

Parkgate Society

(Founded 1972)

Newsletter

Spring 2006

Issue Number 70

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 2006

- 6 February 2006 – Suzi Grenfell -
‘Sir Wilfred Grenfell’
6 March – Colin Lee – “The Home Guard in
Cheshire”
3 April – Dr Helen Ash – “Time off in
China”
8 May – David Casement – “Storeton
Woods”
23 September – Linda Brislin – “North West
Air Ambulance”
23 October – AGM followed by “ Some
should-be-more-famous
British women” by Mike
Murphy
27 November – Peter Nicholson – “History
of Gordale Nursery and
Garden Centre”

Visitors are welcome

SUBSCRIPTIONS

£4.00 Family or Single 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.

AGM

**The AGM took place on Monday 24
October 2005 at 7.30 pm.**

The Chairman welcomed members and
introduced the President, Jim Cochrane.
The minutes of the 2004 AGM were taken
as read.

The accounts were presented by the
Treasurer, there were no questions.
The officers, all duly proposed and
seconded, were elected, as follows -
Geoffrey Place (chairman), Philip Owen
(vice chairman), Angela Clarke
(secretary), Peter Knight (treasurer)
The members of the committee, all duly
proposed and seconded, were elected as
follows-

Valerie Place (membership) Becky Ford
(planning), Suzi Grenfell, Anne
Williamson (newsletter), Anthony
Annakin-Smith, Stephen Gordon and Jerry
Harris (newsletter)

The chairman explained the proposed
change to the Society’s official name to
‘Parkgate Society’. This, together with
other minor changes, was approved.

The chairman paid tribute to Clive
Edwards, who had been Treasurer for 16
years and a committee member for 28
years. The new arrangements for collecting
subscriptions by April 1 was explained.

Articles or suggestions for future
Newsletters are most welcome, please
contact:

Anne Williamson 336 6146 or
Jerry Harris 336 7406

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NEWS and VIEWS

In our last newsletter we made reference to **Peter Moore**. We were misinformed and have apologised to Peter Moore for our mistake.

For the benefit of our newer members, we summarize the **aims and objectives of the Society** -

We encourage an interest in Parkgate's past, by

- Researching local history,
- Publishing local guide books,
- Seeking to preserve Parkgate's historic buildings.

We encourage an interest in Parkgate's present and future, by

- Putting our members' views to the local Council
- Keeping in touch with Councillors, Council Officers and our MP,
- Examining local proposals
- Tackling the litter problem.

Following our survey list that was handed to the Council last year, Mr Collins, District Engineer with EP&NC, attended a committee meeting and as a result Parkgate has a **new notice board** and the slats on the donkey stand seats will be attended to this year. Emergency repairs were carried out to some of the drain covers. Helpfully he has offered to accompany us on our next survey. **Boathouse Lane** is now closed for 6 weeks for construction of a walkway over the bridge and an access path to the Wirral Way. Accidents at the **barrier/kissing gate** between Parkgate Old Baths and the seawall path to Gayton have resulted in its removal.

The committee are considering entering Parkgate in the **National Heritage Open Days Scheme** in September 2006. This could include walks, events and visits that focus on local architecture and culture.

It is with sadness that we report the death in January of **Beth (Betty) Prichard** (Holywell Close) at the grand age of 97years.

Money raised for the restoration of Parkgate's **St. Thomas's Community centre/church** now stands at £190,000. The Carols sing-a-long raised £351. Planning permission has been granted to fell a sycamore tree to the right of the church entrance to make way for building work, which is due to begin again soon.

A local resident requests volunteers to help her tend and improve the **flower bed at the entrance to Springcroft**. Any offers?

Last Autumn, at the National Ice Cream Competition in Birmingham, **Nicholls Ice Cream shop** achieved three Diplomas for their ice creams and a bronze medal for their cherry surprise (3rd in the country, a great achievement).

HENRY MELLING - ARTIST

By Geoffrey Place

Henry Melling was born in 1808 or 1809. His grandfather's boat building business and his father's printing firm, both in Liverpool, made him financially independent and able to devote himself to painting. He was a keen yachtsman and was secretary of the Royal Mersey Yacht Club from its foundation in 1844 until his death in 1879.

Melling came to live at The Old Quay House, a mile south of Parkgate, probably in 1866. With him came his sister, Mrs Payne, whose daughter Clara died there on 16 July 1866. In her last illness she reported seeing a ghost. In the 1871 census, Henry Melling was living there with his niece Harriet Lloyd and her two infant sons. He described himself as "artist, historical". He brought his yacht *Water Spirit* along the channel to The Old Quay House, and the round stone platform, that is all that remains of the house today, was probably his construction.

He had previously had an art gallery in Liverpool. He now turned The Old Quay House into a gallery of his own paintings, open to the public. A catalogue dated 1874 of paintings in oils, watercolours, crayons, etchings etc, amounting to 250 works, shows that they were displayed in thirteen rooms. These were the dining room, entrance hall, drawing room, staircase, landing, two rooms on the landing, landing staircase, two rooms on the upper landing, studio and museum. This does not include the seven bedrooms.

There were all kinds of subjects. There were several pictures of Liverpool, of shipping on the Mersey, and the following pictures of local interest:

Twilight on the River Dee, June 1860

Victoria RMYC coming up the Parkgate deep, River Dee.

Sunset, River Dee, young flood making.

The Old Quay House - high water 20 foot springs; fishing cobble.

Saxon and the Safety yacht.

On the beach at Parkgate, looking north.

Sunset on the River Dee, 9 October 1862.

Gayton Cottage, River Dee, the Flying Proa yacht.

On the Dee, the Proa at anchor off Gayton.

Victoria yacht sailing in the upper deep at Parkgate.

This catalogue of 1874 carries an addendum slip of 1878, which suggests that the exhibition was permanent. But in that year Melling moved to North Wales, looking for more reliable water for his yacht, and died the following year.

Catalogue: Cheshire Archives 942. Nes. Mel

See also an article on Melling in *Marine art and Liverpool* by AS Davidson (1966).

THE PARKGATE SWIMMING BATHS

By Geoffrey Place

The land on which these baths were built was called the Near Bank, which formed the shore fronting Galloway Hey, the field stretching back to the present Wirral Way. At the start of the 19th century, the Pengwern Arms roughly on the site of the present Boathouse, and between that and the future site of the baths stood Bennet's Row, four tiny cottages known locally as John and Mary's Row, because at one time a John and Mary lived in each house. The Pengwern Arms was pulled down, about 1883, after storm damage.

All the land bounded by Boathouse Lane, Backwood Lane, the railway and the river was put up for sale in 1922, with the intention that houses should be built there. There was even a proposal to make a road to Gayton. The piece of land beside the river was bought by AG Grenfell of Mostyn House, and in June 1922 he began building the first of two baths. It was opened to the public on 12 May 1923. It was 335 feet long by 50 feet wide, and it was unusual in having, instead of deep and shallow ends, deep and shallow sides, shelving from 3½ to 8 feet deep. The baths were designed by Grenfell himself and built by his foreman George Cannon. In the summer 1923 the approach road, with its retaining wall, was also built, together with the Bath House, which contained a café and quarters for the manager, John James. Mr James' daughter Hilda James swam for Britain in the 1920 Olympics aged 15. She was chosen for the 1924 Olympics in Paris, but her parents would not let her go unless mother went too (and was paid for). Hilda was employed as a swimming coach on an ocean liner and gave lessons at the Parkgate Baths when at home.

At one end of the baths was a sunbathing area, partly enclosed with a type of glass, which was supposed to exclude ultraviolet rays. A letter was published in a local paper denouncing the lewd sight of half-naked girls offering temptation to chaste young men. "Did you see that silly letter in the papers?" a friend asked AG Grenfell. "Who do you think wrote it?" asked Grenfell, with a wicked twinkle in his eye. Between the Wars the Parkgate Baths were very popular!

The baths were designed to fill with salt water at every 30 foot tide, and at first the unaided tide was sufficient, but after a couple of years a pump had to be fitted. This was partly to incorporate a filter, because the tide brought in scum and debris, which had to be fished out with nets. Another hazard was that storms regularly caused considerable damage to the massive concrete retaining walls. Although the price of entrance was locally considered to be expensive, the

maintenance costs were also high, and for the years for which the accounts survive (half the years from 1923 to 1938), the average annual profit was £125.

In 1930 a second bath was constructed on the river side of the first. This bath was 220 by 60 feet, but very shallow, and was intended as a paddling pool for non-swimmers. As AG Grenfell wrote "The main object in running a bath at all is to make it possible for all the boys and girls in the neighbourhood to learn to swim." Eric Smith, recorded that a visit to the Parkgate Baths was one of the treats of school life. He came from Puddydale School in Heswall in 1939, and said that the water was full of little shrimps.

Another building venture, in 1926, was the Boathouse Café, also designed by Grenfell. In 1923 he had built a real boathouse, in which sailing boats and their gear were stored for Mostyn House, just beyond the baths, at the foot of Backwood Lane. This boathouse was destroyed by an incendiary bomb on 6 May 1941 during the blitz of Liverpool.

AG Grenfell died in 1934. His son Daryl Grenfell sold the Swimming Baths and the Bath House at auction in February 1939. The sale was prompted partly by the increasing silt in the river, which was starting to jeopardise the water intake; but mainly because Daryl foresaw the approach of war and needed the money to build a large air raid shelter for his school. The new owner kept the baths open until about 1942. Gerald Vining, a Guernsey headmaster who brought some of his pupils to Neston as evacuees, used to teach swimming to local school children in the early years of the War.

It was in 1942 that the crisis of water at Parkgate finally occurred, when the expected tide failed to overcome the silt by Gayton Cottage. Frost damage and the impossibility of obtaining cement for repairs in and after the War caused the structure to deteriorate. Nevertheless, the baths did reopen - in June 1946 a swimmer, Mrs Jellicoe, died of a heart attack. The baths are thought to have finally closed in 1950. The buildings became derelict and the open pools a danger. In 1959 the Neston Council bought the site for a nominal £5, without any clear idea what to do with it. The acquisition was opposed by one Parkgate councillor on the grounds that a bus shelter would be more useful. The bus shelter was built as well.

The site of the baths remained an eyesore until 1974, when it was turned into a picnic area and car park for the Wirral Country Park.

A copy of a poster of the time, advertising Parkgate Baths, is reproduced on the next page.

Beauville En Witcel.

PARKGATE SALT WATER BATHS

Open Middle of May to first Sunday in October. 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.
Sundays only. Two sessions 9 a.m. to 1-15 & 2-15 to 9 p.m.
Mixed Bathing daily. Sundays included.

MAIN BATH 335½ ft long 50 ft. wide | SHALLOW BATH 220 ft long 60
depth 3½ ft. to 8 ft. | ft. wide, depth 2½ ft. to 4½ ft.

This bath makes bathing safe for all.

350 Dressing Boxes and large Changing Rooms. Spacious Sun Bathing
Decks free to bathers. Diving Stages, Spring Boards, Refreshment Buffet



Single Bathe ...	Adults 1/- ...	Juvenile under 16 6d.	}	Huge Vita-Glass Sun Bathing Pavilion free to bathers
Monthly Contract	15/- ...	" " " 10/-	}	
Season Contract	42/- ...	" " " 30/-	}	
Book of 24 tickets (Transferable)	21/- ...	" " " 10/6	}	

Spectators 3d. each Saturday, Sunday & Bank Holiday 6d.
Season 10/- Free Motor Park and large Picnic Field for bath visitors only
Accommodation for 1000 cars at owner's risk.

Come and spend a pleasant day, bring your own food if you like
or Bath Buffet will supply you if you prefer.

Frequent change of water, one bath always available during entire cleaning out of the other.
Motor pump replacing water at the rate of 3200 gallons per minute.

The Management will appreciate your interest in handing this card to a friend

WIRRAL WALKS

As a lover of our local heritage, you may like to know that a book, called "Wirral Walks: 100 miles of the best walks in the area", has recently been published. Not only does the book detail 25 local walks, ranging from 1¾ to 10½ miles, but each route description includes much information on what to see along the way - the landscape, the buildings, the wildlife and so on.

The author, Anthony Annakin-Smith, is a Parkgate Society committee member. Anthony has agreed to donate the profit, from sales to our members, to Society funds. He'd also be delighted to sign and add a personal message in each copy - maybe an ideal gift for someone you know.

If you would like to order a copy, price £7.95, please contact Anthony on 0151 336 8211.

Parkgate and its names (part 3)

SWIFT WEINT - the Swift family have been butchers and slaughterhouse owners through the 19th and 20th centuries. The slaughterhouse still operates (sheep only), but the shop closed in the 1980s.

THE ANCHORAGE - There were several anchorages along this section of coast for vessels too large to reach Chester. Parkgate originated because of the anchorage by the deer park gates.

THE LEIGHTONS - built on the site of Leighton Court, which is not in Leighton. It fronted Leighton Road, which leads to Leighton from Neston. **LEIGHTON COURT** and **LEIGHTON PARK** are so named for the same reason.

THE LOOMS - historically there was a field to the south side of **The Runnel**, called Nine Looms. The name Loom in this context is not to do with weaving, but refers to a strip of land on the site of medieval open field.

THE PARADE, NORTH and SOUTH PARADE - were where, in the 18th century, the sea-bathing visitors paraded.

THE ROPEWALK - made in about 1815, originally called *Cheltenham Walk*. Its original purpose was to provide a sheltered walk for sea bathing visitors when the wind was too strong on the Parade. It was reported in the late 19th century that there was still some derelict rope making machinery beside the walk.

THE SPINNEY - any suggestions?

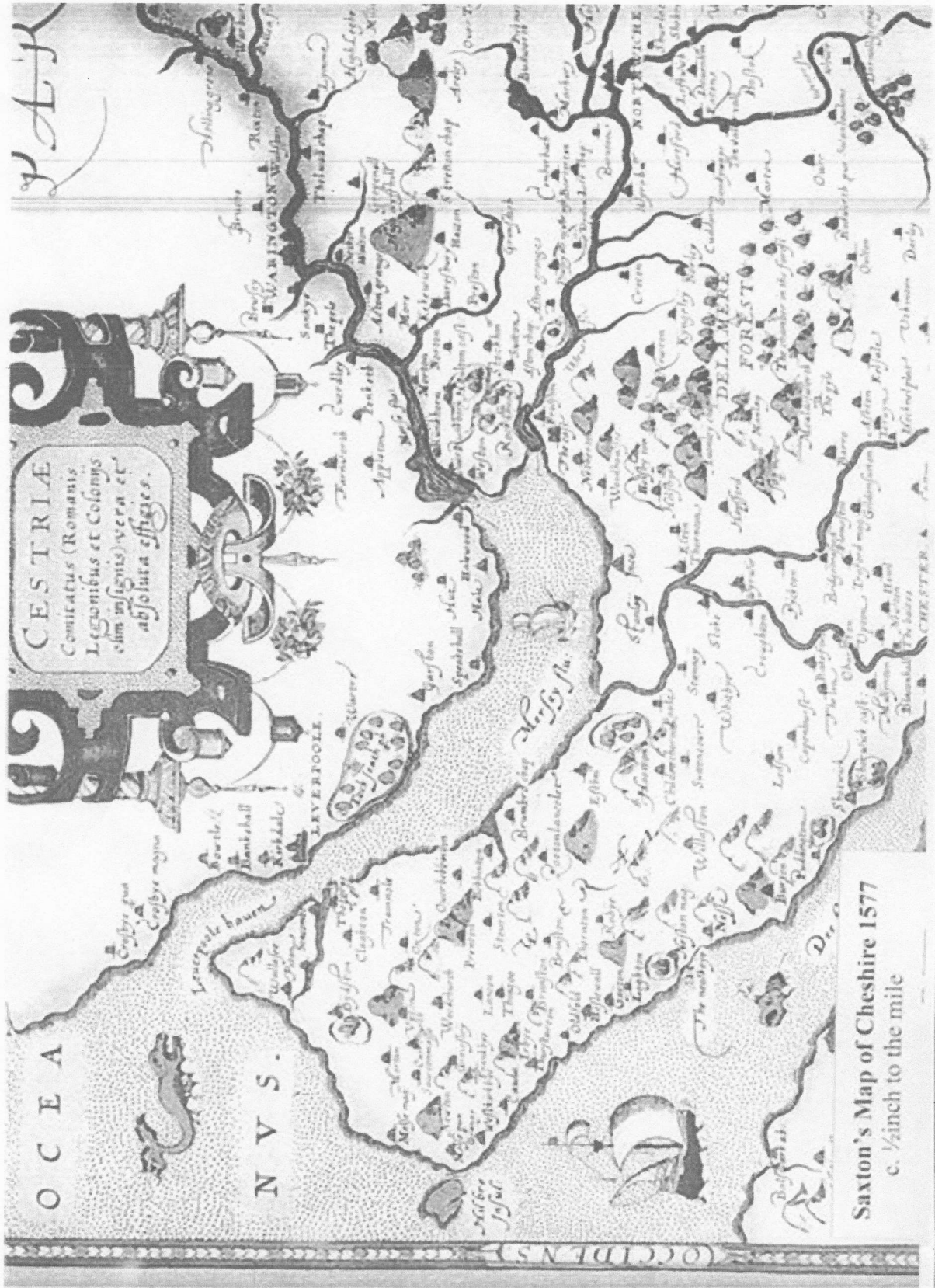
TITHEBARN DRIVE - there was no tithe barn in Parkgate, but a small barn attached to Leighton Cottage, which stood on this site, was made into a house called The Barn. The real tithe barn for the parish of Neston was at Ness.

WESLEY CLOSE - named after John Wesley, the Methodist preacher, who came through Parkgate nine times on his way to and from Ireland.

WOOD LANE - was a boundary of the ancient Neston Deer Park (approx 1250 - 1600), and led to Leighton Wood, which was situated to the northwest of the bridle path to Brooklands Road.

WOODLANDS ROAD and WOODLANDS CLOSE - built on land owned by Woodlands, a large house off Wood Lane, Neston end. This house was formerly The Vicarage until 1903

We are coming to the end of our reserve of articles for the Newsletter! Please, there must be some of you that have memories / stories of Parkgate and the district, that you can share - if you wish we will listen to you and then write the piece. Come on, don't be shy!



Saxton's Map of Cheshire 1577
c. 1/2 inch to the mile