



Parkgate Society

(Founded 1972)

Newsletter

Spring 2010

Issue Number 78

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 2010

- 15 March – “Liverpool 1907 – 2007” a film
show by *Angus Tilston*
- 19 April – “The work of Wirral Countryside
Volunteers” - *Paul Loughnane*,
Wirral Wildlife Trust.
- 24 May – “Wayside Windmills with Wirral
examples” – *Jim O’Neil*
- 20th September - “ History of Bromborough
Port” - *Gavin Hunter*
- 18th October - AGM at 7.30pm, followed by
“As We Were No.3” - *Glynn
Parry*
- 15th November - In the Footsteps of Forrest
(Ness Gardens plant collector)
- *Ted Brabin*
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 19
October 2009 at 7.30 pm.**

CHAIRMAN’S REPORT: Moira Andrews
reflected on a sad but busy year for the Society.
The Parkgate Preservation Trust and Friends of
Park Fields became affiliated to our Society, an
initiative set up by our late Chairman Philip, and
we intend to have one or two joint meetings a
year.

We took part in various local events such as
Neston Village Fair, HODS, Neston Collieries
exhibition and the recent “safari” organised by
ch64inc. We are sorry to lose Anne Williamson
from our Committee, although she won’t
disappear altogether! A special thank you to our
long-standing Hon. Secretary Angela Clarke, who
has faithfully kept our Minutes over more years
than perhaps she cares to remember, and to Suzi
Grenfell for hosting our monthly meetings at
Mostyn House School. We are grateful to Clive
Edwards for preparing the year-end accounts,
which were presented by Nick Marten, our co-
opted Treasurer, and were accepted by the
meeting.

We thank Michael Lyon for giving his time free of
charge and we note is willing to carry on in his
private capacity.

PRESIDENT : Moira put forward a proposal that
we appoint a President, which position has been
vacant for some time. Moira nominated Valerie
Place who has been involved with the Society
almost since its inception and this would be a
fitting tribute. Seconded by Suzi Grenfell, all
agreed.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS Chairman Suzi
Grenfell, Vice Chairman Moira Andrews,
Treasurer Nick Marten, Secretary Angela Clarke.

ELECTION OF COMMITTEE Becky Ford,
Stephen Gordon, Jerry Harris,

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NEWS AND VIEWS

In October ch64inc (the voluntary, community organisation created by the Market Town Initiative) organised a coach 'Safari' around the CH64 area for CWaC Councillors and senior Council officials. Jerry Harris welcomed them to Parkgate and spoke about the state of the sea wall, the railings, parking etc. Hopefully this sowed some seeds for change!

A **Streetscene Meeting** took place on a very wet morning in November, in the form of a walk-about along the Parade. It was arranged by Mike Solari, from CWaC Streetscene, and attended by CWaC Councillor Kay Loch, together with Becky Ford and Jerry Harris, from the Society, and local resident Glyn Dale-Jones.

The group discussed the state of the bus shelter and the possible merits of its demolition and opening up the gateway into the churchyard. Mike Solari undertook to have the interior painted in the interim, and we are pleased to note that this was done within a few days. As we approached the railings on the Sea Wall, as if by magic, they were being repaired! Mike has undertaken to have them painted, in the Spring, when the weather is more suitable. On the question of the Sea Wall and its deteriorating condition, he undertook to contact the Heritage Officer about the problem.

On reaching the Donkey Stand, Mike Solari was immediately struck by the overall lack of a planned approach to the whole street furniture and seemed quite shocked. He felt the existing litterbins were not very good, nor coordinated, and that they were too prominent and should be sited more sympathetically. He said that there was money presently in the budget, for bin replacement, we eagerly await progress on this! He also commented that the seats were old and in need of replacing. He felt there should be more of them and that they should be nearer the outer edge, and facing outwards. The litter problem was discussed and the need to get businesses involved; it was felt that we should leave this to CWaC to resolve.

We welcomed the arrival in Parkgate, on 27 January, at Neston Cricket Club, a **Mobile Display Unit from Cheshire Police**. It was staffed by a PCSO and a member of the civilian staff. Various local people put in an appearance including Councillor Moira Andrews, Chairman of Neston Town Council, Councillor David Andrews and Michael Darby, local resident and former Chairman of Cheshire Police Authority.

The newly appointed Police Sergeant for Neston, Henry Platten, bravely volunteered to trial this service here, before its use across every Cheshire West & Cheshire rural area.

It would appear few local residents attended to air their concerns. This may be due to lack of information that this new facility was available. It seems many of us do not receive any of the free local newspapers, which were notified about the event. We hope the new Newsletters from Neston Town Council will keep us in touch when the MDU returns to the local area.

The Friends of Park Fields are delighted to announce that they have entered into a partnership Management Agreement with Cheshire West & Chester Council to manage the 29-acre field, known locally as the Cowfield, adjacent to Park Fields in Parkgate.

The "Friends" under the leadership of Damian McDermott Loughe, achieved this after a long campaign, firstly with EP&NBC and later with CWAC. Damian has been Chairman for the past two years and having achieved this objective decided to stand-down in January of this year. The new Chairman, Brian Elias, hopes to carry on in Damian's footsteps, ensuring a continued commitment to preserve and develop this bio-diverse ecological area for future generations to enjoy. Notice Boards have been purchased and will shortly be erected to give information about the organisation and its aims.

In addition, a campaign to request CWAC to register the 'Sports Ground' area of Park Fields - an area of some 12 acres - as a Village Green is nearing its conclusion. A Dossier setting out the case for this to happen, thus giving permanent protection against development or disposal of the land, will shortly be presented to the Council.

Anyone interested in getting involved in any way should contact Mrs Christine Try on 0151 336 7472 or by email to christine_try@yahoo.co.uk

We welcome **Jill Brock** and **Greta Simpson** onto the Parkgate Committee, as co-opted members.

St.Thomas's Church. Before Christmas, the drain connection for the new WC to the main sewer in Coastguard Lane was completed via an enormous hole in the road, which warranted closure of the lane for approx. 10 days. The main sandstone approach to the front door of the church was re-laid as a gentle slope with a handrail. The floor of the church was looking fairly patchy and dirty, with several areas having required removal of rotted joists and woodworm weakened flooring. New floor boards were necessary in these areas, but the need to retain as much of the original appearance of the historic building was paramount so mechanical sanding followed by application of an antique coloured stain enabled the patchy floor to be blended to a reasonable appearance. Entire replacement of the floor would have been expensive and would have removed much of the character.

Complete redecoration then took place with the interior walls painted in white distemper, with pale grey for some of the woodwork and doors, and black for external doors. The colours were chosen to reflect the historic nature of the simple building, which is listed Grade II.

Apart from repairs to the Coastguard Lane perimeter wall, restoration work is now complete, leaving the equipping of the building to be finalised. Recently a grant was received which has enabled purchase of chairs, and a kind bequest has enabled folding tables to be purchased. An electric organ, some crockery & cutlery and a new fridge have been donated and decaying trees overhanging Mostyn Square have been removed by generous efforts.

To complete all the restoration work £250,000 has been raised over a period of approximately 10 years. This has been a long struggle, but now the end is in sight and when various legal matters have been completed, a date for opening can be announced.

Thank you for all your help, support and donations. We are looking forward to the resumption of church services here once more and equally to the building being available for use for a variety of community purposes. There will be a place for you in this building, religious or non-religious, for worship, for drinking tea with friends, for leisure pursuits, singing, art & craft, gardening or whatever. Please feel welcome to join in and foster the community spirit when the building opens.

We are seeking an organist and helpers for some work improving the garden when the weather improves.

STOP PRESS – The Bric-a-brac sale at the end of February raised £1252!

www.stthomasparkgate.co.uk The Bishop's Trust for St. Thomas's, Parkgate.

Memories of Childhood Boat Trips - Part 1 The Mersey and the Ship Canal

by Polly Carter

MY FATHER'S BOAT, the "Vina" chugged past the Woodside Ferry boat terminal. We two children waived at the passengers who were hanging over the side staring down at the little converted lifeboat, in amazement. The "Vina" was 28ft long and 7ft wide. Dad had spent a winter giving her a cabin. This he designed and built in our garden. He did a few sketches on the back of old envelopes, before finally making his mind up. He acquired a seized up Petter diesel engine and took it apart. He worked for hours in his log cabin of a shed up at the top of the garden. The flywheel was so big and heavy; he called upon two friends to help him. One evening she started up and shook the whole house. He had to warm the engine up with a blowlamp; this he pumped to what I thought was exploding point! My young brother held his fingers over his ears and, frightened by the fearful racket, neighbours ran round to see for themselves and wonder at this latest monster.

She was launched on the next big tide, with due ceremony. We all scrambled into the big sturdy punt and followed her out to the new moorings. We tied up the punt by throwing the painter rope to his friend Kenny Warren and he made it secure with a bowline knot to a very substantial piece of wood that Dad had made for such tasks, in the big wide cockpit in her stern. Robin and I scrambled on board and explored the contents of the cabin. We opened the brass dinner plate sized portholes and screwed them back up with all our might. Our bunks were up forward sporting a small porthole. The little bunks had sleeping bags on top and chopped up, lumpy pillows. These felt like stones but were old woollen sweaters stuffed into a bolster case cut in half. If it was a cold night we had navy style wool blankets tucked down the sides and were snug and safe.

At our feet was a great pile of rusty anchor chain. I was convinced that these links came off the Queen Mary, but just after the war, when Dad returned from his six-year stint on the minesweepers, these things were simply not available. He fashioned the small mast he occasionally used in the stern, from a broken telegraph pole; it served the purpose! We had a medical chest in the main cabin, a Victorian velvet lined box reeking of TCP, stuffed with pots of dettol ointment and bandages and tiny nail scissors. A large tube of burn cream was always in use; we all singed our fingers on the primus stoves and blowlamps. Not to mention playing with matches when we got the chance! These were kept in an old Oxo tin with a tight fitting lid to keep the damp heavy salt air out. In an evening the primus stoves were placed on our folding dining table and served to cosy up the cabin. We sat on my parent's bunks and listened to the huge Eveready wireless, we listened to mostly adult plays, some classical music, Charlie Kunz and the all-important weather forecast. Big 'shushes' when the Irish Sea was mentioned. The wind, weather and tides governed what we did and which direction we sailed, or really motored. We did have big thick, heavy, hand made red canvas sails but the motor was quicker and far less work.

My brother Robin was so young and small; he was tied with a fine line around his coat and then to a post. He was prone to fall in, and like all small boys of three, moved like quicksilver. It was my job to mind him as I was four years older and could swim. His main purpose in life was to do forbidden stunts and give me the slip, as much as possible. I clearly remember the "Vina" being in Bromborough Dock waiting for Dad and Kenny to do a 'little job'; these things always took days, mostly weekends. So Sunday morning we four cycled to the dock and I was instructed to watch Robin. I did, as he tried to walk on water! He was so small and light that he floated on his side and as his wellies filled with water, sank slowly before my eyes. Naturally it was all my fault and to Father's fury, we had to go back home for dry gear. Mother was deep into her weekly bake and just as cross. Robin always tasted the cake mixture before it was put into the cake tin, to bake. The wet wellies were dried out with some difficulty in those days. They reclined on a solid fuel stove in the kitchen of our bungalow, smelling of rubber and sea water, that permeated every room. New wellies were unobtainable just after the war, so in the shed was an assorted collection of them, some with puncture repair patches on them, and you chose the pair nearest to your size, filled the gap with cardboard insoles and big homemade sea boot socks! His wet wool coat and trouser steamed around the dining room fire for hours, on the fireguard.

In those days there were no 'Fairy type' detergents, no polythene bottles or boxes. Life was quite old fashioned. We carried fresh drinking water on board the "Vina" in stone jars; they weighed a ton! Father acquired two of the first aluminium containers and these marvelled at for being so light. He staggered through the mud with army jerry cans full of diesel, when obtainable. We washed up on board with seawater in an enamel bowl. The first liquid detergent to lather in seawater was called "Quix" and it was heralded as a miracle. Normally when we rinsed out gear it took for ever to dry on the mast, being full of seawater. We all had various changes of clothes left on board. I had a blue knitted bathing costume, a cousin's cast off. This went on for years and was passed onto other boats, one called "The Frances", after my Mother.

This sported a flush toilet, but no 'red sails in the sunset'! Another boat was called "Thumper" as her engine made such a noise.

My favourite weekend venue was 'up river' to Manesty's Mount. This was the spoil heap from the excavation of the Manchester Ship Canal. Very inaccessible, this hill is still visible from the river Mersey and canal. The ideal plan was to sail up on the flood tide, then moor as near to the Mount as possible, and when the tide ebbed we could clamber out and vanish on our treasure island. We combed the stony beach for shards of pottery, interesting stones and shells. Bits of wood were whittled with one of Father's many penknives. We used to smooth the sand out like a tablecloth and place our finds on it, then we would carry one or two of them in our hankies, back on board, but this was frowned on as Dad hated sand as it scratched the varnished wood. A bucket of water was placed outside to step into and wash your wellies! To keep the boat on an even keel, Dad fashioned two big wooden legs, which he quickly put in place and the tide ebbed out. This made for a more comfortable stay as the table and cooker were flat, plus you didn't roll out of your bunk. One dreadful morning we woke to find that we had "dried out" on the edge of a deep gutter, perhaps a 15 foot drop! We all had to keep to one side of the cabin in case we rolled in and waited anxiously for the tide to come in and re-float us.

The banks of the Ship Canal were home to the biggest blackberries ever. So we took Mother's sisters, cousins and friends on a day trip to collect them. We children ate more than we saved, our purple tongues, hands and clothes were evidence of this. Hours passed in the hot sun and the booty mounted up on the shore. As no-one possessed a fridge we left early to go home to start the blackberry and apple jam and jelly making. Ancient jam jars were recycled yet again, pre-war jars and all sorts of glass containers. Our precious sugar measured very accurately so as not to waste a grain and we kids helped out and licked the pans clean. I was in charge of labels; these were small pieces of paper with the name and date the jam was made and then glued to the jar. When cool these were stored in a dark cupboard in our large pantry. We tried elderberries and crab apples too, but nothing tasted of summer so much as blackberry and apple jam!

Occasionally we would moor at Eastham; the old ferry sandstone pier blocks littered the shore. We kids messed around in dinghies and punts and waived at the tankers in the queue for the Ship Canal. We once were in the first lock with a huge tanker. Father was most anxious not to be positioned near the foaming water from her powerful propellers. We were banished to the cabin and peeped out through the portholes. The banks of the canal are very steep and we could see life from the other side of our 'blackberry spot'.

Sometimes we pulled into Monks Ferry and very quietly rowed to the slipway where boats had been coaled up. We collected the pieces that had missed their mark and put them in old hessian sacks, saved for that particular purpose. The coal we burnt at home and it made a lot of smoke, I recall.

Continued in the next newsletter - Part 2, Hilbre, Dee, Welsh Coast, etc.

ANOTHER MYTH – ESKIMOS

Following our notes on Handel's visit to Parkgate (Newsletter Autumn 2001), here is another favourite myth, the Eskimos, said to have landed at Parkgate and settled in Neston. Several people have asked recently whether there is any truth in this story. No, there isn't, but it is quite interesting to see where the story came from.

The story originates from an attempt to explain the name of the Neston pub called the *Greenland Fishery*. The name actually derived from the whaling days: the Greenland Fishery was the name given to the whaling industry sailing out of Liverpool, whether or not the whales were caught in Greenland waters. It seems likely that a retired whaling captain gave the inn its name, probably in the late 18th century. The licensing records name the pub for the first time in 1822.

This information was not known to Hilda Gamlin, when she tried to find a reason for the pub's name in her book, *Twixt Mersey and Dee* (1897). On page 212 she states that in 18th century "a colony of Greenland fishery folk" (no mention of Eskimos) had settled at Milford Haven but had not stayed. She then supposed that it was "most likely", in view of the unusual name of the inn, that some of them came to the Dee.

This flimsy notion was buttressed by the memory that Sir Wilfred Grenfell, who was born in Parkgate and became a medical missionary in Labrador, imported ten Lapps, from Norway to Newfoundland in 1907, to herd reindeer. These were not Eskimos, though perhaps they looked similar. They did not land in England.

When I came to live here over 40 years ago, I was told that there were some very small rooms at the top of the *Greenland Fishery*: "built for the Eskimos, you know". In such ways are these myths kept alive!

Geoffrey Place.
2005

That's it! The article above is the last of the nuggets of local history information written by Geoffrey, for the newsletter.

We do now need you, the members, to come up with your memories of earlier years in Parkgate and the surrounding area, or if, an 'incomer', your impressions on first arriving in the area. Or, possibly, your thoughts on how the Conservation Area can be maintained and improved. We look forward to all contributions for future newsletters.

We are very grateful to Ian Boumphrey for providing the copy of the sketch of Parkgate, on the next page. The original drawing by Charlotte Price, c1840, shows the Bath House, on what is now known as The Donkey Stand. This fascinating view of Parkgate, along with many new photos of the area, can be seen in Ian's new book; *Yesterday's West Wirral - Part One*, which is available from Nicholls of Parkgate.

