

# Parkgate Society Newsletter

Spring 2001

Issue Number 60

## Meetings

We meet at 8pm at the **Boathouse**.  
If you need help with transport please ring  
Mrs Angela Clarke, our Secretary, giving 24  
hours notice, on 0151-336 -1069.

### *Diary dates – Spring 2001*

- |             |  |
|-------------|--|
| 22 January  | Home watch by Bob Cain<br>(Chairman Home Watch Co-<br>ordinators Group).               |
| 19 February | A Night on the Tiles –<br>Nocturnal Naturalist by Jeff<br>Clarke (Countryside Ranger). |
| 19 March    | Discover the Waterfront<br>(Liverpool & Birkenhead) by<br>Valerie Hozack.              |
| 23 April    | The Leverhulme Estates by<br>Gavin Hunt.   |
| 21 May      | “RMS Titanic” by David<br>Hill.  |

Non – members are welcome

## SUBSCRIPTIONS

£4.00 Family or Single per year  
£2.50 Senior Citizens per year  
Payment can be made at any of our meetings or  
directly to  
Mrs Valerie Place,  
Pendmore,  
Station Road,  
Parkgate.

Standing order forms are available, if required.

DONATIONS ARE WELCOMED

## AGM

The AGM took place on Monday 23 October 2000.

The Minutes, taken, were as follows-

1. In the absence of the President, the  
Chairman welcomed some 50 members.
2. The Minutes of the 1999 AGM were taken  
as read.
3. The Treasurer presented the accounts. The  
Chairman asked for suggestions on how  
we might spend surplus funds.
4. The Committee: Fiona Gow was thanked  
for her work on the committee. The  
remaining committee members were  
declared re-elected, as follows: Geoffrey  
Place (Chairman), Michael Potts (Vice  
Chairman), Clive Edwards (Treasurer),  
Angela Clarke (Secretary), Valerie Place,  
Anne Williamson, Becky Ford, Liz Marrs,  
Stephen Gordon and Jeremy Harris.
5. The Chairman reported that planning  
permission for the St Thomas' project was  
being sought and that the Society was  
sponsoring a concert, on 20 January, to  
raise funds. He said the County Council  
had pledged to replace the daffodils which  
their Cycle Track had destroyed in Station  
Road. The Society's Millennium Project, a  
record of Parkgate in the year 2000, was  
on display as far as it was ready. Members  
were urged to fill in a questionnaire about  
Agenda 21.
6. There were no questions from the floor.

Parkgate Society Newsletter  
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Articles for the newsletter are very welcome

NEWS and VIEWS

**The Weather** - we all have our own view on what the weather has been like these past few months. Thanks to the Curator at Ness Gardens, we can record how wet it actually was!

	Actual	Average (based on 30 years records)
July	3.64 inches	1.20 inches
August	3.47	3.17
September	2.98	3.83
October	5.63	3.09
November	6.82	2.49
December	2.93	3.63

As you will see, over this period, we had about 8 inches more rain than we would expect! The period September/ October/ November was the wettest since Ness Gardens started to keep records, beating the previous record by ½ inch for the same period in 1976. This resulted in considerable damage to the new cycle track between Wood Lane and Brookland Road, and cars parked outside the houses at the top of Brookland Road were pictured in the local press several feet deep in floodwater. Local press also featured the pony sanctuary, which lost revenue by not being able to hold their Santa's pony, and trap rides due to their fields being flooded.

The planning application for the **St Thomas' Project** is, we understand, due to be considered at the Council's planning meeting in February. The **jazz concert** held in the Parish Church on January 20<sup>th</sup>, which was sponsored by the *Society*, was very enjoyable, well attended and raised an amazing £1500. Well done Clive Edwards and his team. A further £100 was added by a Parkgate parishioner, following a supper for family and friends after the concert. The **Red Lion** continue to fund raise with a collection tin on the bar and a second party/disco in early February to be held at the cricket club - tickets and information from the Red Lion.

The Society has received its first (?) application for "overseas" membership from Dennis Mealor, in Australia. An extract of his letter is included within this Newsletter, which, we are sure, will be of interest to those who are "local" members of the Society. (The plan is to email him his copies of the Newsletter. Fingers crossed.)

It looks as though we will have to wait till spring 2002 to enjoy the **daffodils** destroyed during the construction of the Cycle Track in Station Road - we are not aware that the County Council have replaced them, as promised.

The "Green Way" (Regency Court?) development (**Parkgate Hotel site**) seems to be progressing at pace, with the first house occupied mid-January. It is good to see that the original house can be viewed from Boathouse Lane.

**New road name signs** have appeared in various locations throughout Parkgate, namely Wood Lane (both ends) and Barnacre (the smart new one replacing the chipped blue one). The Society has had considerable correspondence with the Council on road signs, and it is good to see these new ones now in place.

**Fiona Gow, a long time member of the Society and for the last two years a member on the committee, moved away from Parkgate in September. Here are some of her thoughts:**

“You did say you were a first time buyer, didn't you?” said the girl at the Building Society, clearly puzzled by a client who looked at least half the age of the Queen Mother. I assured that I was, but thought that it would take too long to explain that it was twenty years since I had taken what I had intended would be a short term tenancy on an upstairs flat in Mostyn Square. The owner, Mrs Shaw, who lived in the downstairs flat, was then in her early eighties, had recently been widowed and did not plan to remain long. But she stayed and only moved out in her hundredth year, and I stayed too, not least because I had a Room With A View of the marshes and the Welsh hills.

Moving away stimulates the memory and it has surprised me to realise how much has changed in twenty years. In 1980 Tony Smith and his wife ran their splendid shop opposite the Old Quay car park; there was still a restaurant called the Marie Celeste at the south end of the Parade (I always thought it was optimistic to expect it to prosper with a name like that!); Mostyn House still had boarders; Nicholls' Ice Cream Shop was half its present size (the other half was a dress shop); the Red Lion had a red lion looking haughtily down from an upstairs window; there was a butcher's shop and a greengrocers on the Parade; and where Deeside Court now is, there was a garage where assistants would put the petrol in for their customers. High tides were higher and Parkgate's hinterland was less densely populated; where Grenfell Park and Close are today, sheep grazed and small boys played rugby.

What do I miss? The friendly service at the Parkgate Stores (even at 6am!), an excellent hairdresser half a minute's walk away whose prices are far too low, and waiting for the 6.54 bus on summer mornings when I felt I had the marshes all to myself. There are plenty of seagulls in the sky I now look at, but none of the herons, goldfinches or wild ducks I have grown used to. And I miss all the interesting ghosts of Parkgate's past.

What do I not miss? Crowds on the Parade on sunny weekends, although I have to admit I enjoyed the dramas when a driver, who parked in the Square, was confronted by a traffic warden or a bus; from my upstairs flat I had an unrivalled view of the show. I definitely do not miss the days when the wind was so strong that getting round the corner of the Marsh Cat was an achievement comparable to rounding Cape Horn, nor do I miss waiting for the 6.54 bus on the cold, wet mornings when it was 10 minutes late.

How do I cope without the view and all the links with the past generations? Do not feel too sorry for me. One of the things Parkgate lacks is waves. But I have moved to a flat in Blundellsands where I am (just!) able to see the sea and where a three minute walk will take me to the beach. I have another splendid view, this time of the windmills of Seaforth, the landmarks of the Wirral and the coast of North Wales and I have now got used to the novel idea of the tide coming in every day.

The beach is parallel with the Mersey channel, used by all the shipping of Liverpool, the port which took over from Parkgate. So in my imagination Emma Hamilton, Wilfred Grenfell and the Parkgate shrimpers have taken a step backward, to make way for the countless emigrants to the United States, the passengers on the great liners and the sailors on the North Atlantic convoys. But I still miss the herons and the handy hairdresser – and the natives of Parkgate who were remarkably friendly to someone who merely dropped in for twenty years.

*Parkgate Society Newsletter*

Dennis Mealor  
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AUSTRALIA

Email: sandmealor@telstra.easymail.com.au

Dear Madam,

I enclose a Parkgate Society application form which your then secretary, Mrs A M Clarke, sent me in 1996.....

Just to put you in the picture again, I was born in Parkgate in 1952 in Mealor's cottages and lived in Parkgate until my family migrated to Australia in 1961. My father is Roy Mealor, who lives in Little Neston, and my mother Joan, who resides in Bundaberg, Australia.

After being away from Parkgate some 30 years, my brother Ray and I visited my father and his, now, late wife Marianne in 1991. It was then that I saw a poster of your society in the Neston Library, and have procrastinated for years about applying to join.

I must apologise that after receiving your application form in 1996, I didn't respond to Mrs Clarke who wrote me a very nice letter at the time and said she used to talk to my father and Marianne over the fence when they lived in the Black Oak. She also sent me a newsletter which I still have. Unfortunately at the time I received the application form, my previous marriage broke up, and my life went into survival mode. I entered University, and got tied up in heavy studies. All is going well for me now, as I am married to Sue who I met at Uni., and we are both about to finish our Bachelor of Arts degrees within the month, after 4 years hard work (we are both heading for teaching careers).

Despite being away from Parkgate for so long and feeling that Australia is home, the passion for Parkgate never dies. Having left there at age 9, it is etched in my mind as a magic place, like a dream I had when I was a child. The visit in 1991 strengthened that feeling rather than destroyed any childhood fantasies I had.

Apart from that, since taking on Creative Writing subjects at University my interest in the place has increased due to Parkgate's evidently rich history. There must some great stories to tell, perhaps in the form of a novel I am sure.

I enclose \$15.00 Australian as a nominal membership fee.....

All the best to you All

Yours sincerely

Dennis Mealor"

A little more information on Dennis – he and Sue live on 2 acres about 20 minutes drive from Bundaberg (population about 30, 000), which is where Bundaberg Rum comes from. It's a sugar cane city. Their block of land is part of a rural estate of about twenty properties perhaps, all 2 to 5 acres or so, and surrounded by big stands of eucalyptus and other native trees ("the bush") It's very quiet & secluded which is what they like very much.

**THE PUBS AND HOTELS OF PARKGATE – No 6 of a Series by Geoffrey Place.**

**Holywell Hotel**

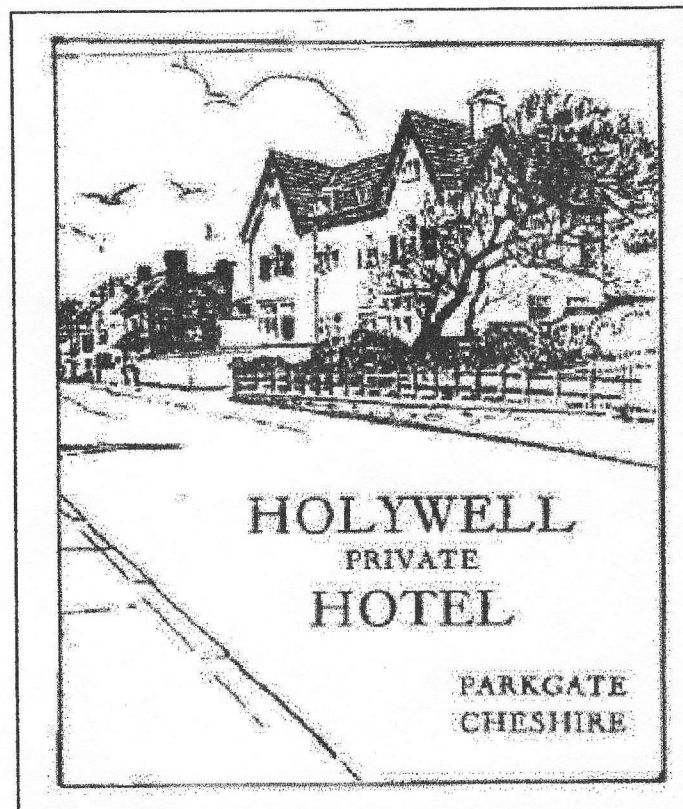
The Holywell Hotel was in the building now occupied by the Parkgate Nursing Home. It was originally built as two semi-detached houses, by the then vicar of Neston, Richard Gleadowe, in 1863. Until the 1890s they were called The Villas, but then became separately known as Holywell and Sandheyes.

A G Grenfell, headmaster of Mostyn House, bought both houses in 1894, together with the field behind them, which he made into a cricket field. In 1900 he sold the houses but in 1918 he bought them back. He turned the two houses into one, calling them Holywell House, and used them as a boarding house for forty of his pupils. In 1923 he turned the building into a private hotel, particularly for the use of parents visiting the school and he installed his former cook to run it.

A G Grenfell sold the hotel in 1933 to the sisters Kathleen and Gertrella Smith, who had already bought the Boat House café from him. The hotel was not licensed but would obtain wine for the guests on request.

The hotel was bought by The British Diabetic Association as a home for elderly diabetics. It was called Charles Best House, after the co-discoverer of insulin. Professor Best came from Canada to open it in 1956, but the Association sold the building in 1972, when it became the Parkgate Nursing Home.

The cover of the  
Hotel's brochure  
1936



## The History of Backwood

By Anne Williamson

Concluding the three-part series on Backwood (the hall and farmland between Boathouse Lane and Gayton). Part 1 The Origins - Spring 2000 newsletter, and Part 2 Life in the 1800s—Autumn 2000 newsletter.

### Part 3—Life in the 1900s

#### The Rathbone Era

Theodore Rathbone and his family lived at Backwood from approximately 1867 until his death in 1890, after which his daughter May became proprietor. The estate bailiff continued to be Charles Owen and his family, until about 1896 when Edward Jones took over. The Rathbones had a significant influence on the estate and may have been responsible for the building of both Lodges, the walled garden and kennel, farm buildings and enlarging the Hall itself. May Rathbone (her sister Lucy did not appear to have survived childhood) continued as proprietor until at least 1910, when Kelly's Directory lists Richard Norris as her bailiff and Frederick Mousley as gardener. May's mother, Mary, died in Italy in 1913 and one could speculate that the estate may have been sold as a result of her death. By the 1920s the owner was W.E. Whineray (of Leighton Court) and/or Gilbert Brown with Elias Friend as farm bailiff.

#### Farm life—the Norris Family

Richard Norris, farm bailiff, has descendants still living in Neston, and the family were of great interest to me because although we are now in the 21st century and this took place nearly a hundred years ago I have a first hand account of the times from Richard Norris' granddaughter, Joan. A few years ago she journeyed up from London with her son to visit our lodge, her childhood home, and knocked at our door. We had an interesting chat about life in Parkgate in the 1920s. Her parents, Joseph and Alice (who was born and brought up in Parkgate) came to live here when Alice was 21yrs and Joan was a young girl. They had previously lived at the wine shop (by Tesco's) in Neston. They had a difficult time in Neston with two of their children, a daughter aged 5yrs and a son aged 3yrs, dying of flu on the same day in the War (1918), but with Joan, their daughter they moved to Backwood to work on the farm with uncle James and grandfather Richard. Uncle James of Backwood married in 1906, when he was 25yrs old, to Florence Violet Oxtan (22yrs) of Neston, daughter of a stonemason, William Oxtan. The farm provided work and accommodation for many families, some still with descendants living in Neston. Joan remembers several families, the Constables, the Miltons, the Abletts and the Pickards. They all moved from cottage to cottage within the farm as their families increased or decreased in size. There was a community spirit on the estate and Bill Pickard's daughter (who became a vet) became Godmother to Kath Milton. We have had visits from Kath Milton some years ago, and a couple of visits from Bill Pickard who was ninety something last time he came here. When we arrived here Bill Pickard lived in the Mews (before refurbishment) and he and Vic (who still lives in Neston) were the last labourers to work for the Parringtons. Our Lodge was home in turn to Norris', Miltons, Swifts, and Pickards. At one time there was a family of 11 living here in what was a two bedroomed house with no toilet or drainage. Life must certainly have been hard in these times with washing in a copper in the kitchen and cooking taking place on the range in the living room. Joan Kay (Norris) told me that the Rathbone family were still here when she was a girl and that lady Rathbone (as she called her) used to like painting and travelling. The ownership of the farm changed to the Whinerays then shortly after, to the Parrington family. The Parringtons (senior) and their two children like the Rathbones also

had servants and nannies. As a girl, Joan and her brothers used to walk to St Winefred's R.C. school and back in Neston every day. Joan and her brothers used to work hard and every Saturday they harnessed their goat to the cart, loaded up with farm produce including free-range chickens that their mother had plucked and cleaned. They would take the cart along Parkgate front to sell the produce. This type of trading from carts in the street was commonplace in those days. In the summer holidays they helped with stooking of the corn and gathering it in. When the fields had been cleared the two big shires would be used for ploughing. We have unearthed a huge horseshoe and several old horse brasses in our garden. Joan's mother, Alice, used to serve teas in the garden of the lodge. They put out small folding tables and served sandwiches with Hovis bread with homemade jam or eggs from their hens and pots of tea. Every day the fire was lit under the copper water boiler to provide hot water for teas and for washing. Two shillings and sixpence was the fee for full afternoon tea or one shilling and sixpence for tea and hot water only. They also sold home-made lemonade for which they had to walk to Birkenhead, 8 miles away to buy lemons. The Parkgate Swimming Baths opened in 1923 and many visitors would walk up the lane to the Lodge for tea. At this time the Hooton to West Kirby steam train would have trundled past the door every so often.

Joan went to work for the two sisters at the Boat House Tea Rooms when she was 14yrs where she served lunches for seven shillings and sixpence for which she was paid five shillings a week. Joan and the family left Backwood in the 1930s but she remembers an Air Ship R101 coming down over the farm in 1930. Another of her brothers was killed in N. Africa during the Second World War, but her mother, Alice, despite her hard working life and the loss of three of her children, lived to the amazing age of 101yrs and her grave is in St Winefred's church in Neston (b.1887 and d.1988).

#### The Parrington Era

The Parrington family arrived in the 1920s and remained here until the 1970s. Mr. Ronald Parrington, son of Frank Parrington, lived on the estate for 56years and has written to me with his fond memories of his childhood such as visiting the newborn lambs and calves, riding on the horse and cart, fetching in the sheaves of corn, fishing for roach and rudd in the ponds and shooting the plentiful rabbits, ducks and partridges. After the War he struggled to modernize the farm buildings (which dated from about 1870). He worked hard to improve the cows by husbandry through times that saw increasing mechanization, the introduction of artificial fertilizers, TT testing, the Green Pound, and pedigree herd inspection. Between the years of 1956-1978 his pedigree Dairy Shorthorn cattle carried off all before them in the show ring and the National Milk Records show that his herd improved their milk production from 600 gallons to 1000 gallons. Ronald Parrington was a respected cattle judge and became county Chairman of the NFU. He married Sheila and they had children, Simon and Ruth. When his father died in 1962 he bought the Hall, which with the 240 acres of farm, gardens, lodges and cottages, was a huge struggle to maintain. Some of the properties were sold to try to keep the farm going, but after sixteen years and against the wishes of his heart, he had to sell his "spiritual home" and move to Devon.

#### More Recently

Since 1978 Backwood has been the home of the McBurney family. There are now ten households living within the perimeter of the farm.

Notably, people who have lived here keep very fond memories of the place and do return to visit whenever possible, several lived to ripe old age, and in 200 years of eight documented owners, the Parringtons covered 56 yrs, the Rathbones approx. 40 yrs and the Bennetts approx. 30 yrs.

### **Final Word on the Origins**

In part 1 of the History of Backwood the earliest date that can be traced for the property was 1792 (with the Bennetts purchasing the dwelling in the township of Leighton). However, following examination of the Hayes Lyon (Ashfield Hall) collection of documents in Chester Records Office, further information may be helpful. This collection includes an exchange of two parcels of land in 1759. In 1759, William Cook the elder and yeoman of Heswall bought Ryders in Leighton and later that year gave to James Bond, the apothecary of Neston his three fields at "the back of the woods" in exchange for three fields of James Bond (situated near the bends in Leighton Road). The description of Cook's fields were, total size 15 acres, with the land of Gleggs of Gayton to the north and of Mostyn to the south. His legal document was witnessed by John and Mary Glegg. If these fields were the site of Backwood it had very small origins in an area dominated by the large land owners Glegg and Mostyn. In 1849, in the Craig's ownership, Backwood's size was still small, about 30 acres (with a further 10 or so acres rented from the Mostyns). Presumably the estate was only able to begin to grow to its present size after the sale of the Mostyn lands (later in 1849).



Joan Kay (Norris) as a girl with her brother and mother, Alice Norris, outside the Lodge at Backwood in 1927 and pictured again in 1999 aged 80 yrs.

