



Parkgate Society

(Founded 1972)

Newsletter

Spring 2009

Issue Number 76

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 2009

16 March - "Thomas Brassey, Storeton Quarry
Manager, local benefactor and world
railway builder." - *David Casement*

20 April - "Lost and re-invented houses of
Wirral" - *June Lancelyn-Green*
MBE

18 May - "Liverpool 1907-2007" a film show
- *Angus Tilston*

21 September - "Liverpool Capital of Culture -
the Legacy" - *Mary Beaumont*

19 October - "British Humour 18th-20th Century"
- *Mike Murphy*

16 November - "Cheshire Diaries - the First
World War"
- *Edward Hilditch*

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.

AGM

**The AGM took place on Monday 20 October
2008 at 7.30 pm.**

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT.

We are continuing to canvass for a new Treasurer.
We contributed to the Conservation Area Appraisal and
have re-printed our booklet, 'This is Parkgate'. We
commented on the Local Government Review. We look
forward to the new Neston Town Council next year.
Following the donation from a benefactor, we have agreed
to mount a heritage display in St. Thomas's Church upon
its completion. We note that funding has been secured for
the repair of the sea wall at the Old Baths. We are
represented on the Friends of Parkfields Committee, the
Parkgate Preservation Trust and ch64inc. We were invited
to the Memorial Service of our late President James
Cochrane and the dedication of the Geoffrey Place
Shooting Range, both at Mostyn House School.
A Special Resolution to change the Society's Constitution
was passed (the additional words are highlighted)
2. OBJECTIVES amend clause c. - To secure the
preservation, protection, development and improvement of
buildings and features of historic or public interest in the
area of benefit.

Add clause **e. The Society may offer affiliation to other
like-minded voluntary or charitable groups within the
area of interest.**

Insert new POWER after (ii) **To engage in discussions
with other such organisations or charities and to
undertake appropriate joint activities".**

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

Philip Owen (chairman), Moira Andrews (vice chairman),
Angela Clarke (secretary).

The members of the committee, all duly proposed and
seconded, were elected as follows-

Valerie Place, Becky Ford, Suzi Grenfell, Anne
Williamson, Stephen Gordon and Jerry Harris.

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

NEWS AND VIEWS

The **Audio Trails**, which we described in the autumn edition of the newsletter, were put forward by the Neston Civic Society and have won a Cheshire Community Pride Project Award Best Community Project in Ellesmere Port & Neston. The trails are descriptions of Parkgate, Neston Town and Neston Parish Church and can be accessed on the www.neston.org.uk website.

The **Lobster Grill** (formerly the Copper Grill) closed down after many years of trading on the Parade. The premises have reopened as an Indian Restaurant called Britannia Spice.

The **Friends of Park Fields** have produced a management plan for the 'Cow Field' area.

In October, the Society organised a **weeding of the sea wall** (from the Donkey Stand along to the Chip Shop). Those working on the project received several nice comments from passers by and the result was well worth the effort. There are plans to continue the removal of vegetation, on Saturdays, March 7th and April 4th of this year, 10am. All are welcome to join in. Bring suitable tools if you have some and wear old gloves.

Congratulations to **Neston Civic Society** who won the Cheshire Community Pride Best Kept Village (of a certain population size) competition. Their floral displays on the Cross, and at the railway station have been impressive, as has their determination in the face of occasional vandalism.

A bookcase has been installed in Neston Library bearing a plaque in memory of Geoffrey Place (our former Chairman) and David Scott (the well known local artist and historian). The bookcase will hold the **collection of local history books bequeathed by David Scott to the community.**

Since the completion of the electrical rewiring of **St. Thomas's Church**, the outdoor cross has once again been illuminated in the winter evenings. The new heating system and gas supply are now installed and the church windows have been refurbished, repaired and the protective grills have been re-galvanised. Sales of Christmas cards in aid of the church restoration brought in approx. £420 and Christmas carol singing door-to-door raised £215. The next work to be carried out includes digging up of the main approach path and piping the toilet connection to the main sewer in the road with relaying of the path at a slight slope up to the church door to eliminate the steps. Redecoration of the interior will follow shortly.

Meetings are taking place about the formation of a **Town Council for Neston**. There will be a Parish Clerk and seventeen councillors. Applications are sought.

The **Right Way** chain of shops (owned by a 'Parkgate-born' businessman), featured in the newspapers recently, with the purchase of the North Wales chain of hardware stores, Bevans.

At the end of February work began on the **archaeological dig** on the car park behind the Town Hall, Neston. The large prefabricated building (the Blackwell Building) has been demolished and the tarmac surface to the car park removed; all this as a precursor to the long process of building the new Sainsburys supermarket.

This year is the **250th Anniversary of commencement of coal mining in the Neston area** and various celebrations are planned. In an interview on Radio Merseyside recently, Anthony Annakin-Smith, of Parkgate, described some of the events. Some of the events planned are -

An exhibition in the Library, "Blood, Sweat and Toil in Neston: a 250th anniversary exhibition on the Collieries", (hopefully including memorabilia loaned by local families with connections to the mines), Monday 27th April to 23rd May

A Talk – "Blood, Sweat and Toil in Neston: the 250th anniversary story of the Collieries." Tuesday 28th April. 7.30 p.m.

"Neston Collieries 250th Anniversary Commemoration Service", Sunday 24 May, at The Harp.

A Trail leaflet taking walkers on a route round the mining area is to be launched soon, guided walks of the area are planned for later this year, it is hoped an audio trail of the colliery area will also be published.

FIRST CITIZEN – 'HERE AND THERE'

or 'WHAT A PARKGATE SOCIETY MEMBER DID'

By Moira Andrews

"Perhaps civic duties are in my blood" - I asked myself when it was proposed that I became Mayor of Ellesmere Port & Neston — and not forgetting Parkgate! One of



my ancestors, around the turn of the last century, became Lord Mayor of Bradford in the then West Riding of Yorkshire. I was duly elected and my Husband David became my Consort. Being a female mayor has its difficulties, albeit minor, in that many people did not know how to address me. I was called various things, as far as I am aware all polite - such as Lady Mayoress, Lady Mayor, Madam Mayor and Mrs. Mayor would you believe?! Actually my correct title was traditionally Mr. Mayor. The title of course has a purpose, if the Mayor is male, his wife or partner is the Mayoress, or if male would be a Consort. Madam usually refers to a married

status and is not necessarily correct for a single lady. So I insisted on being Mr. Mayor and was proud that women have been able to aspire to what was once a male dominated role.

I took on the role believing it should be a commitment to fulfil that role to the best of my ability, and that I would do it my way or not at all. I had every support I must say, particularly from the then leader of the Council, for whom I had a great deal of respect, even though not of my political persuasion! I decided I was going to fly the flag for the Borough and make ourselves known outside the Borough boundaries, by representing our citizens in other areas outside of Cheshire. I was present at the memorial service for Sir Richard Foster, Chairman of the National Museums & Galleries of Merseyside, who had died tragically in that summer. His service was held in the Anglican Cathedral and the place was full. I sat on the front row next to the Chief Constable of Merseyside at the time, Norman Bettinson, who I found to be an impressive character and very human. I then was invited to the opening of The Walker, the Art Gallery, which was a fantastic glittering occasion, attended by all the notables of the art world, from both at home and across the globe. The Walker looked splendid and it was certainly one of the highlights of my year. We went to one of the Royal Garden Parties at Buckingham Palace in the July, went to the Showmen's Guild Lunch for the North West, which was held at the Imperial Hotel, Blackpool. There were civic dignitaries there from all over the North West and I have never seen so much ornate gold chain in all my life! We also went to the opening of the Plas Bellin Home in North Wales, opened by their patron The Duchess of Westminster. They seemed surprised and pleased that the Mayor of Ellesmere Port & Neston had bothered to come from over the border. There were of course the rounds of civic events held in other boroughs of Cheshire, and over the year you get to know the other Mayors very well. Our own civic events are the Annual General Meeting (the Mayor Making), Civic Sundays in Ellesmere Port & Neston, Civic At Home Day, the Civic Dinner and Remembrance Sunday. Then there are all the other events to which you are invited.

The Civic Sunday Service of the Lord Mayor of Chester is probably the most impressive of them all because of its history and pageantry. The procession is from the Town Hall across the Square to the Cathedral for the service, and all the Mayors wear their robes. The Town Hall itself, for those who have not been inside, has an interesting history as you can imagine, with a meeting room, which has numerous boards listing the names of past Mayors and Sheriffs going back to the 12th century. I seem to remember that one or two showed they had been executed!! I am glad I managed to get to the end of my year! The regalia is of course very historic and impressive, particularly the ceremonial sword and mace always carried in front of the Lord Mayor on civic and ceremonial occasions.

The Borough's mace is obviously not as old, but has a unique emblem emblazoned on it - one of the panels has the seal of the United States of America carved in relief on it. The reason for its inclusion is because the original donor of the mace to the Borough was the American owned company Cabot Carbon in Ellesmere Port. It is made of hand wrought silver with a fire-gilt finish and comprises 350 parts. The mayoral chain is nine carat gold and was presented



by the Wolverhampton Corrugated Iron Company whilst the jewel, which hangs on the chain, was presented by the Manchester Ship Canal Company; Consolidated Bathurst Inc. supplied the new crest in 1984 when the Urban District Councils of Neston and of Ellesmere Port were united as a Borough.

For the first six months of my year I was fortunate to have the valuable and helpful knowledge of Vic, who had been the Mayor's Attendant for about 15 years. He was an invaluable source of knowledge; discretion personified and became a loyal friend, certainly to me at one or two difficult times. Sadly Vic died in the second part of my year, having not been very well for a few months, although he never complained. Everyone was most upset. He had a lovely set of stories he could tell on some of the long journeys to other parts of Cheshire. He really was an Attendant, not just a chauffeur.

It is essential I think, during your year, to make sure you have time to your self for holiday breaks. You are not only Mayor, with over 200 engagements in the year, but your job as a councillor still goes on.

The year 2001 was a momentous year in so many different ways, highs and lows, joy and sadness. The high parts were such as, hosting a visit by a delegation from our twin town of Reutlingen, for 5 very intensive entertaining days, which included a day at Chester Races, which they loved, particularly when they won! A visit to London and Buckingham Palace for the Garden Party was a wonderful warm day. The lows are probably obvious if one remembers the year, September 11th, which happened to be my Civic At Home Day. Cheshire's Civic Dignitaries were arriving in their cars at Ness Gardens, having visited Parkgate, when the news was breaking of the appalling atrocity occurring in New York. Then there were the deaths of Princess Margaret and the Queen Mother, a time when flags have to be lowered, books of remembrance opened and letters of condolence written.

Going out and about and meeting people is a useful way of exchanging ideas, how other Boroughs do things and promoting ourselves and often initiatives arise from these contacts, which are useful to our Borough. It is not just about enjoying yourself if you do the job properly. I particularly enjoyed visiting centenarians on their Birthday, taking a card and a bouquet of flowers and chatting to them.

It is usual, but not compulsory, to have a theme for your year and to have a charity or charities for whom you raise funds during the year. Very often local industries would give donations or sponsor events, particularly the big names in Ellesmere Port.

Over the years I have been involved with voluntary organisations such as Leagues of Hospital Friends, the Hospice movement and the Abbeyfield society, so I took as my theme something I know quite a bit about - Volunteering. 2001 also coincided with the International Year of Volunteering so it was perfect. I tried to highlight the problem all organisations are finding in the lack of new younger volunteers coming in to take over from us older ones. With that in mind I held 2 Volunteer Awareness Days, one in Ellesmere Port and one in Neston. Sadly the one in Neston Town Hall wasn't very well patronised by the public, although the organisations that took part did some useful networking.

I supported 6 charities and set myself a target of raising at least £6,000 to be divided between them. The charities were, Hospice of the Good Shepherd, Prostate Cancer (New Treatment), Ellesmere Port & Neston Talking Newspaper, Anne Milne Cold Cap Appeal, The Samaritans (Chester), and the Stroke Association (North West). I finally raised more than £6,000 and was also able to donate a small amount to Neston Youth Centre, Riding for Disabled and Ellesmere Port Cottage Hospital League of Friends.

The Large companies in Ellesmere Port were very supportive of me, and without these companies sponsorship and generosity it would have been a difficult task. Shell sponsored my 2 Volunteer Awareness Days and Associated Octel, Kemira & Cabot Carbon were also very generous in many ways. This is where contacts come in useful I found! For many years I was one of the Borough's representatives on those companies' Liaison Committees.

Before my year ended I was privileged to be able to nominate people to receive Community Awards. These are the people who the Mayor feels should be honoured by the Borough for their contribution to life in the Community. I honoured 4 people from the Neston side of the Borough two people particularly known to us all, Jimmy Pratt for his dedicated efforts over a number of years to save St.Thomas's Church in Parkgate and our own Chairman, Philip Owen for his service to Clatterbridge Hospital League of Friends. These are real people who should be honoured and often are never recognised, so it gave me enormous pleasure to be able to present them with their awards. A very pleasant and satisfying way in which to end my year.

(Our thanks to Ken Evans for permission to use Moira's photograph)

DEE ICEBERGS!

By Anne Williamson

This winter has been a particularly severe one for most of the country, but in the Wirral, we had milder conditions than most. However, the start of January saw the nighttime temperature around here down to as low as minus 6 centigrade, coupled with about 10 days of freezing days and nights. Then at the beginning of February we had snow. Yet we still got off lightly compared to the rest of the country.

Life on the Dee has not always been so mild, and extreme weather of old was much more extreme than present day. In an old copy of the Wirral Journal, there is an excerpt from John A. Dockray, 1901, on the subject of icebergs in the River Dee. He described how in 1895 the winter conditions were particularly severe. There was frost day and night and, as the tide ebbed the last half-inch or so of water freezes and the banks become glazed with a layer of ice. As the tide successively ebbs and flows the ice builds up. Pieces break away and float on top of other iced areas and gradually huge, irregular blocks of ice are formed that float along the river.

In 1895, a winter that was so extreme that the river Thames froze over, the ice floes on the River Dee formed huge masses up to 12 feet high and fifty to sixty feet

in length and weighed many tonnes. Dockray states:

“The appearance of the estuary in 1895 was very lovely so long as the ice and snow were clean, the whole flashing with prismatic hues in the brilliant sunshine; but when the big tides had covered the ice many times the whole became muddy and soiled, and on a dull day the prospect was dreary indeed.”

Previous severe winters are described on the Internet *. 1813/1814 saw a severe frost that began on December 27th and continued through to March 27th. This resulted in the Thames freezing from London Bridge to Blackfrairs Bridge and, on the 4th February, a frost fair was held on the ice. Thousands of people attended. There were many stalls and a sheep was roasted and the meat sold.

*The Stepney notes - <http://website.lineone.net/~fight/Stepney/weather.htm>

NESTON & PARKGATE 200 YEARS AGO **as recorded in MAGNA BRITANNIA** **- an ancient book**

This fascinating book of almost 200 years ago, is written in old spelling, with “s” written as “f” throughout, eg. Chefter for Chester. The sections on Great Neston, Parkgate, Leighton and Thornton Hough are re-typed here. The Magna Britannia lists the towns and manors of Britain, county by county, giving descriptions and history of their ownership. **

NESTON

Neston in the hundred and deanery of Wirral, is a small market town, nearly eleven miles N.W. from Chester. The market, which is merely for butchers' meat and other provisions, is held on Friday; there are three fairs, February 2, May 1, and September 29.

The Parish of Neston contains seven townships, Great-Neston, Little-Neston, Ledsham, Leighton, Nesse, Thornton-Hough, and Willaston. Footnote – The Parish is divided into four quarters, one of which comprises Great-Neston only, another, Leighton, Thornton and Raby, a third Ledsham and Willaston, and the fourth, Little-Neston and Nesse.

The Manor of Great-Neston was at an earlier period in the family of Montalt; in therein of Edward III. Robert de Montalt having no issue gave it to Queen Isabel, with remainder to John of Eltham, and to the King, who in the year 1337 granted it to William Montacute, Earl of Salisbury. Having reverted to the crown by attainder,

King Henry IV gave it to Sir John Stanley, whose descendant (one of the Earls of Derby) conveyed it to William Whitmore of Leighton; from the Whitmores it passed by female heirs to the Savages and Mostyns, and is now the property of Sir Thomas Mostyn Bart. The manor of Ashfield in Neston, which belongs to Sir Henry Poole Bart. was purchased by his ancestor Roger de Pull of the Duttons in 1317.

In the churchyard at Neston is the tomb of John Hancock, a farmer, who died December 4, 1775, at the age of 112. Foot-note – We are informed that at the age of 104 he was in the habit of walking half a mile to a public house; his wife survived him twenty four years, being at the time of her death in 1799 only seventy-three years of age, so that there must have been fifty-three years difference between their ages.

The church of Neston was given to the abbot and convent of St. Werburgh by Ralph de Møntalt; the vicarage is now in the gift of the dean and chapter, who, under their first charter, were for a while possessed of the impropriation. The great tithes of the townships of Leighton, Raby and Thornton, now constitute part of the endowment of the vicarage; those of Ledsham, Nesse, and Willaston, belong to Sir Thomas S.M.Stanley Bart. and those of Great and Little-Neston to Sir Thomas Mostyn Bart.

PARKGATE The greater part of Park-gate, on the estuary of the Dee, from whence the packets sail to Ireland, is within this (Neston) township Footnote – the remainder is in the township of Leighton. ; it contains above 130 houses, and is frequented in the summer as a bathing place.

LEIGHTON The manors of Leighton, and Thornton-Mayewe, or Mayes, now generally called Thornton-Hough, passed by successive female heirs from the Leightons to the Thorntons and Houghs, who had a park at Thornton. Alice daughter and heir of William Hough, brought these manors in marriage about the year 1579 to a younger branch of the Whitmores of Thurstaston, from whom they passed by female heirs, with Great Neston, to the Savages and Mostyns; they are now the property of Sir Thomas Mostyn Bart. Leighton-hall has been taken down and a small farmhouse built on the site; Thornton Grange belongs to the Earl of Shrewsbury.

** Published in 1810. Magna Britannia "A Concise Topographical Account of The Several Counties of Great Britain volume 2 by Rev. Daniel Lysons and Samuel Lysons, Esq.

Both were fellows of the Royal Society, the former was Rector of Rodmarton in Gloucestershire and the latter was Keeper of His Majesty's records in the Tower of London.