



Parkgate Society
(Founded 1972)
Newsletter

Spring 2004

Issue Number 66

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 –

- 9 February 2004 – Angus Tilston – “More films of
local events”
15 March – Ian Norris – “Burton – the meek, the
martyr and the mighty”
19 April – Malcolm Ingham (WCP) – “Owls,
squirrels and a wild cat”
24 May – Peter Bird – “Recovery of the Mary Rose”

20 September – Roger Bunn – “Walking and
Working Stick Maker”
25 October – The AGM followed by – Leslie Brown -
“Diving and working below water”
22 November – Dr Helen Ash – “Voluntary Service
Overseas in China”

Visitors 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 20 October 2003.

1. The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting. The President was introduced and took the chair.
2. The Minutes of the 2002 AGM were taken as read.
3. The Treasurer presented the accounts, which showed that the Society's finances are in a healthy state. These were approved with no questions.
4. The committee were re-elected, as follows: Geoffrey Place (chairman), Philip Owen (vice chairman), Clive Edwards (treasurer), Angela Clarke (secretary), Valerie Place (subscriptions secretary), Michael Potts, Becky Ford, Stephen Gordon, Anne Williamson (newsletter) and Jerry Harris (newsletter). Peter Knight was also elected to the committee.
5. The President commended Valerie Place on her twenty-five years as Membership Secretary and presented her with an engraved glass bowl and a framed testimonial, beautifully written by Mrs Cochrane.
6. The Chairman spoke of the possibility of a microphone system in the meeting room; of the proposed traffic-calming scheme along the Parade; and the intention of the Marie Curie cancer charity to plant 500 daffodils on the Ropewalk. – The Society would add £100 to whatever sum was collected from the members present.
7. The only question from the floor was regarding St Thomas' – this was answered by Anne Williamson.
8. The meeting was followed by a talk on Ephemera, by Glyn Parry.

Articles or suggestions for future Newsletters are most welcome, please contact:
Anne Williamson 336 6146 or
Jerry Harris 336 7406

The Parkgate Society is a registered charity. no. 503718

NEWS and VIEWS

The collection at the AGM, in aid of the Marie Curie cancer charity, whose intention was to plant 500 daffodils along the Ropewalk, raised £44 and the Society sent a cheque to Marie Curie for £150. The daffodils have been planted and we wait to enjoy them.

A waste disposal facility has been proposed, by Flintshire Council, to be sited opposite Burton. A letter has been sent, by the Society, to Flint County Council, supporting the objections of Burton Village, Cheshire County Council, and others.

After some months of uncertainty the Boathouse has been sold to Spirit Amber. It is to be hoped that the new owners will carry out some internal decorating, to brighten up the place.

You will see in this newsletter an article by Dennis Meador. Since receiving this we have learned that he has been awarded a 1st Class Honours, and plans to write a larger novel for a PhD, again on a River Dee theme.

With sadness we have to report the death of Hilda Wall Jones. She was a founder member of the Society, a former vice chairman of the committee and lived for many years in Parkgate.

The Old Butchers Shop on the Parade has had scaffolding up since early November and some work has been done exposing brickwork and cracks. It is likely to be a very difficult job to work on this building due to the lack of space for building materials and deliveries and the need to keep open both the Parade and the side weint.

Installation of traffic safety measures to the Parade, as reported in the autumn newsletter, is due to begin soon.

The Parkgate Coffee Shop and the end property in the Red Lion both have new owners. Land clearance behind these adjacent properties has taken place, including the removal of the private swimming pool of the Coffee Shop.

A planning application has been submitted to enlarge Parkgate Nursing Home and turn it into 12 apartments, with an additional 5 houses in the back garden. There is to be provision made for car parking with some underground. If this application is successful there is likely to be considerable disruption on the Parade during construction and increased traffic generally on to the Parade.

The Chinese wall plaques on the frontage of Mr. Chows, placed there as part of the major improvements that have taken place over the last year, translate as 1) 'plain sailing for the business', 2) 'good health of the people who own the business', 3) 'strength, health and prosperity for the business', and 4) 'good fortune and wealth for the future of the business'.

"FLINT, FROM PARKGATE"

As the housing development in Leighton Road progresses and the estate being named, by Crosby's, as Turners View, it is an appropriate time to publish Geoffrey Place's note on JMW Turners connection with this area.

"*Flint, from Parkgate*" is the title of a drawing by JMW Turner (1775-1851), now apparently lost, from which an engraving was made. It is referred to in the Parkgate Society's guidebook, *This is Parkgate* (page 35).

The print was "engraved by J Walker from an original drawing by W. Turner, published August 1st 1797 by J Walker, no. 16 Roominess Street, London". The engraving was first published in the *Copper-Plate Magazine*, volume III, plate 134. It shows a foreground of wheatfield with stooks of corn and a field with two figures and two dogs, with a house on the shore; a brig and some smaller vessels are on the river, with Flint Castle and the Welsh hills in the distance. It appears to have been drawn from a point up Boathouse Lane or on the path to Backwood.

It is known that Turner had friends who lived near Flint, and it seems probable that he crossed the Dee to Parkgate on the ferry while staying with them. AJ Finberg's *Life of Turner* states that Turner was commissioned by the *Copper-Plate Magazine* to do drawings of Sheffield and Wakefield, and he began a tour of the north of England in 1797. His two sketchbooks of this journey, "*North of England*" and "*Tweed and Lakes*", each contain above 100 drawings. He does not seem to have come near Wirral on that tour; it may be that the Parkgate drawing was done before this trip but Finberg is of no help here. At some uncertain date Turner borrowed a pony, which he never returned, and went on a tour of North Wales from Bristol to Caenarvon and back through St Asaph and Denbigh. Turner published a drawing of Flint Castle in 1795 and his visit to Parkgate may have been on that occasion. Alanson's *Engraved Work of Turner* lists three engravings of Flint: "Flint, from Parkgate", 1797 ($6\frac{1}{2} \times 4\frac{3}{8}$), "Flint" 1795 ($4\frac{5}{8} \times 2\frac{3}{4}$) and "Flint Castle" 1836 ($9\frac{1}{8} \times 6\frac{1}{4}$). Rawlinson says, "Only a few of Turner's drawings for the *Copper-Plate Magazine* have survived, and most of these have greatly faded. The Parkgate drawing, much faded, was at Christie's in 1877. Turner had written notes on the foreground *Fallow, Wheat*".

RAPTORS AND A RAT

Some observations by Freda Race

Well yes, I've only been in the area since June, but I thought you might be interested in an offcomers first impressions.

We moved from Burley-in Wharfedale, a village near Ilkley, in Yorkshire, to be near the grandchildren. I miss the moors, but we more or less look over the Dee to the Welsh hills and I appreciate the relatively flat ground for walking. And what walks! (as Sir David Frost would say). The Wirral Way with its butterflies and wild flowers, the walks along the coast, or should I say the banks of the estuary, and the front at Parkgate. The front, which is a joy to see, with all the black and white buildings, not to mention the ice-creams.

We, that's my husband and I, are very interested in the history of the area as well as the wild life, which includes the people.

So far we have discovered that it used to be a deer park, that boats and even ships moored at the Quay in Parkgate, that it was a mining area with underground canals running out under the estuary for some way and that all the small, and sometimes not so small, ponds are marl pits.

We have been warned by people in the area that Neston and Parkgate folk can be "funny" but coming from Yorkshire, where we have a reputation for being reserved, not that we personally are I hope, the natives all seem very friendly to us and have made us most welcome.

We have had dragonflies in the garden, some weird and wonderful insects, flies or bees of one sort or another that we wouldn't see in Yorkshire, but also mosquitoes (I was bitten 17 times one evening), hedgehogs and, of course, birds.

Soon after we arrived there were a lot of herons on the marshes but they seem to have left to be replaced with, and here we couldn't believe our eyes, buzzards! Since then we have seen harriers, which sort I'm not sure of. Oh what joy! Not that either of us are very knowledgeable about birds but we are learning. We didn't know that the male harriers are mainly white until we got home and identified what we had seen. Lots of small birds flying very fast I couldn't identify.

What we also saw by the sea wall we were sitting on while eating our famous ice-creams, was a very large rat, just 4 foot away from us. Now don't get me wrong, I love rats and was glad to get such a good view of this brown and rather fluffy one, but I am well aware that they carry a lot of diseases and I should not have been pleased to see it.

The Leaving of Parkgate

By Dennis Mealor

Parkgate was the fairy tale that ended with my childhood, when my family (and I) emigrated to Australia in 1961. I was nine years old.

It was like going from one fairy tale to another though: boarding the big white whale with two yellow funnels at the back, The *S. S. Canberra*. That took my mind off the leaving of England for a while. A six-week adventure at sea on a brand new luxury liner. It was the *Canberra's* second voyage.

Even though I was born at No 5, Mealor's Cottages, Parkgate, in 1952, my first bout of consciousness was in my cot, at a house in Bedford Road, Rock Ferry. I can vaguely remember waking up each morning, finding my rubber dummy amongst the bedclothes, and shoving it into my mouth without bothering to remove its thick growth of bed fluff.

My mother sometimes reminds me of my first day at Rock Ferry's Ionic Street School. I was perhaps five when she handed me (struggling) to the teacher. I punched my mum on the nose and called her names. From that, you might say that I was a terror of a kid. But perhaps someone should have told me why I was being handed over to some strange woman, with her clutch of even stranger kids. Adults often don't imagine what goes through a kid's mind.

I survived Rock Ferry until my family returned to Parkgate. I started at Parkgate Infant's School in about early 1958. We must have been an easily entertained bunch of kids in those days. I was mad keen to get to school early each morning to play football in the playground, using a marble for a ball.

Even more exciting was the day our teacher (name forgotten) lined us all up in front of the school one morning. "Children, you'll all be pleased to know that today we have new tables," she said. I couldn't wait to get inside the class, to see our brand new school desks, and a new table for the teacher. Not quite. The tables were the mathematical kind, the ten times table. She had probably spent hours doing up the big black-ink chart on the classroom wall. I wasn't happy.

I enjoyed Arthur Draper's memoirs in the last Newsletter. I remember Arthur when I was a kid. My father (Roy Mealor) took me to visit him on a few occasions. I think he had a monkey on a chain back then. I was glad it was on a chain, because every time you went near, it curled up its top lip and showed its big fangs. I thought it was going to eat me.

The memories keep flooding in about Parkgate, the more I think of them. Scrumping apples, that seemed to be a regular pastime for the young ones. The idea might have come out of the *Beano* comic, but I thought it normal to raid anybody's apple tree and stuff apples down your jumper. We worked out early on that you had to tuck your jumper into your pants, to stop the fruit from falling through. I think we used to take one bite out of each, and throw them into the scrub, little horrors. I always think of that, when I see young vandals today. I think I have turned out ok. I gave up stealing apples long ago.

I might be tempted again though, after having tasted an English apple some years back. Australia has brilliant tropical fruits, such as backyard mangoes - nectar of the Gods. We have apples too, grown in Australian orchards in cooler parts. But none of them compares to the crunch and flavour of an English apple.

Since I left England in 1961, a lot of water has gone under the bridge. When I was about 14, my folks split up, and my father left Australia and returned to Parkgate.

Both my parents remarried. I lost contact with my father for years, until a small trickle of letters and postcards started things off again. In September 1991, my brother Ray and I returned to Parkgate for the first time in 30 years to the month. It was also 25 years since we had seen our Dad.

We had a great month staying with my father and stepmother Marianne, and met all our relatives again. Had a good time with the cousins and families, darts night at the *Coach and Horses* without a lot of darts getting thrown; as well as some nights out at the odd restaurant. A very hospitable lot. I felt like I had come home.

There was a lot more that I could have done, like go to Blackpool, or have a look through Conwy castle. But I didn't feel like playing the tourist. I just wanted to see and do all the things that I knew from way back. I wanted to walk the full length of the Prom, and then back along the Rope Walk (this time with video camera). I went up Swift's Weint where I used to live. Where was the field of sheep and geese? Gone to a housing estate as I found out.

When we lived up the Weint - at Swift's Cottages - mobs of sheep would make their way past us regularly, to Swift's butchery on the Prom. I was in the kitchen one day with my mother (Joan Mealor then), when we heard a lot of noise in the front corridor. When she opened the door, the corridor was a sea of sheep, from one end to the other. A ram was eyeing our hallway mirror, ready to butt his own reflection. My mother shut the door and hoped it would all go away, and it did. The sheep somehow managed to spill out into the Weint, and on to their fate. Our mirror survived intact. My mother always kept the front door closed after that.

Arriving back in '91 was almost like hopping into the Tardis and returning to the late 1950s. I was glad to see that Parkgate was virtually unchanged, except that it seemed even better. Buildings seemed painted pristine white with bright colours for the trimmings. Black-and-white photos had probably clouded my memories. Parkgate was now in colour.

My only worry was the loss of a little brook that I used to visit as a kid. The brook used to be up the "Back Path" I think it was called, behind Hawthorn Road. The path was a short dirt walk shaded by sycamores, oaks and horse chestnut trees. I used to wade into the brook and catch sticklebacks with an enamel bowl. The brook has gone to houses these days. Ironically, my father's house in Bevy Road was just about over the spot where the little brook once flowed.

Today I live with my wife Sue (and some almost grown-up 'kids') on a two-acre property about 20 minutes drive from Bundaberg, Queensland, Australia (the home of *Bundaberg Rum*). Sue hails from the U. K. also (Plymouth). We love it here, but there's always that little piece of England in the corner of our thoughts. My little piece of course is Parkgate. So much so, that I have been writing about Parkgate and the Dee Estuary for the past year, as part of my Honours degree (Literary Studies/Creative Writing) at Central Queensland University. My Dissertation has been a creative work - a novel (plus a substantial literary critique) - set in Parkgate.

Achieving a good mark for it, that's a difficult enough task. Results aren't out yet, but fingers crossed. After that, I know that getting it published will be even harder. A bit like winning the lottery. Everything seems to have to be super 'commercial' to get anywhere these days.

But whatever. Writing about the place has taken me to Parkgate for free for the past 9 months, and I've loved it. I can't seem to get Parkgate out of my system. But then, why would I want to?

St Thomas' Church

The Bishop's Trust for St. Thomas' has continued (since it's launch in 2001) to work towards restoration of the church. In July 2004 it will be 10 years since the church closed and at last, we are delighted to report, the contracts for phase 1 have been signed. The contractor aims to begin work at the start of February. This first phase of the work will take about 13 weeks and will involve the major renovation and stabilization of the roof and walls. Following this phase there still remains work on the interior and the equipping of the building, for which we urgently need to raise more money. Hopefully, more donations may come in when building work begins.

£110,000 has so far been raised towards the renovation, but more money needs to be found. When the church was built in 1843, Parkgate had a population of 400, now it is nearly 4000 and our need for a central building for our church services and other suitable community uses must surely be within our reach.

£480 was raised at a carol sing-along in December in the Red Lion, and £509 was presented by the Parkgate Golf Society in November (which includes Irene Thomas' sponsored walk). Christmas cards and tea towels have sold well.

Thank you for your support in the fundraising. Enquiries should be made to Tel: 0151 336 6146, or The Bishop's trust for St Thomas', PO Box 80, Parkgate, Neston, CH64 6WE.

A CHRISTIAN SYMBOL AT LEIGHTON HALL FARM by Geoffrey Place

At Leighton Hall Farm, near Parkgate, there is a barn, which has a date stone marked

S

D A

1665

These initials stand for Darcy and Ann Savage who were married in 1655. A beam inside the barn bears the date 1666.

Anne Savage was a daughter of Jon Mostyn of Talacre, who was a Roman Catholic. Anne and Darcy Savage had a daughter Bridget, who was also a Catholic. In 1672, a year after the death of her mother Anne, Bridget, as heiress of the manors of Leighton, Thornton and Neston, married her cousin Thomas Mostyn of Mostyn, who was a protestant. Her husband, who became Sir Thomas Mostyn the 2nd baronet, stipulated in his will that his widow should not have supervision of his children's education, presumably to prevent her from influencing them in the direction of Catholicism.

Continued next page.

Some years ago an interesting discovery was made in the upper floor of the barn at Leighton Hall Farm. A small cube of stone had been set into the brick wall of the barn, at floor level. The cube has edges 17cm long. On one face is carved a cross on four steps. A rose is carved on each of the two faces either side of the cross, while the remaining faces are plain.

There is no way of knowing why this object was put in such a place, but it may be reasonable to link it with Bridget, Lady Mostyn. If her husband disapproved of her religious affiliation, she may have had to practice her devotions, if not in secret, at least in private. Could this stone cross have served to create a private oratory for her? As for the rose, it can signify, amongst several other meanings, both the Virgin Mary and secrecy.

Several experts have been asked for their opinion on this stone, but none has been able to identify it. It has been suggested that the stone may have come from another building, such as an abbey or other religious house when it was dismantled in the time of Henry VIII. We may never know.

The owner of the stone, Mrs Lloyd, has generously agreed that it should be displayed in the restored St Thomas's church in Parkgate. An oak display shelf, which holds the stone firmly in place, has been made and, when the building restoration is complete, it will be fastened to the wall.

