



Parkgate Society Newsletter

Spring 2002

Issue Number 62

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 for 2002 -

- | | |
|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 4 February | The National Wildflower Centre,
Liverpool –
Richard Scott. |
| 11 March | Discovering the Mersey waterfront
– Valerie Hancock |
| 15 April | The Leverhulme Estate, next
instalment-
Gavin Hunter. |
| 20 May | The Cotswolds and Shakespeare
country –
David Cummings. |

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.
CH64 6QJ

Standing order forms are available, if required.

DONATIONS ARE WELCOMED

AGM

The AGM took place on Monday 22 October 2001.

1. The Chairman welcomed some 50 members.
2. The Minutes of the 2000 AGM were taken as read.
3. The Treasurer announced a small surplus of funds; there were no questions on the accounts.
4. The committee were declared re-elected, as follows: Geoffrey Place (chairman), Michael Potts (vice chairman), Clive Edwards (treasurer), Angela Clarke (secretary), Valerie Place (subscriptions secretary), Becky Ford, Stephen Gordon, Liz Marrs, Anne Williamson (newsletter editor) and Jerry Harris (assistant newsletter editor).
5. The Chairman reported the introduction of programme cards and our efforts to improve the neglected condition of the Wirral Way on the Parkgate stretch. He paid tribute to the co-operation of our new County Councillor, Mr David Andrews.
6. Members asked questions about St Thomas' (see article), the Baths carpark, the Cricket Club and the possibility of a blue plaque, to commemorate Wilfred Grenfell's birthplace, and the sea wall.

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NEWS AND VIEWS

After many years, **The Parade** was resurfaced in September and very smart it looked. The final touches (the white and the yellow lines) were added on Saturday 29th and less than a week later (Tuesday) the first repair hole had been dug (outside the Chippie)!

Geoffrey Place's article on **Handel**, featured in the Autumn 2001 issue of the Newsletter attracted the attention of the Wirral News. The paper summarised the article on Handel's visit to Parkgate and quoted the Handel House Trust, in London, who concurred with Geoffrey's controversial conclusion that Handel did not perform the Messiah in Parkgate on his way to Ireland. The Handel House Trust in November, 2001, opened a museum dedicated to the life of the composer.

The Society were pleased with the outcome of the refurbishment of **The Red Lion**, having initially expressed concern about the rumours of possible alteration to the character and outside appearance of the building by the leisure group owners. The "picture postcard" pub and its fine "Walkers of Warrington" globe are an asset to the Conservation Area.

The "**Millennium Profile of Parkgate**", prepared by Becky Ford and Anne Williamson, has been lodged with the Cheshire Records Office, together with the "**Domesday Photographic Survey of Parkgate**" prepared in 1985 by Leonard Walker. If any member would like to see these documents they are available at Duke Street, Chester. Please contact the Chairman or Secretary to obtain the 'holding' number. Local newspapers carried the story of the Records Office being presented with these documents, which the Society hopes will provide research material for the future people of Parkgate.

In a **Neston Cricket Club** letter to its members last September it states that they are considering a revised plan for the re-development of their grounds. They are now investigating the possibility of selling a smaller portion of the rear ground for housing thereby retaining a second cricket pitch on the club site.

The Parkgate Society has circulated most of Parkgate with an **advertising leaflet** for the society. Serious issues such as 1) the fund raising and restoration of the church, and 2) the large-scale housing development that could take place at the cricket club, make the committee feel that the people of Parkgate may like to join (or lapsed members rejoin) the society at this time. We welcome new members and would like you to encourage your neighbours to add their support, by joining.

Local press has reported that Headteacher **Julian Grenfell of Mostyn House** is to retire after 40 years teaching, at the end of 2001, and his daughter Suzi Grenfell is to take over as the 6th generation to run the school since its foundation in 1854. Julian Grenfell became the headteacher in 1964 after taking over from his father Daryl.

Our **County Councillor, David Andrews**, has been most helpful and effective in representing the people of Parkgate in their wish to see more maintenance and general improvement in the Wirral Way which was becoming very overgrown, particularly after the foot & mouth closure. He walked our section with the Cheshire countryside officers and discussed the problem. As a result, cutting back has already taken place between the Heswall boundary and Backwood Hall Bridge, and improvements at Station Road car park have begun with a new sand surface to the horse path in this section. The vandalised toilets have been demolished. An additional ranger has been appointed and there are further plans for cutting back the overgrown areas.

There have been several sightings of **barn owls** flying low around the Parkgate Baths area at dusk. The Wirral & Ellesmere Port Barn Owl Group have confirmed that barn owls have indeed been seen in Parkgate recently. This is an exciting new attraction for us as there are only five recorded breeding pairs

on the Wirral, the nearest being Burton. As the Wirral owls have bred 17 young in 2001, it is hoped that the growing population may spread out and breed in Parkgate in the future as the marsh and farmland seem to suit them. More on barn owls in our next newsletter.

Note from the editors – We are most grateful to Colin Mealor for providing his very interesting article and hope that it will inspire others, with equally fascinating stories to tell, to let us publish their memories.

THE BISHOP'S TRUST FOR THE RESTORATION OF ST THOMAS' CHURCH, PARKGATE

Since the report in the Autumn Newsletter, the proposed trustees have met several times under the chairmanship of Barrie Youde and solid progress has been made. The new trust will be in the form of a Company Limited by Guarantee and the draft memorandum and articles are in a form put forward by the Charity Commission.

The proposed initial trustees are: - Beryl Hughes, Neville Jones, David Johnson, Emma Dennett, Elizabeth Gordon, James Pratt, James Tong, Barrie Youde, Robin Pavillard, Clive Edwards and Michael Potts.

They have been drawn from various aspects of Parkgate life, including our own society. They will be directors and have signed the draft documents, which have been sent to Companies House with an application for a Certificate of Incorporation. This is expected without undue delay. Then registration as a charity will be sought from the Charity Commission.

The next step will be the receipt of a draft lease for a period of five years from the vicar's solicitors. This will need careful consideration, as it will be a key document in the progress towards the restoration. Following from this will be specification of the work needed to architects and surveyors, and the selection of suitable and cost effective persons and firms. The work will be prioritised and proceeded with, as and when, it is covered by donations and grants received.

Fund raising will start in earnest once the lease is finalised and the costs are known. In the meantime well-wishers should give donations and the proceeds of coffee mornings etc to the Parkgate Preservation Trust, who will transfer these to the Bishop's Trust when it is up and running.

Clive Edwards

THE SEA WALL AT PARKGATE

By Geoffrey Place

In 1799 Sir Thomas Mostyn, who owned the whole of Parkgate, bought the remaining stones of the ruinous Old Quay, a mile up river, from the City of Chester. It is likely that he used this stone to build the first part of the sea wall, which ran from the Middle Slip, at the Watch House, to the Donkey Stand. This first section appears to have been built in two parts, as the north stretch has no parapet. There then was a house on the site of the Donkey Stand, and the sea wall went round the house. The first mention of the "quay wall" yet found was in 1800 (CRO, QJF 228/2). This first section of the wall can be seen on an estate map surveyed in 1811.

The Mostyn estate map dated 1732 shows clearly that there was no sea wall and roadway in front of the houses, which gave directly on to the beach. The ships would anchor in the mainstream of the river, then

some fifty yards from the shore, and there was no quay or landing stage at all. Passengers were rowed ashore at high tide, or carried across the wet sands by sailors. There was a landing stage at the Boat House for the ferry to Flint, established in 1786. In the mid nineteenth century there was a wooden landing stage just south of the Donkey Stand, built before 1849, probably by the Dee Yacht Club. Only the posts were visible in 1915 when the District Council was petitioned, unsuccessfully, to put a new top on it, 30 to 40 feet long. The posts had been buried in sand for 40 years but had reappeared. The only clue to an earlier landing stage comes from an advertisement in *The Chester Courant* of 5 June 1770: "*A genteel house, pleasantly situated on a Kay, at the lower end of Parkgate, to let*".

The wall, therefore, was not built for the benefit of the ships, but for the sea-bathing visitors. One of the rituals of inland spa towns was the daily promenade. At Parkgate, the visitors in the 18th century, bathed early in the morning, so a Parade was built where the ladies could show off their finery. As *The Chester Chronicle* reported in 1811 (9 August): "*A grand, brilliant and splendid display of fireworks will be exhibited on the shore beneath the Terrace at Parkgate*". The Mostyn family was keen to develop Parkgate as a bathing resort as its importance as a port began to decline and the various stretches of the sea wall are examples of this development.

The second section of the sea wall, perhaps built in the 1820s, was a southward extension from the Donkey Stand to a point opposite Prospect House, as can be seen in a drawing dated 1828 (or 1833). The parapet stones of this section each have a rectangular hole in the top, giving rise to the surmise that there may once have been railings. But the holes are too shallow for this and are probably grip holes to assist moving the stones. The third section of the wall completed its southern end as far as the South Slip, as may be seen on Bryant's map of Cheshire published in 1831. The parapet stones of this section have no holes in the top.

The fourth section completed the northern end of the wall, from the Middle Slip to the Boat House. It was described as the "*new marine parade*" when the estate was sold in 1849, and the purpose of building this section may well have been to encourage the purchase of building lots at this end of the village. It was a condition of this sale that most purchasers, and not only those with Parade frontages, "*shall contribute towards keeping up in the repair of the Sea Wall against this estate, which is now in a most perfect state and not likely to require any outlay whatever, for a long period.*" In 1897 (November) the Local Board asked counsel's opinion about responsibility for the wall and sent a repair bill to the Turnpike Trust.

There used to be two wooden flights of steps leading from the Donkey Stand to the beach, fitted by the District Council in 1904, and there were other sets of steps opposite the Square and Mostyn House. There remains a set of concrete steps nearly opposite the end of Station Road and some steps cut into the sandstone opposite the Red Lion. The only part of the wall with no parapet is a stretch of some 90 yards beside the Middle Slip and this stretch is now protected by railings, probably put up in 1881 (Minute Book 15 October). The total length of the wall is about 1200 yards.

In 1879 it was reported that AS Grenfell of Mostyn House had agreed with Mr Macfie to pay half the expense of keeping up the sea wall in front of their properties, if other owners would do the same, and if the other half were paid by the Local Board. The Local Board and its successor the District Council did repair the wall from time to time. In 1881 (Minute Book 9 April) 18 yards of the wall was rebuilt, and later that year 70 yards were pointed and backed. The Board repaired the Middle Slip and the Donkey Stand wall in 1882 - 4. There was a great storm in 1889 (reported 12 October) which caused 15 yards of the wall, by the convalescent home, to collapse and the Board repaired both the Middle and Boat House slips. In 1884 (12 May) the Council declared that it owned the wall and threatened to prosecute anyone who undermined it by removing sand or gravel at its foot. AG Grenfell was given permission in 1901 "*to dress the big rough stones at the foot of the wall.*"

In 1885 (28 February) it was reported that *“at about 2pm, a young man, named Jellicoe from Thornton Hough, was exercising a horse on the Esplanade, Parkgate. A woman came out from one of the houses and commenced shaking a carpet, at which the horse took fright, and commenced plunging about and fell over the wall onto the shore and was frightfully hurt. The youth's fall was broken by the horse's body, but he sustained a sprained wrist and was much shaken. The horse was so much injured, having broken his back, that he never moved from his first fall. The top of the wall to the shore is over nine feet, where there is an accumulation of large boulders.”* In 1909 the height of the wall was given as ten feet.

THE PUBS AND HOTELS OF PARKGATE - No 8, the last in a series by Geoffrey Place.

The Vanished Inns of Parkgate

The Sawyer's Arms

The Sawyer's Arms, now Sawyers Cottage towards the north end of the Parade, lies next to Pengwern and probably was built, at least in part, at the same as that ancient house, about the start of the 18th century.

The sawyer of The Sawyer's Arms was Richard Bartley (1763-1844). He held an ale-seller's licence from 1793, but the earliest mention of the name Sawyer's Arms is in 1822. A map of Cheshire published in 1831 calls it The Carpenter's Arms. We know that Bartley was the carpenter in question because he was described as a sawyer when he married in 1786, and in the 1841 census gives his occupation as 'sawyer'. He was succeeded as landlord by Maurice Evans (1800-1879) who married Bartley's daughter Alice in 1831. Evans also sold groceries. Maurice's son Richard Evans (1833-1901) was both publican and fisherman. His daughter Anne (successively Mrs Mellor and Mrs Wood) held the licence until 1904. The inn closed in 1905 as part of a national campaign to reduce the number of licensed premises.

One interesting feature of The Sawyers Arms is its cellar, which is vaulted in brick. There are several other brick-vaulted cellars in Neston and Parkgate, and we believe that their tunnel-like appearance gave rise to the myth, still popular in Neston, of smugglers' tunnels. Most such tunnels are, of course, underground, but that of The Sawyers Arms was built above ground. Its purpose was to provide insulation and keep the beer cool.

The Golden Talbot

The building now called Talbot House was an inn in 1757, when it was advertised as having stabling for thirty horses. In 1803 the guidebook *Paterson's Roads* states that The George and The Talbot are the recommended inns in Parkgate. This was the inn where Mrs Fitzherbert, the discarded wife of the Prince Regent, was said to have stayed in the late 1790s. It had ceased to be an inn by 1822 and the building is referred to as "the old Talbot public house" in 1841.

The White Lion

This occupied all or part of South Cottage, next to Balcony House, which then extended halfway across the present road. The front part of the building was pulled down as a condition of sale in 1849. The inn is said to have had a date-plate of 1708, making it the oldest Parkgate inn (except for the old Boathouse) of which we have a record. The inn crops up at intervals for the next century. In 1804 it was stated, "The house adjoining the Billiard House (the Assembly Room, now Balcony House) on the south was formally called The White Lion". If this means that it was temporarily without a licence, it was revived later, because The White Lion was mentioned between 1813 and 1828. It was probably the landlady of this inn, Mrs Morris, who hanged herself in 1810.

were about 30 boats working the river about half of which were manned by Parkgate men. Their catches of shrimps were boiled on the boats, in water over coal fires. However, in 1961 my dad had the idea of using calor gas instead of coal for the fires and all the other fishermen followed suit. In 1939 my father joined the Royal Navy working on mine sweepers until 1945. Many other fishermen joined the services during the war. My uncle, Roy Mealor, was unable to join up on medical grounds and he worked the boat in my father's absence. In those days there wasn't the luxury of radar equipment and the men had only a compass for guidance. While Uncle Roy was fishing his elder sister, my Aunt Doris, 1914 - 2000, helped run the shop. In 1945 my father returned from the war and continued the boat with Roy until he retired in 1974.

John Herbert Mealor 1893 - 1962 Fisherman

My grandfather was born in Parkgate. He began working his boat in 1907 with his elder brother Jobe Mealor. This was under sail as engines were not around at this time. They were a large family of nine, all born in Parkgate, and all involved with the River Dee; cockling, musselling and shrimping. They also caught fish, which were gutted and sold. At this time there were between 60 and 70 fishing boats on the river, nearly all from Parkgate or the surrounding areas of Neston and Heswall.

It was my grandfather who decided he would cut out the middleman and open a shop from the front room of his house, which was Hill View next door to the present day shrimp shop on the Parade. However, this had to be put on hold until 1918 because, from 1914, he served with the Army in the Cheshire Regiment.

At this time his boat was moored at the Middle Slip (Watch House). When the catch was sorted it would be taken by handcart to Parkgate Station for transportation to the Liverpool Fish Market.

John Mealor 1859 - 1936 Fisherman

My great grandfather. Born in Parkgate.

John Mealor 1820 - 1911 Fisherman

My great great grandfather. Born in Parkgate.

JAZZ IN PARKGATE by Clive Edwards

When I moved here in 1975 I was preoccupied by a new job, a young family and settling in. Something was missing, and when the great band of Humphrey Lyttleton came to play in a marquee at the Cricket Club, I realised what it was and had to go to other parts of Wirral and Chester to listen to local bands on a regular basis.

PARKGATE HOTEL

Before this a band with the strange name the Eskaromaticendola Jazz Band had played at the Parkgate Hotel for several years in the early 1970's. A rhythm section plus Dave Renton on trombone, used to have each time different guests on trumpet and clarinet making for varied and stimulating sessions.

It had to wait until the late 1970s for weekly sessions to start again here by the Savoy Jazzmen, with the always exciting Tommy Orrett on trumpet. Bruce Bakewell was their superb clarinetist, who had played and lived in Canada and USA. Sadly Tommy died in 1995 and had a real 'New Orleans' funeral in Liverpool. Bruce has had a series of strokes and can no longer play, but loves to listen when he can get out. Ken Colyer 'the Governor', still in great form, joined the band for a memorable evening on 30 August 1981. Their residency came to a halt on 19 January 1982 (as did folk and country and western nights), when there was a change of management policy. The Savoy now play on Monday evenings at the Brewer's Arms in Neston and did a wonderful concert for St Thomas's in Neston church in September 1999.

The weekly sessions resumed on 26 January 1983, until May or slightly later, with the Climax Jazz Band, then a new band led by Carl Thompson on cornet. Under the name the Tuxedo Jazz Band, their successors now play at the Old Colonial in Birkenhead.

Sessions were organised in the late 80' or early 90's by Tony Davis (ex Spinner) using four bands in rotation. These were the Merseysippi, the Blue Magnolia, the Panama and the Wirralian Jazz Bands. These ceased with new ownership.

THE BOATHOUSE

Around 1989 a band was formed to play at the Boathouse on Tuesday evenings, by Mike Woods, a learner trumpeter. Despite his musical limitations, Mike would hire and fire until the band was quite good. He then persuaded Billy Edwards, one of the regions' best trumpet players to come in as lead trumpet and to get some advice. Mike soon moved on and the band by 1992, called the Parade Jazz Band, had settled down with Billy -trumpet, Dave Renton -trombone, vocals and compere, Terry Perry -clarinet, tenor and soprano saxs and vocals, Charles Walcombe -bass and leader, Ron Hall -drums, Bernie Flynn -keyboard and Roy Gregory -banjo and guitar and vocals. Terry left and founded The Big Easy, a 1920/30s style big band. He was eventually followed by Howard Murray who plays clarinet, alto, tenor and baritone saxs. The band plays everything from Dixieland through to Count Basie and Bernie sometimes plays a lovely modern jazz piano piece. They have monthly guest stars of national stature, such as Roy Williams -trombone, John Barnes -clarinet and baritone sax and lots of wit, David Shepherd -clarinet, Jim Douglas -guitar. The impressive 52nd Street Jazz Band from USA west coast has twice played here while on tour. They have played continually here, except for a short spell at the Cricket Club, right through to the present. They started downstairs with a good pub atmosphere and when the pub was re-laid out with a central bar, they moved upstairs into the room used by our society.

THE SHIP HOTEL

From the late 1990's right through to the present The Silver Dollar Six has played here on Sunday afternoons from 2 to 4pm. They create a relaxed atmosphere for the diners and imbibers and add to the fun and entertainment of the visitors. Geoff Parker, their tasteful clarinetist lives in The Runnel and is a member of our society. Dave and Charles are refugees from the Parade band, as is Geoff Walker on banjo from the Savoy band. Dave's brother, Laurie Renton plays a good hot cornet style. Roger Planche often brings the house down with a super charged vocal. Roger has also regularly sung with the bands at the Parkgate Hotel and the Boathouse.

Live music is very precious, the musicians need you, so how about an evening or afternoon out and away from the 'telly'.