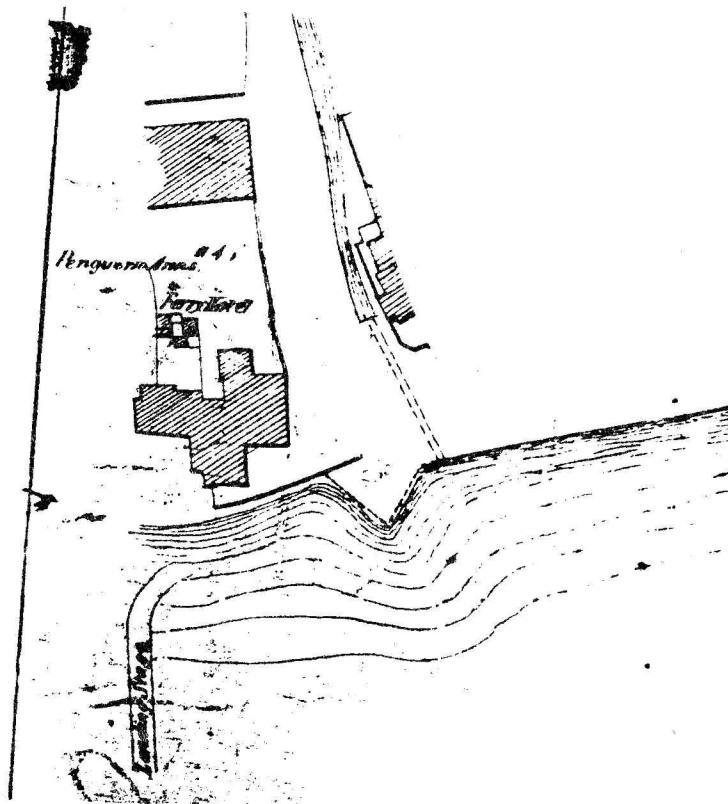
THE BOAT HOUSE

by Geoffrey Place

The present Boat House was built in 1926, but the inn that used to stand on that site, variously known as the Beerhouse, the Boat House and the Pengwern Arms, was older than Parkgate itself.

The first certain reference to the Beerhouse is in 1613, which is many years earlier than the first reference to anyone living at Parkgate. When John Mann of the Beerhouse died in 1617, the inventory shows that it was quite a considerable house with a brewhouse and limehouse attached. According to a witness writing in 1888, the old building had a date plate in the parlour inscribed "J.B. 1620".

There are only scattered references to the inn surviving from the 17th century, but it is clear that one reason, perhaps the main reason, for its situation was its proximity to a deep water anchorage called Beerhouse Hole. In 1645 Sir Richard Grenville reported that two ships had sunk by the Beerhouse. A French traveller going to Ireland in the 1660s sailed from "the little village of Birhouse" where he said there were warehouses for merchants' goods. It is probable that Boathouse Lane was created to serve the anchorage at Beerhouse Hole. There is no evidence of a settlement at Parkgate before the 1680s.



In 1694 the Beerhouse Inn was leased to James Wolstenholme, Woollen draper, and it remained in his family for at least 50 years. We know nothing of the inn for the rest of that century, apart from a pencil drawing made in 1791, now in the Williamson Art Gallery in Birkenhead. At about this time a ferry began operating between Parkgate and Flint, not originally from the Beerhouse, but by 1814 the old Beerhouse was advertised as the Ferry House, with a coach service to meet the ferry. The inn was first called the Boat House in 1818, and was then called, by different landlords, the Ferry Boat, the Flint Ferry House, the Parkgate Ferry House and even the North Wales Royal Ferry House.

The Pengwern Arms or Boat House from the sale plan, 1849.
Notice the wooden landing stage for the ferry.

Another change of landlord in 1844 brought a new name, the Pengwern Arms. Pengwern was the name of a house at St. Asaph belonging to the Mostyn family who owned the inn and all Parkgate. From then until the old building was demolished, it was known either as the Boat House or the Pengwern Arms. The landlord was very much in the transport business for, as well as two ferry boats and a punt, he kept nine horses and four different kinds of carriage (coaches, phaeton, brake and car).

When the Mostyns sold Parkgate in 1849, the inn was described as "an old-established inn and ferry house, with accustomed rights of ferry and landing stage from whence a ferry boat crosses daily to Bagillt; together with capital stabling, coach house etc, yard, garden and bowling green, a spacious yard used as a coal depot." The sale plan shows where the landing stage was.

The new landlord after the sale was Thomas Johnson who continued to run a coach service which connected with the trains at Hooton. But in 1864 he and his brother Joseph died when stormy weather prevented the ferry boat from landing. When they stepped into a small boat, it capsized; Joseph was drowned and Thomas, though reaching the shore, died of exhaustion. That was the end of the ferry, but Johnson's wife and son continued to run the inn until about 1878.

A severe gale damaged the north gable of the building in November 1881 and a few months later the old inn closed for the last time. It was demolished about 1885 and the site remained empty for forty years, with only its stables remaining. The Parkgate swimming baths were built nearby in 1922 and at first refreshments were sold from the Bath House; but in 1926 the Boat House Tea Rooms were built on the site of the Pengwern Arms.

The stone stables were demolished in 1965. If the Parkgate Society had existed then they would surely have been saved! The tea rooms became a licensed restaurant (changing its name briefly to The Bistrot and its colour to pink) and eventually gained a pub licence, thus renewing a tradition of nearly 400 years.



TELEPHONE NESTON 137

THE BOAT HOUSE—

PARKGATE, Cheshire

"The Tea Room with its Toes in the Sea"

is open all winter, including Sundays, for morning coffee, light lunch and afternoon tea. We invite you to pay us a visit and to try any of our home-made cakes, scones, biscuits or other delicacies.

For Christmas-time we shall have a special display of home-made decorated cakes; also mincemeat, plum puddings and sweets, and an attractive collection of small Christmas gifts.

We deliver in the district, or send by bus, rail or post, paying half the cost of carriage.

Card advertising the Boat House, 1927

Editor: Anne Williamson (336 6146)
Secretary: Mrs A Clarke (336 1069)
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