

Parkgate Society

(Founded 1972)

Newsletter

Spring 2008

Issue Number 74

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 2008

- 21 April – “Chester Heritage & History
Centre” - *Alison Watson*
- 19 May – “Birkenhead Park”
- *Adam King, Senior Ranger.*
- 15 September – “The Royal Train”
- *Terry Butler*
- 20 October - AGM at 7.30pm followed by
“One War – two captivities”
- *Meg Parkes*
- 24 November – “So you think you know
Parkgate”, a light-hearted quiz
by *Anthony Annakin-Smith*

Visitors are welcome

SUBSCRIPTIONS

£4.00 Family or Single per year

Payment can be made at any of our meetings, however we
would prefer payment by Banker's Standing Order.
Membership, Standing Order and Gift Aid forms are
available, from our Secretary.

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

AGM

The AGM took place on Monday 22 October
2007 at 7.30 pm. The following is a summary of
the meeting.

The chairman began by paying tribute to our late
President James Cochrane who was well
experienced in public life and widely respected in
many circles. A Thanksgiving Service will be held
at Mostyn House School Chapel on 17th November
2007.

Philip went on to thank all Officers with special
thanks to Peter Knight who is not returning as
Treasurer.

We have enhanced our profile within the
community and with local and county councils
because of our involvement with the Council
Conservation Area review, Parkgate leaflet
Mayor's At Home, Springcroft, Heritage Open
Days, The Neston MTL, Parksfields and Parkgate
Preservation Trust. We are grateful to Suzi
Grenfell for the facilities at Mostyn House School,
where we hold our monthly committee meetings.

We have streamlined our membership subscriptions
methods to include Gift Aid and Standing Orders.
The Society is indebted to Valerie Place for
keeping the records for many years and we are
pleased to see she is in her usual seat welcoming
everyone to our talks.

We look forward to the future and note the possible
changes to local government in Cheshire may
herald the organisation of a Neston Town Council.

The officers, all duly proposed and seconded, were
elected, as follows -
Philip Owen (chairman), Moira Andrews (vice
chairman), Angela Clarke (secretary), Bill Grey
(treasurer).

The members of the committee, all duly proposed
and seconded, were elected as follows-
Valerie Place, Becky Ford, Suzi Grenfell, Anne
Williamson, Anthony Annakin-Smith, Stephen
Gordon and Jerry Harris.

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The Parkgate Society is a registered charity, no. 503718

News and Views

Looking back over the past six months there seems to have been plenty of activity concerning community groups and local residents' desire to have a say in their environment and how it is governed. There have been meetings about the **Market Town Initiative** and how to carry on the good work when, at the end of March 2008, it finishes. Neston and its CH64 townships have to maintain the good work that the MTI has engendered and to this end a group has formed through a partnership with the MTI and EPNAVCO (Ellesmere Port & Neston Association of Voluntary and Community Organisations), called **ch64inc**. This voluntary, community organisation will serve the communities of Burton, Neston, Little Neston, Ness, Parkgate and Willaston, in partnership with the proposed Town Council for Neston, local organisations and public authorities. The formation of a Town Council has this year gained ministerial consent in principle so should be in existence in a year or so. **Citizen's Week** has taken place this March organised by ch64inc to celebrate and promote your community.

The **Friends of Park Fields** held an inaugural meeting last autumn. Their plan to secure for Parkgate the future of the mown field at Park Fields by applying for Village Green status is proceeding with no objection from our local authority.

There has been a public meeting about significant changes to **Neston Town Centre** with the proposal to build a Sainsbury's store. This plan continues to cause much heated debate in the local communities. The plans were recently on display in Neston town centre, and are available to view on the EPNBC website.

There has been a new Character Appraisal & Management Plan on the **Conservation Area of Parkgate** drawn up by EP&NBC Planning (Conservation) Officer, Sophie Norton. The last time this process took place was 1999 and the new appraisal contains much more detail on the nature and history of Parkgate and how it could be managed to retain its special character. A public meeting was held in January to explain boundary changes to the Conservation Area (CA). Basically, Brook Hey, The Moorings and Grenfell Park and Close are to be removed from the CA as they are modern developments and the new CA is to be extended along the edge of the Dee, south and north to include more of Manorial Road and to take in North Parade and The Old Baths area. The Planning Officer did a large amount of research and consultation, including meetings with Parkgate Society Committee to determine what makes Parkgate unique.

In mid-September the Boathouse featured on the **One Show on BBC1**. The show had asked for viewers to send in details of "their special place" and Will Rowlands had responded. Will was interviewed together with Colin Wells, the Dee RSPB Warden, to say why the Boat House and the Parkgate marsh was such a special place. They did a good report and Parkgate looked great.

The Marsh Cat and Mr Chows had new signs put up. The new signage at **The Old Quay** has come in for criticism and attention from the borough Council.

The former air raid shelter at Mostyn House School has recently opened as the **Geoffrey Place Shooting Range**, commemorating our late Chairman. Plans have been approved for alterations to the **clubhouse at the Cricket Club**, the addition of a car park, and the re-sitting of the bowling green.

Part of the **sea wall at the Parkgate Old Baths** has had to be demolished for safety reasons after a pillar fell. The rangers are seeking funding to remedy the situation. Whilst inspecting the wall for cracks, a stone on the seaward side was found to be inscribed "AG 1924", presumably after AG Grenfell who built the Swimming Baths, the first one opened in May 1923. This was followed by the building of the approach road, and in 1930, the second bath.

The **bus stop at Nicholls Ice Cream Shop** has been built out into the road to enable people to get on buses in safety without having to negotiate parked cars. This has, of course, led to the loss of a parking space.

Despite detailed and strong objections from this Society and from many local residents, **Parkgate Post Office** has closed. There seemed to be little anyone could do to stop the widespread loss of small community post offices in the determined cuts of the powers that be.

Parkgate did not receive an award in our first entry to the **Community Pride Awards**, but Neston, after an impressive effort, gained a runner up award. The judges' comments for Parkgate were posted on the Mostyn Square notice board.

St. Thomas's Church is poised to proceed with refurbishment of the interior. The carols evening at the Red Lion raised £211 and the Bric a Brac sale at the Town Hall achieved £643 towards the impending renovations.

A new **publicity leaflet "Parkgate Walks & Information"** has been written by Anthony Annakin Smith (Society committee member) and produced through the Neston Market Town Initiative and the graphic design team of EP&NBC. The Neston Market Town Initiative has also sponsored an **Audio Trail** of Parkgate, which will be downloadable to an MP3 player/Ipod from the www.neston.org.uk website.

ENGLAND'S MISTRESS-
The Infamous Life of Emma Hamilton by Kate Williams

We are very grateful to Kate Williams for her kind permission to reproduce this extract from her book. Kate says "I love Parkgate and discovering it was one of the great treats of my research."

A Radio 4 book of the week. "A wonderful, sparkling biography", Amanda Foreman

Copyright Kate Williams, 2006, published by Hutchinson (The Random House Group Ltd., London) at £8.99.

Emma met up with her daughter, now aged one, at her grandmother's house in Hawarden. Mother and daughter began to build a relationship. She decided that Abergele was too far away and "uncumfomtable" and set off instead for the glamorous sea resort of Parkgate, on the west coast. Only a few miles from her birth place, Parkgate was a world away from grimy Ness. Visitors admired the handsome promenade of white and red houses and flocked to the elegant entertainments. Over thirty hotels graced the long sea front and small alleys were named after roads such as Drury Lane in London to attract the urban rich. Perched on the promenade were a theatre, a billiard room, several coffee shops and restaurants, a racecourse, and assembly rooms for dancing, tea drinking and card parties. Since it was the main port for passenger boats to Ireland, most of the actors and aristocrats travelling there spent a couple of days in the town. England's elite partied in Parkgate, most recently Mrs Fitzherbert, new wife of the Prince of Wales. The visit of sweet-natured Maria, a quiet Catholic widow and the most controversial woman in England after the secret marriage that had so infuriated the King that he swore she would never be Princess of Wales, meant one thing: the hoteliers put up their prices.

Emma claimed she had found a cheap apartment at Mrs. Darnwood's boarding house, now Dover House, 16 Station Road, but its pleasant position right by the sea came at a cost. Little Emma played with Mrs. Cadogan by the sea, while her mother embarked on a stringent detoxifying and beautifying regime that was, she confessed, a "great expense": "a shilling a day for the bathing horse and whoman and twopence a day for the dress." Bathing machines were liberally advertised in the local papers: a carriage driven by a liveried man and horse which had at the back a long covered tunnel, so that the lady could bathe in (dark) privacy. It seems as if Emma had developed eczema at Edgeware Row, and it was particularly painful on her knees and elbows. Greville had been repulsed by her peeling skin, so she was anxious to prove it was improving, declaring she washed her knees and elbows at least twice a day in seawater and massaged them with moisturising cream, as well as hiring a maid to slather seaweed all over her before she went to bed.

Neston Park - The forgotten park of Wirral

By Geoffrey Place

It was Neston Park that gave Parkgate its name. Yet its memory was so far forgotten by the late 19th century that several writers, noticing that some fields called Park stood near to Leighton Hall, invented a wholly fictitious Leighton Park. But Leighton in Wirral never had a park, and Neston Park dates from the 13th century.

The first we hear of it is in 1258. In that year Neston's lord of the manor, Roger de Montalt, Baron of Mold, gave to the abbey of St Werburgh in Chester 'certain lands in Neston which he had earlier given to Neston church in exchange for some lands belonging to the church, which were enclosed within his park at Neston'. The abbey already owned Neston church, given to it by Roger's uncle.

It was clearly Roger himself who enclosed the park, and as he became baron in 1232, the park must have been formed within the next twenty-five years.

Anyone who wanted to enclose a park for deer would have required a licence from the king, and a licence would have been doubly necessary inside the Forest of Wirral. We know that there really were deer in Neston Park, because in 1275 another member of the family, Sir Ralph, held the manor of Neston for life, 'save only the hunting of the deer of the park'. No sign of any licence has yet been found.

The park was about two hundred acres in area, within a circuit of just over two miles. Only two of its boundaries are known for certain, corresponding to the shore of the **Dee** on the west and on its north side, marked by a road and footpath which now run inland from the centre of Parkgate. The other boundaries can be deduced from the evidence of field names, shown on the plan.

The north boundary, marked by Brooklands Road, is known for certain because it formed the boundary between the townships of Great Neston and Leighton. In 1569 a Special Commission heard witnesses to the exact limits, after some mere-stones or markers had been thrown down. The evidence was that the township boundary followed 'the great double ditch of Neston Park down to the sea⁵. A double ditch was a way of making an immoveable boundary, whereby two landowners had ditches dug next to each other, the spoil being thrown up on either side to form two banks with a 'hollow way⁵ in between. An earth bank was also useful to keep the deer in and predators out. Deer parks were often surrounded by fences of stout oak pales over six feet high, sometimes raised on banks.

The other two boundaries can be inferred from the field names, which often include the word Park inside those limits, but not at all outside.

Little is known about how medieval deer parks were managed, and we can only guess at how many deer there may have been. As the owners of the park were never permanently resident at Neston it seems unlikely that a great deal of hunting went on, and it is more likely that the herd was managed for meat. Yet we also know that the woodland within the park was managed. In 1282, when Edward I was making an unsuccessful attempt to cross the Menai Straits by means of a pontoon bridge, he ordered that five hundred 'clays' or hurdles should be made in Neston Park and taken to Burton for transhipment. Deer and forestry do not coexist happily so close management must have been required. The Special Commission of 1569 mentioned three woodwards of Neston Park by name.' The type of deer would have been Fallow or Red. The maximum number would probably have been about two hundred in summer, and it was recorded in 1607 that Ditton Park in Buckinghamshire, about the same size as Neston Park, contained 220 deer. But there may have been far fewer in view of the managed woodland, and about thirty could have made a viable herd.

The deer sometimes needed guarding as well as managing. Five men were charged in 1323 that 'with force and arms, they broke into the park at Great Neston and there, without permission, hunted and captured wild beasts and carried them off'.

About 1330 the Montalt line came to an end and the ownership of Neston Park passed first to the Earls of Salisbury, and a century later to their kinsmen the Stanley family, Earls of Derby. In 135 Salisbury had trouble with the eyre (circuit court) of the foreest because he had not satisfactorily proved his claim that his manor and park of Neston were free of Forest Law. At about the same time, the anchorage along this stretch of the river Dee was in occasional use and was referred to as 'Neston Park'.

During the 16th century, under the Earls of Derby, it is evident that sheep were admitted to the park as well as deer. One lease of the pasture required that the tenants 'shall leve sufficient pasture and grasse for the fedyng of the dere' in Neston Park. Mixed grazing of sheep and deer implies that the grassland was of good quality, and there would have been enough grass for both in summer.

It is towards the end of the 16th century that we first hear of the hunting lodge of the Earls of Derby, known as Neston Lodge. The house seems to have been on Moorside Lane, opposite the park. This location assumes that Neston Lodge, last referred to in 1620, is the same building as 'the Manor House in Great Neston called the Moor House', mentioned in 1697. When Robert Wade rented the house that year, he agreed 'to keep one hound, greyhound or spaniel' for use of his landlord, which sounds like an echo of a hunting lodge although the requirement to keep a hunting dog is found in certain other leases on the estate. Certainly no other house in Neston apart from the hunting lodge seems to fit the description of 'manor house' and in Wade's day it was apparently moated. In the late 18th century the Moor House was rebuilt, and as the Manor House it survived until 1967.

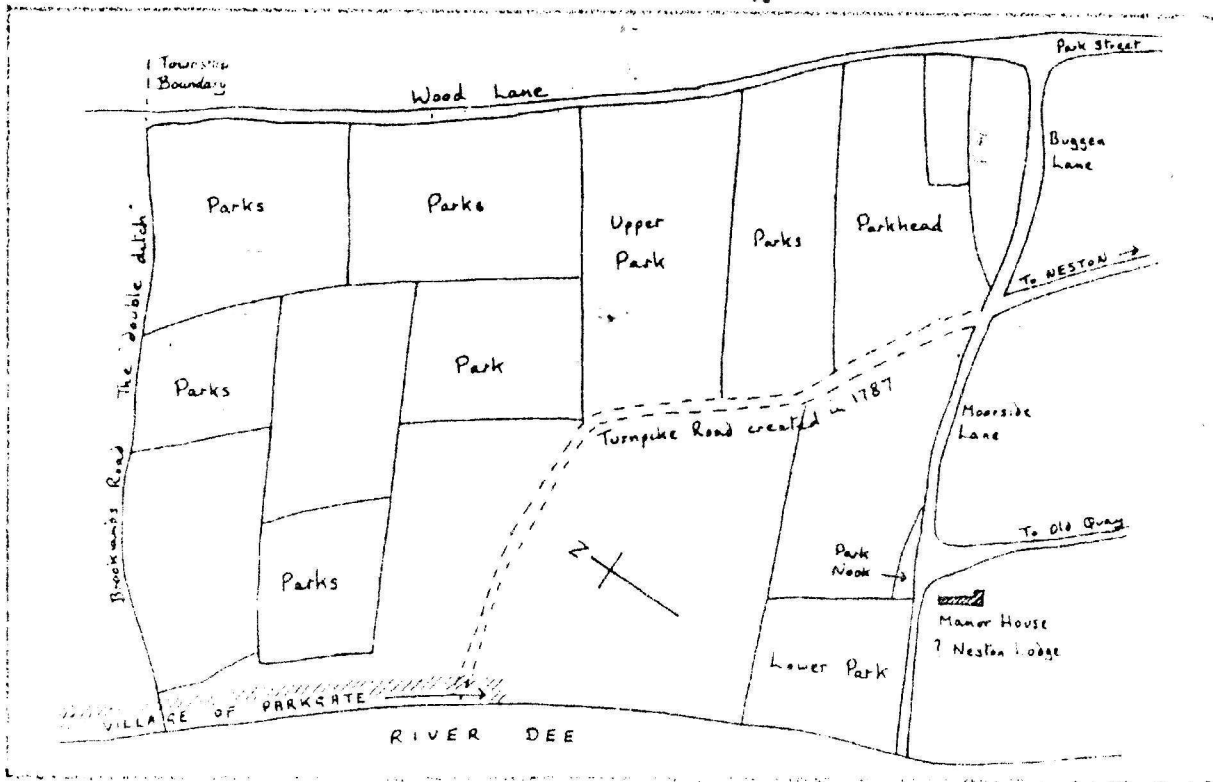
Whether any Earl of Derby stayed at Neston Lodge is not known for certain. A Countess may have done, because 'Dorotye Standleye, daughter of the Earle of Darbye' was baptised at Neston in 1576. Only one record has so far been found of anyone hunting there. Sir William Russell, Lord Deputy for Ireland, did so in 1594. He had hoped to sail from Hilbre, but after waiting there for three days, he sailed up river to Gayton, and 'we went to hunt at the Earl of Derby's, at Nestow Lodge'. He seems to have stayed there for three days.

Whether the end of Derby's ownership at the turn of the century also saw the end of the deer is not known, but if they did survive that upheaval, they certainly could not have survived the Civil War. The Whitmores, who bought the park in 1602, were Catholic recusants, and their estates were sequestered; but 'the incursions of the enemy and the quarterings of our own soldiers destroyed much of the sequestered estates, few being tender of what belonged to the public'. Troops were garrisoned as near as Puddington, and any remaining deer must have been early casualties.

And so Neston Park survived only as a memory, recorded in the field names to be found in leases and on estate maps. A field was identified in 1726 as being 'at the lower end of the Great Park in Neston, but Sir Roger Mostyn's estate map of 1732 shows that the whole park was sliced into fields, seven of which bore the name 'Park', as they still did a hundred years later. A small part of that land, now used as a recreation ground, is known as Parks Field to this day.

The most enduring memory of Neston Park is of course the name Parkgate itself. The earliest use of this name found so far is 1610, when a Chester merchant tried to smuggle calf-skins without an export licence down river to Parkgate. Scattered references to Parkgate can be found during the rest of the 17th century, and nearly all of them use the name to mean an anchorage in the river. The first record of houses occurs on Greenville Collins' map of the **Dee**, drawn in 1689; and our earliest knowledge of named people living there derives from a marriage licence issued in 1694.

The name Parkgate, therefore, was applied to the waterfront long before any village was built; after all, no houses could be built on the park while it was preserved for deer. Where then was the gate? In those days any carter collecting goods from the park's waterfront would have had to go down Moorside Lane, and there must have been an entrance to the park opposite the hunting lodge. Was that entrance the origin of the name? If it was, then we have the paradox that the village of Parkgate grew up, not at that gate (where a cluster of houses became known as Moorside) but at the other end of the park.



We thank Valerie Place for her permission to reprint this article, which originally appeared in The Wirral Journal 1985.

It may interest members to know the organisations that the Society is affiliated to –

The Wirral Greenbelt Council
The Wirral Society

And the Society has close working partnerships with –

Parkgate Preservation Trust
Friends of Park Fields
CH64inc
EPNAVCO (Ellesmere Port & Neston Association of Voluntary and Community Organisations)
The Bishops Trust for St Thomas'

And Here is the News...

News, just as it was reported, from Parkgate and the surrounding area
(Our thanks to Anthony Annakin-Smith for unearthing these articles)

250 Years Ago - 1758

The couple tenanted a local inn, the 'Red Lion and Three Pigeons' - presumably the forerunner to today's Red Lion - had moved to a new property. Following refurbishment they were keen to extol its virtues to the wealthy and important travellers who passed through the village.

'Whereas Thomas and Mary Williams at the Red Lion and Three Pigeons Inn, in Parkgate, hath removed to the Golden-Talbot Inn, in Parkgate aforesaid, hath put the said Inn in good Repair, having thereto large and commodious Stabling, and all other conveniences becoming such of the Nobility or Gentry that will favour them with their Custom, may assure themselves of meeting with kind usage, and the most civil Entertainment, and their favour most kindly acknowledged by their most obedient and very humble servants.

Thomas and Mary Williams.'

Adams Weekly Courant, 2nd April 1758

Meanwhile, Neston was by far the biggest town on the Wirral and still growing. New entertainment was needed for the locals, and presumably for travellers too while they waited for the winds that would carry their boat to Ireland. Hence the bold and simple announcement:

*'Neston BOWLING-GREEN
Opens on Wednesday 10th of May'*

Adams Weekly Courant, 2nd May 1758

So those playing bowls in the area today are carrying on a local tradition at least 250 years old.

Down Moorside Lane - at that time the main route to Parkgate - a property became available to let. It would not be an unattractive property today.

To be LET, and entered upon at May next, a Neat, well built House, four Rooms on a Floor, with a Back Kitchen fit for brewing or baking, also two Gardens planted with all Sorts of good Fruit Trees, a good Stable and Barn, pleasantly situated at Moorside, near Parkgate: For further Particulars Enquire of Mr Wright at Moor-side.'

Adams Weekly Courant, 18th April 1758