



Spring 2007

## Parkgate Society

(Founded 1972)

### Newsletter

Spring 2007

Issue Number 72

#### 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 2007**

19 March – Edward Hilditch – “A Cheshire  
Diary 1890 – 1910”

16 April – Gavin Hunter- “Thomas Mawson,  
landscape gardener”

21 May – Ron Hutchinson, chauffeur to Lord  
Leverhulme – “Life through the  
rear-view mirror”

17 September – Mary Beaumont – “Liverpool –  
Capital of Culture 2008”

22 October – AGM followed by Geoff Taylor –  
“Shropshire Union Canal and  
Taylor's Boatyard.”

26 November – Colin Simpson, Wirral  
Museums – “The Williamson  
Art Gallery”  
Visitors are welcome

#### **AGM**

**The AGM took place on Monday 23 October 2006 at 7.30 pm. The following is a summary of the meeting.**

The Vice Chairman, Philip Owen, welcomed members and the apologies from the President, Jim Cochrane, were noted. The minutes of the 2005 AGM were accepted as a true record.

Philip noted the tragic changes to the Society and the immense shock of losing Geoffrey Place. The Society and the community owe a debt of gratitude to Geoffrey and Valerie for their years of dedication.

The accounts were presented by the Treasurer. Peter reported that a Charities Aid Foundation Bank deposit account had been opened, which gave us a more favourable interest rate. Subscriptions just about cover expenses and the surplus is from the sale of ‘This is Parkgate’ and Anthony Annakin- Smith donating the profit from his book sold through to the Society. Nicholl’s Post Office was thanked for selling our book and donating their profit to the Society. Our costs are rising so we are introducing Gift Aid to enable us to reclaim tax on subscriptions.

The officers, all duly proposed and seconded, were elected, as follows -

Philip Owen (chairman), Moira Andrews (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, Anthony Annakin-Smith, Stephen Gordon and Jerry Harris.

#### **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.

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

Anne Williamson 336 6146 or  
Jerry Harris 336 7406

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The Parkgate Society is a registered charity, no. 503718

## News & Views

**The Springcroft Green Area.** The country park fence has been repaired, overhanging trees cut back and the low sandstone wall that was damaged after a car crashed into it has been made good. The new heritage flowerbed has been constructed using the old railway bridge sandstone blocks that had for decades been gathering moss in the undergrowth of the Wirral Country Park. Interestingly, the driver of the contractor's JCB who moved the blocks into place, by huge coincidence turned out to be the very person who had many years earlier been given the job of disposing of the blocks in the undergrowth! New railway sleepers, some sections of track and a small railway trolley that originated from a stone quarry in mid-Wales have been positioned there to represent the adjacent railway station and goods yards that had operated between 1866 and the 1960s.

Development of the bed is continuing. Perennial plants have been chosen to give a naturalistic look with year round interest and will be in place soon, but in the meanwhile, colourful bedding has been planted. Several of our members and the committee had felt that this green area and the flowerbed in particular needed some change. After consultations and planning with the Parks Dept. of the council, the Society applied for (and got) a grant from the Neston Market Town Initiative. The Parks Dept. carried out the work in a most enthusiastic and helpful way, even contributing additional funds to acquire the railway trolley. They will maintain the garden under their existing maintenance budget. We hope that the community enjoy the development of the site and that the vandals keep away. The seat will be renewed in the near future by the Society.

The Society are very pleased to report that after many requests to the Council, all of the **seats on the Donkey Stand**, some of which were extremely rotten and a very poor advert for our tourist attraction, the Parade, have now been renewed and look very good indeed. There was insufficient money for all of them to be done at once, so they were renewed in two sessions.

Following the talk in September on the **North West Air Ambulance**, we received a letter thanking members for £55 raised from the sale of raffle tickets, individual donations totalling £50 and £25.50 raised from the sale of merchandise.

There has been a good response to **Gift Aid**, with 80 completed forms (by Feb. '07). If you are a tax payer and wish to take part, the Society can reclaim tax paid. This is worth £1.12 for a £4 subscription and helps us to maintain our current subscription without increase. You can also enable us to reclaim for the last six years prior to this one. Our Treasurer Peter Knight will be able to advise you 336 4922.

The Trustees of **St. Thomas'** have applied for a Big Lottery grant to complete the restoration and reopening and further work is not allowed until the outcome of the application is known. Fundraising has reached £208,000 (Jan. 2007). A newsletter will be issued soon. Try looking at their updated website [www.stthomasparkgate.co.uk](http://www.stthomasparkgate.co.uk)

**Parkgate Businesses.** It has been all change along the Parade with the Red Lion, the Boathouse and Parkgate Stores all having new owners/tenants. We wish all of them every success.

**Community Pride Competition 2007 – Best Kept Village.** The Society is entering Parkgate for this year's competition. We have not entered before because Village or Parish status was

required, which Parkgate does not have. This year however, a community can enter by declaring its own boundary. Each community that enters is judged on a minimum of two occasions between April and September with the average of these marks being taken. Things judges are looking at are flower beds, bus shelters, notice boards, shops/commercial premises, church yards, pubs, telephone boxes, benches, children's playgrounds and open spaces. Are these well kept and is the area kept free of litter and graffiti?

Entering the competition enables local residents to be involved in caring for the local community. It gives useful feedback on how to improve, from impartial observers and is a record of local achievement. A prize of £250 is on offer.

**The Mayors of Cheshire are visiting Parkgate.** The Mayor of EP&N will be hosting an "At Home" on Monday, April 16<sup>th</sup>. All the civic heads from the surrounding area come to experience the Borough. Parkgate Society has been asked to help out as Parkgate has been chosen for an afternoon of relaxing tourism, tea and ice cream. A visit to Mostyn House Chapel, an Ice Cream Shop and a guided history walk along part of the Parade has been organised by the Committee.

We have arranged, with Saul Burton and Colin Wells, a '**Marsh Clearance**' on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 10am at the Old Baths. Please come along and help, with gloves and wellies.

## **MOVING THE GOALPOSTS**

Over recent months the community of Parkgate has become increasingly concerned over the strategy for substantially developing the provision of football facilities on Parkfields. Following a consultation project undertaken by Groundwork Wirral a public meeting was held on Thursday, 19th October. Although the message from the platform was that no action was imminent less than a month later the Borough Council Community Committee decided to recommend that the Neston Nomads proceed with a planning application.

The concern over this matter continued to increase and a further public meeting took place on Thursday, 7th December following which a Steering Group began to meet. The remit of the Steering Group was to seek urgent consultation with the local authority and to form a Friends of Parkfields group. In response to the concern expressed by the Steering Group and many other individuals and groups the Community Committee decided on Thursday, 25th January to rescind its previous recommendation and to commence consultation with the Friends and the Neston Nomads.

At a further public meeting on Thursday, 8th February the community was invited by the Steering Group to submit designs and proposals for Parkfields. The Parkgate Society wishes to see a scheme which is compatible with the green belt environment and which will benefit the widest possible cross-section of the community.

We will keep our members informed.

Philip E Owen  
Chairman

## COAST

On BBC2 television in November 2006, as part of the programme Coast, the coastline from Holyhead to Crosby was covered.

The first part of coastline featured the Mostyn family's main areas of ownership, Llandudno and Great Orme. Sandstone from the Mostyn's C16th quarry at Gwespre, Talacre was used in the building of much of Llandudno and Great Orme. A notable limestone cave on Great Orme, a Mostyn's fishing lodge/hideaway, was lined with the Gwespre sandstone in the style of York Minster with carved figures of a man, an owl and a swan at the entrance and semi-circular seating inside. The cave, which was the subject of an ancient (1683) poem about the Mostyns (Lord Roger and his heir Thomas) had graffiti within dating from 1853 and 1718.

Stepping forward through time the UK's first offshore wind farm off North Wales was shown and the A380 airbus wings factory at Broughton was discussed.

The section on Parkgate was covered by 3 minutes of TV time where waders and wildfowl such as shelduck and pintail, redshank, knot, oystercatcher, redshank, little egret and kestrel were seen over the Dee. The very rare spotted crake made a magical appearance for the TV crew, as did the secretive water rail. Water shrews and water voles were discussed and their predators the short eared owl, hen harrier and merlin were shown. The salt marsh to sea progression was shown very quickly and there were the briefest glimpses of Parkgate Parade and the Old Baths and some canoeists enjoying the estuary waters.

From here the programme mentioned the boulder clay glacial cliffs at Thurstaston and the island of Hilbre with its Neolithic settlements and Roman history. Its importance as a settlement was due to its position for guiding ships up to Chester. The 1841 telegraph system on the island and its links through to Liverpool and Angelsey was explained.

The enjoyable programme finished at "Another Place", the Anthony Gormley statues on Crosby beach - the 100 iron men that provide inspirational art along their own 2 miles of coast.

## **HERITAGE OPEN DAYS 2006**

After much planning, the weekend approached and everyone wondered how many people would turn up and how the weather would treat us. We needn't have worried about the latter; the vicar's daughter's wedding was on the Friday! We can only guess at the number of visitors to the event, although we did have an accurate figure for those who went down the Mostyn House air-raid shelter - 635!

Society members were involved at Mostyn House School, and we are very grateful to Suzi Grenfell for opening the Chapel, providing the opportunity for some to play the carillon, making the Tea Room available for a display of old photos of Parkgate and other interesting items, and also for the use of the Dining Hall, where teas were sold in aid of St. Thomas' restoration fund. Anthony Annakin-Smith led a well-attended walk from Parkgate to the site Neston Colliery, and visitors were encouraged to take a self-guided walk along the Parade.

The Parish Church provided guided tours round the church's many historic features and also the unique collection of stained glass windows. Our thanks to the Vicar and Peter Rossiter and

his team of helpers. The church was also the starting point for guided walks round Neston town centre, organised by the Neston Civic Society.

Sadly the number of visitors going to St Winefride's and the United Reformed Church were disappointing, however, those that did go in were treated to the beautiful Stations of the Cross, more outstanding stained glass windows and a stunning, newly created, mural reflecting the view across the marsh and the Welsh hills. Our thanks Father Courell and Minister Wright and to all those who manned these two churches. Finally our thanks to Neston library for their display of photos and maps, which generated much interest and helped advertise the weekend events.

We are looking at a different format for 2007 HODS, with more emphasis on walks and tours. We plan to keep all informed through press releases.

## **A Short History of Shooting at Mostyn House School** **By Mary Eveleigh.**

The school target shooting history goes back to the very roots of the sport in England, in fact it even precedes it in certain ways. In 1860 (or possibly 1861) one of the very earliest photographs of pupils of Mostyn House shows about 44 of them lined up on the sands at Parkgate wearing what would now be described as army cadet uniforms. It was feared at that time that Napoleon III was becoming warlike, and that the nation would once again have to answer a call to arms. The boys did not have real rifles, but they used to drill with wooden imitations. With these, they used to drill in the road now known as the Ropewalk in Parkgate, at the back of the school. In the 1870's it was a punishment for ill-behaved pupils to have to march up and down a passage in the school carrying these "rifles".

It was interesting that in 1890 the Headmaster asked the Government if they had any old rifles that his pupils could use for drill purposes, only to have a counter suggestion from the War Office that they should form a cadet corps (again!). The Government then provided some obsolete Martini-Henry rifles for the school, although the calibre isn't clear - it could have been the original .577/450, or the "new" .303 cartridge.

In the 1890, target shooting took place on the sands in the front of the school - which must have been similar to the beaches at West Kirby and Hoylake today - just imagine that! A red flag to warn people - and that was it! I don't imagine the local fisherman and cockle pickers were too happy about this, but no major complaint was ever recorded. Later, the school competed against local military volunteer regiments and units and there was often a camp nearby, with even artillery using the area for practice. In fact a live 12 lb shell from this period was dug up near the artesian well, about 20 yards from the entrance to the air raid shelter - and this was in 1960! However - going back to 1903, the school shooting team took on a team of Lancashire regiment NCOs - and beat them. Sadly, the rifle corps came to an end in 1909, although drill remained a part of the school programme for another fifty years - the very last vestige of which died out in 1965, when the practice of pupils saluting visitors was finally abandoned.

Shooting, however, continued using Martini-Henrys, Martini-Metford and Lee-Enfield .303 rifles until 1908, when the practice of the government giving free rifles and ammunition to the

school cadet corps ended. Up to that time, sufficient ammunition was provided by the government to allow "every cadet to fire 60 rounds of service ammunition" every year.

In 1906 Mostyn House competed at Altcar Rifle Ranges in the Cheshire County Rifle Associations competition. They entered three teams (VIIs), which came 1st, 2nd and 3rd. In 1908 the Volunteer Battalions system was abandoned, with the Territorial Army superseding it. This sadly meant an end to the free use of government .303 rifles in school. During this time, (1899 - 1902) the Boer war filled the whole of England with an enthusiasm for rifle shooting, and some other schools started cadet corps - but of course Mostyn House was the forerunner of these by nine years.

In 1906, the Headmaster of Mostyn House School A.G. Grenfell, set up the Preparatory Schools Air Rifle Association - with assistance from Robert Ramsbottom, a Manchester sports dealer who sold air guns. Lord Roberts VC, (who was one of the most famous soldiers of the time) was the President, and within six months 120 schools had joined. The National Small-Bore Rifle Association was formed later that year. Now you have to bear in mind that the NRA [National Rifle Association] was formed in 1860, so in effect Mostyn House was a target shooting school with a target shooting tradition as old as the organised sport itself.

Target rifle shooting continued successfully at Mostyn House, with the school teams regularly beating the rest of the country right up to the 1980's. Since this time facilities have been somewhat limited, but the sport continues at the school non-the less.

In early 2006, it was decided with Phoenix Shooters Association (a local target shooting club) to try to convert the Second World War air raid shelter under the football pitch into an indoor .22 rifle range. This work started early in 2006, and involves a lot of very hard work by Phoenix members. The first job was to clear out all the old and rotting rubbish from the shelter. It had been used as indoor cricket nets and later as a store for surplus equipment. The next task was to put in new ventilation, which meant digging a very large hole to accommodate the ventilation pipes, which was done over the summer holidays. As this was being completed all new electrical wiring was installed.

During English Heritage weekend in September 2006, many people viewed this work when the shelter was open to the public. It is the intention to retain as many of the original features of the shelter as possible so that we do not destroy our history.

There is still a lot of hard to work to be done, but when it is finished Mostyn House School will have an indoor range in which Olympic target shooting disciplines can be shot, and it will allow the school to compete in competitions, which are currently unavailable due to the lack of such a range.

The Preparatory Schools Rifle Association has asked Suzi Grenfell to become its next President, following the sad death of Geoffrey Place, and the range will be named after him. Geoffrey Place was a master at Mostyn House School for many years. He was the shooting coach and inspired many pupils to shoot very well. He was also President of the PSRA.

## **Sawyers Cottage, Parkgate**

**By James Pratt**

Originally the Sawyers Arms, Sawyers Cottage is a Grade II Listed Building and one of the oldest in Parkgate dating back, it is believed, to the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. As is the case with many old buildings: precise details are scarce because the deeds are incomplete. However, a map dated 1732 among the Mostyn Estate documents at the University of Wales in Bangor depicts two un-named semi-detached buildings in the exact location of the present Pengwern, the adjoining house, and Sawyers Cottage and it is authoritatively believed they refer to these two properties.

There is also another map, belonging to a resident of the village, incorporating a sketched panorama of Parkgate, which was printed in 1849 on the sale plan for the auction of the Mostyn Estate, of which Parkgate then formed a part. This clearly shows, in plan and perspective, both buildings and the adjoining Dee Cottages – thought to have been built 50 years later – all as they are to this day.

The first recorded publican of the Sawyers Arms was Richard Bartley, a sawyer and carpenter, who was granted a license to sell ale in 1793. In 1844 his son-in-law, Maurice Evans, (who it is believed was engaged in smuggling until 1853, using the tunnel from under the taproom floor, to hide brandy etc from Customs officials), became the landlord until 1880, when his son, Richard Evans, took over. He was followed, in 1901, by his daughter, Ann Mellor, until 1905 when the Inn, then owned by Birkenhead Brewery, lost its license. In his biography “Dee Wildfowler – The Last Professional”, Harold Gill, who died in 1961 aged 78, said “I know the old Sawyers Arms was a grand pub in my younger days. It was out of sight, few people knew of it and still fewer knew where the drink came from!”

After closing as an Inn, Sawyers Cottage, as it then became known, was adapted for use as a private dwelling house with a succession of occupiers. In the 1930s, before the Second World War, a section of the building collapsed. When the war was over Sawyers Cottage and Pengwern were in the same ownership. Presumably to save expense, the cottage was only partially rebuilt: a number of rooms on the first and second floors were not replaced and, in consequence, the roof line changed and new roof tiles were used in place of the original slates.

In 1992, however, Sawyers Cottage was fully restored by the owners. The original roofline was re-established retaining all the surviving earliest roof timbers and using old ridge stones, old slates and metal moulded gutters in the original style of the period. The building has been reinstated with the most exacting care and is now in keeping with the general ambience of the other buildings, which form part of this delightful grouping.

Most of the interior is original, including the unusual above-ground vaulted cellar, which has been carefully preserved, as have the tiled floors, the oak beams, the open hearth with oak lintel and the mast newel spiral staircase. The finishes have been meticulously re-installed. The majority of the light fittings are Victorian gas or oil lamps converted to electricity and controlled with dimmers to recreate an authentic lighting level, and the doors are also Victorian with antique solid brass fittings.

In an unspoilt setting, the house and its attractive walled garden is the centrepiece of a charming group of old buildings of local historic interest overlooking the Dee Estuary and the Welsh hills beyond. In 1828 this group was known as Pengwern Place. Today it remains almost identical in appearance and character to the earliest known records.



*Dee Cottages, Sawyers Cottage and Pengwern*

### **100 YEARS AGO - Pertinacity of Parkgate**

The party had travelled by steamer, carrying their boats and rakes with them, and their arrival was a great surprise to the people of Aberdovey, as if they had dropped from the skies. Before Aberdovey folk had recovered from the shock, the punts were on the mussel beds and thirty foot rakes were delving and combing the sable shellfish from their native reefs, while well-filled bags, neatly packed and labelled in the familiar Parkgate style, began to flit citywards from the local station.

Visions of easily acquired wealth and of unlimited 'spending brass' haunted the visitors as they sought their lodgings. There was a buzz in the distance and, like a human hive in the act of swarming, the men, women and children of Aberdovey poured into the thoroughfares. ... Amid an almost indescribable scene of excitement, their boats were torn from their moorings, and many eager hands dragged them on their keels far inland, while their rakes, like so many wicked monarchs, were beheaded off-hand.

In the end the shattered boats and their dismayed owners were delivered, carriage paid, to their homes at the expense of the people of Aberdovey. ... This



was early in October, but immediately afterwards the Aberdovey fishermen, who had, it appeared, previously arranged among themselves not to commence the mussel fishery until November 1<sup>st</sup>, and who made much capital out of the fact of the visitors' commencing in October, themselves set to work to deplete the beds and rush the mussels into the market.

Meanwhile the Parkgate fishermen obtained the services of a well-known firm of solicitors, who sent in claims for damages to the persons responsible ... they ascertained from the fishery authority that the Parkgate men had a perfect right to fish for mussels in the river Dovey between 1<sup>st</sup> October and 1<sup>st</sup> March, provided that they did not remove mussels under two inches in length.

On Tuesday evening the Parkgate boats engaged in yet another exploit. Mounted each on a separate railway truck, they moved in processional order from Parkgate station in the moonlight, bound once more for Aberdovey. At noon on Wednesday six fishermen, namely William Fewtrell, John Robinson, George Wellings, Samuel Evans, Jonathon Miller jnr. and Joseph Mellor, left by the Neston and Parkgate Station (Great Central). On seeing the blue guernseys of the Cheshire men as they detrained at Aberdovey on Wednesday evening, some children set up a very hideous "Boo-oooh" but up to yesterday (Friday) morning the men had not been molested.

It is over early yet to pronounce an opinion on this new departure on the part of Parkgate, or to predict how it may develop, but in itself it is a complete answer to those who describe the Parkgate fishermen as lie-a-beds, who are altogether lacking in energy, and are in fact "too slow to walk last". It is no light matter for the fishermen to pay the carriage of his boat and himself some eighty or ninety miles, and make a home among a bitterly hostile population who had already been cowardly enough to destroy the implements of his craft the moment his back is turned.

Cheshire Observer  
Saturday November 3<sup>rd</sup> 1906.

*We are most grateful to the Editor of the Archives and Local Studies Newsletter, Cheshire Records Office, for allowing us to reproduce this article.*