

Parkgate Society

Newsletter

Spring 2021

Issue Number 100

A very special welcome to this, the 100th, edition of our Newsletter. We have some especially interesting articles for you this time and hope you will find it an enjoyable read.



*Parkgate: Talbot House/Green Shutters, The Parade
February 2021 (Photo: Alan Passmore)*

*‘Working together to preserve and enhance the unique
character of Parkgate’*

Notices

Meetings 2021

We normally meet at 8pm at **The Cranston Suite, Neston Cricket Club, Station Road, Parkgate**, usually on the third Monday of the month. For the time-being, however, our meetings are virtual, using Zoom. If you wish to be added to the list of members who already have access to this facility, please provide email contact details to Derek Haylock (see page 16).

15 February: 'Wirral Smugglers & Wreckers'

- Gavin Chappell

15 March: 'Herbert J Rouse: A new architecture for Liverpool and Wirral'

- Prof Iain Jackson

19 April: 'The Health & Welfare of Neston's early Miners and their Families'

- Anthony Annakin-Smith

17 May: 'The Parkgate Mosquitos and Friends: Detritus but no Tigers'

- Dr Peter Enevoldson

20 September: Annual General Meeting at

7.30 pm, followed by

'The Bibby Line'

- Christina Spencer

18 October: 'Cleanliness is next to Godliness: a History of Pears Soap up to 1914'

- Dr Paul Dufton

15 November: Hot-pot Supper at 6.30 pm

followed by

'Raptors of the Wirral and their Conservation'

- Jimmi Hill

President: Michael Potts
Vice-President: Dr Jill Brock

The Committee

Owing to the Covid-19 pandemic the Society's AGM last September was cancelled and your committee agreed that the following officers and committee members should continue in office for the year 2020/21:

Chairman: Dr Bryan Lecky

Deputy-Chairman: David Johnson

Secretary: Alan Passmore

Treasurer: Derick Cotton

Membership Secretary: Derek Haylock

Committee members:

Dr Peter Enevoldson, Carol Fearnett, Marie Lycett and Cllr Brenda Marple. Tim Marshall has since been co-opted.

Auditor:

Clive Edwards

There are still a number of vacancies for additional members of the committee. If you feel that you are in a position to help us further the aims of the Society, particularly in the field of planning and conservation, we would like to hear from you. Please get in touch with the Secretary.

TRANSPORT - If you need help with transport to our meetings, please ring Alan Passmore, our Secretary, giving 24 hours' notice, on (0151) 336 - 2917.

VISITORS - We are always on the look-out for new members and, therefore, would like to encourage you to introduce your friends to the Society. Visitors are very welcome to attend our talks – first time free – after that we will encourage them to join as full members.

SUBSCRIPTIONS - £7.00 Single / £10 Household per year. Subscriptions are due on 6th April each year. Payment can be made at any of our meetings; but we would prefer you to make payment by Banker's Standing Order. Membership, Standing Order and Gift Aid forms are available from Derek Haylock, our Membership Secretary, tel: (0151) 336-4461. Please check that your Standing Order is for the correct amount.

News and Views

Covid-19

Since this time last year our activities, in fact our whole lives, have been turned upside down by the pandemic, which despite the roll-out of the vaccines is still infecting great numbers of people throughout the land and across the world. Our condolences are extended to all those who have suffered bereavement and good wishes to all who have been affected by the disease. As for the Society, we have continued with our monthly committee meetings on Zoom and, in the light of our experience with this technology, have been able to offer members a programme of monthly talks using the same system. We are very pleased with the tremendous response we have had to meeting everyone in this way; it's close to the real thing, and one advantage we have found is that we have been able to enjoy the company of members who live at some distance and others who perhaps no longer feel comfortable about going out on a winter evening. As to when we will be able to meet again in person, the situation is still not clear – it will depend on when our normal venue (Neston Cricket Club) is able to open and accommodate an audience of the size that we have been accustomed to enjoy in the recent past. Our reading of the government's road map for a return to normality would suggest that, if all goes well, there is a reasonable chance that we may be able to get together in person for our annual general meeting on 20 September. So, something to look forward to: there is light at the end of the tunnel!

Storm Christoph

Towards the end of January, while we were still in the throes of the worst phase of the Covid pandemic the country was battered by Storm Christoph.

Fortunately, Parkgate escaped the worst of the storm, but there was flooding in Boathouse Lane from the junction with Barnacre Drive, also at several places on the Wirral Way. It would appear that the drains are not able to cope with the amount of rain we get these days; and it was good to see that the Council were quite active following this event in turning out and cleaning the kerbside drains. It remains to be seen whether this has had any effect.

Planning issues

At the time of writing there is still no news of a decision by the Council on the future of the former **Parkgate Nurseries** site. As all of you are aware, this scheme proposes a development of 17 houses on land where a number of disused greenhouses currently stand; the land is designated 'greenfield' and forms part of the North Cheshire Green Belt. There is no requirement for this housing and, in particular, there is no need to use green belt land to meet local housing needs, so it is strange that the Council has not been able to reach a decision after all this time.

Likewise, there has been no decision yet by the government's Planning Inspector on the proposal to create a largely **subterranean house** on green belt land in **Boathouse Lane** opposite the lodge to Backwood Hall.

You may wish to know that in opposing both of these significant schemes we were able to count on the support of the Wirral Society, the Wirral branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), to which we are affiliated. In the same area the Council have recently refused permission for extensions at **West Point** and **Hydestile House**, both in or adjacent to Boathouse Lane, so it would appear that they are minded to resist further building in the green belt, where there is felt to be no necessity for it.

The derelict **No 11 Brookland Road** has at last been sold, and there is permission for its replacement with two detached houses. Perhaps it will not be long before this eyesore is gone, replaced, hopefully, by homes of good quality design.

We are very pleased that approval has now been given for the derelict grade 2 listed dwelling at **No 11 Station Road** to be renovated and restored for habitation. The survey shows that this crook beam cottage could well be the oldest surviving house in the village; its current condition means that a complete re-build will be necessary.

The Council has also given permission for improvements at **The Old Butcher's Shop & Seven Steps, The Parade**, mainly affecting the rear of these grade 2* listed buildings, while **Teal Cottage** has just changed hands.

Parkgate in Bloom

During the past twelve months, while we have not been able to do the work ourselves, we have contracted with PDQ Landscapes for replanting our planters and the garden in our boat on the middle slip. Whether we continue with this arrangement once we are able to organize our own working parties for the purpose remains to be seen. The company already looks after the watering of the plants under contract with the town council.

Neston Music Festival

The continued presence of the Covid-19 pandemic caused the cancellation of the 2020 festival and the postponement of this year's event. The decision has now been taken to work towards the presentation of the next festival in April/May 2022. The signs are that by then conditions will have become quite settled and everything will be in order for a good varied programme of music to be presented without the risk of further cancellations.

Heritage Open Days

As part of the national programme in September we are again organizing guided walks based on our Parkgate Heritage Trail. This year the events across Cheshire West will take place on ten days from the 10th to the 19th of the month. On Saturday 18th and Sunday 19th we will meet at the bat haven (the former WW2 pillbox) on the Ropewalk carpark in Station Road at 3.00 pm. The walk is about 1.5 miles, but lasts about 2 hours. Participants should come appropriately dressed and shod for the weather conditions. St Thomas' Church in Mostyn Square is also taking part in the HODs scheme and will be open to visitors on this Saturday and also on the Sunday afternoon.



Newfoundland postal service issued this 5c stamp in 1940 to commemorate the life of Sir Wilfred Grenfell, born at Mostyn House in 1865.

The Donkey Stand in Parkgate *by Michael Potts*

I have often wondered how many visitors to Parkgate, and to the Donkey Stand in particular, were surprised to read on the information board that a house had stood on the stand until it was demolished in 1840. If they had looked on the Society's website, they would have found similar information. However, one bit of information is missing and that is an image of the building that stood on the Donkey Stand before 1840.

In the 1980's, committee meetings of the Society were always held in the sitting room of Geoffrey and Valerie Place's house. On one of the walls hung a small picture of Parkgate. I did not immediately recognise what I was looking at, so asked Geoffrey to tell me more about it. I do not remember how he acquired it, but it was a pencil drawing dated 1833 showing the Donkey Stand and a building called the Bath House fair and square on the stand.



The name of the artist is unknown and, apart from the writing on the picture, the reverse shows that it was drawn on 28th October 1833. I thought no more of the drawing until recently, when I saw it hanging in the sitting room of

Geoffrey Boston's house. Geoffrey had been a master at Mostyn House at the same time as Geoffrey Place and they lived next door to each other. The drawing had been given to Geoffrey after Valerie died in October 2019. I must have said that the drawing was most unusual and clearly a rare image of Parkgate, because Geoffrey immediately suggested that he would like to present it to the Society in order that more people would have the benefit of seeing it.

Many of our members will probably have in their homes a copy of Ian Boumphrey's book entitled **Yesterday's West Wirral, Part One**. On the cover is a copy of a similar drawing of the same view and showing the Bath House on the Donkey Stand. Ian has allowed me to scan his publication and have the benefit of his research into this drawing shown below:



Ian discovered that this sketch was made from an original drawing by Charlotte Price in about 1840 and very clearly shows the Bath House on the Donkey Stand. He also found references to the Bath House in James Stonehouse's book "Random Recollections of Old Parkgate". The Bath House was built originally as a Custom House. In about 1780 it became Parkgate's first Assembly House and the social centre for the village. In 1812 a new Assembly Room was opened at the rear of the building now known as Balcony House. The old Assembly Room was converted for sea water baths and then known as the Bath House. Water for the Bath House was collected in large tanks on the beach when the tide was in and pumped up to the Bath House as and when

required. The book also refers to the long wooden pier opposite the George Inn (subsequently the Mostyn Arms Inn/Hotel and later Mostyn House School) and which ran far out into the river for the convenience of those engaged in sailing.

The two drawings provide a particularly good image of another three-storey building which was demolished in 1851, namely the White Lion Inn, which protrudes onto the Parade from the building now known as South Cottage, and is almost opposite the Bath House. In the drawings the White Lion also obscures any view of Balcony House. The White Lion was an early Parkgate building, as it had a date plate of 1708.

The following photograph was probably taken in the 1860's, by which time the Bath House had been demolished but the pier was still in existence. Balcony House is now in view but had not yet received its balcony (fitted in 1868). The two drawings of the Bath House are both remarkably similar and probably therefore give a good depiction of what the building looked like and how large it was.



The buildings along the Parade vary slightly in the drawings when compared with the photograph and could be described as “artistic licence”. Despite this, the drawings are rare and of historic interest.

Michael Potts

Parkgate Then and Now



This photo shows The Parade at high tide, probably in the late 1930s; beyond Nicholls is the former Hilbre House, next to the Union/Ship Hotel.



The same view from the Donkey Stand in June 2019; the former Customs House in Station Road and houses on South Parade have also gone.



By March 2019 this café/restaurant was now 'Salty's'.



A post-war photo of No 1 Mostyn Square, long known as 'Chompers'.



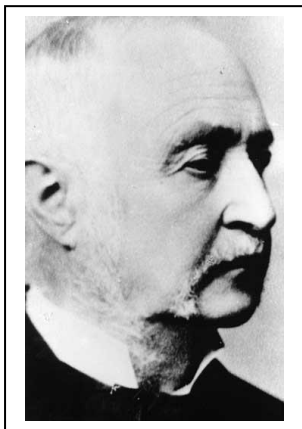
A busy moment: landing the catch at the middle slipway.



A similar view in August 2020: no longer do boats land their catches here.

**The Honourable Henry Holbrook of Talbot House, Parkgate
Politician, Merchant and Humanitarian
*by Anthony Annakin-Smith***

Many people are aware of the connection of Parkgate's Wilfred Grenfell to Labrador and Newfoundland on the east coast of Canada. But there was another local man with strong Canadian connections around the same time who also deserves local recognition – the Honourable Henry Holbrook (*Fig 1*). This article is a short introduction to Holbrook, but it is hoped that, in time, a fuller account can be given of his life and achievements.



***Figure 1: Henry Holbrook:
merchant, politician and friend
to fishermen.***

Holbrook was born near Northwich, Cheshire in, 1820 and, after a much-travelled life as a merchant and politician, retired to Parkgate, where he continued to be active in public life, living in Talbot House on The Parade (*Figure 2*). He was a leading societal figure in both western Canada and Parkgate, as well as being a notable humanitarian. It is a mark of his importance in his adopted Canadian city that flags were lowered there, when they heard of his death at Parkgate in 1902.



***Figure 2: Talbot House on
The Parade where Henry
Holbrook lived for the last
22 years of his life.***

Mercantile and Political Life

Holbrook acquired his business skills as a merchant in Liverpool. From 1854 he was a contractor in Crimea during the war there (1853-56) and was present at the siege and fall of Sebastopol. He subsequently lived in Odessa (Ukraine) for a while. By 1858, though, he was attracted by a gold rush at Fraser Canyon in Victoria in the west of what is today Canada. This region was to be his home until about 1880, although surviving correspondence places him, perhaps briefly, in San Francisco, California in 1859 (where he ordered a large supply of brandy from Christopher Bushell; Bushell was a Liverpool wine merchant who built and lived at Hinderton Hall, Neston).

When Holbrook arrived in Victoria, Canada as we know it today had not yet been formed, consisting instead of several separate provinces and colonies. Moreover, the west coast's commercial, political and technological infrastructure was still in its infancy. This was pioneer country and immigrants were starting to flock there, seeking new opportunities, and would continue to do so for decades to come. Holbrook's entrepreneurial spirit had found a good home and he soon owned a hotel, store-cum-post office, waterfront property and shipping wharves in New Westminster, the then capital of the colony of British Columbia. He drew on his background to name some of his properties, such as the Liverpool Arms saloon and the Liverpool Wharf (*Figure 3*), and his name lives on today in a modern high-rise, the 'Trapp & Holbrook'. He took a great interest in the fishing industry, being a pioneer of salmon canning. At one time he operated over twenty-five boats and employed 300 men.

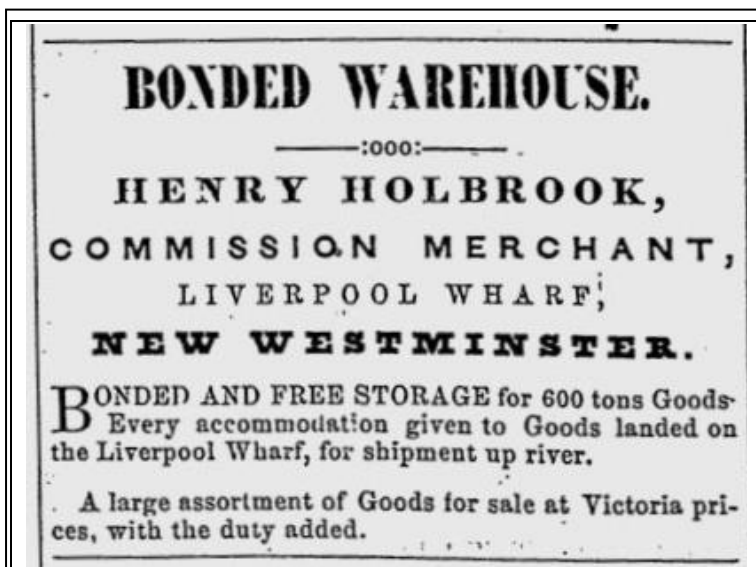


Figure 3.
An advertisement for a warehouse at one of Holbrook's Liverpool-named assets in New Westminster, British Columbia.
Source: The British Columbian, 27 May 1863

Holbrook's business interests drew him into politics. He was mayor of New Westminster several times and was appointed to the first Legislative Council of British Columbia, i.e. its parliament, subsequently holding senior appointments (*Figure 4*). He adopted Canadian citizenship, was a magistrate and gained the title 'Honourable' which he used for the rest of his life. He was deeply involved in the issues surrounding British Columbia joining the Dominion of Canada, which had been formed in 1867, and represented his city in talks on the issue, addressing Canadian parliamentarians in Ottawa. He was also a strong advocate of the Canadian Pacific Railway, a trans-continental line connecting Atlantic ports to the far west for the first time.



*Figure 4:
The members of
British Columbia's
first parliament.
Henry Holbrook is
furthest left.*

A distinguishing feature of Holbrook's speeches was his concern for British Columbia's indigenous peoples. He estimated there were about 40,000 'Indians' and 10,000 whites in the province, and he was concerned about the impact of parliamentary proposals on traditional native activities such as salmon trapping and cranberry harvesting. In discussions about the rights of these communities in anticipation of British Columbia joining the new Canadian Dominion, Holbrook asked that the terms of the agreement specify the right of the indigenous peoples to occupy the land and to enjoy equal protection in law. However, when, in 1870, he proposed a motion protecting their interests his was the sole vote in the face of twenty against.

Holbrook's Life in Parkgate

It seems Holbrook was temporarily in Parkgate in 1871, perhaps knowing he would be seeing his elderly mother, Elizabeth, for the last time. She lived in Talbot House, and he is recorded as being there in the census that year; she died two years later. He must soon have returned to Canada, but he retired

from his life there in 1880, as political and business pressures took a toll on his health, coming to live with his sister at Talbot House. Though he never married, he had a son who took over his Canadian business interests when he retired and who, like his father, became mayor of New Westminster for a while.

Maybe the move to Parkgate rejuvenated Holbrook, for he was to be active in various ways locally and beyond for many years. Again, his humanitarianism can be seen in his advocacy for the rights and welfare of the local fishing community and, even when he was eighty, he was still on Cheshire County Council's Joint Fishery Committee, making use of his intimate knowledge of the fishing industry developed from his time in Canada. Also, he remained a keen and influential advocate of New Westminster and British Columbia specifically and Canada generally, acting in a kind of informal ambassadorial role: he was New Westminster's representative at an important London conference in 1887, and it was said that his activities brought him into contact 'privately and publicly with some of the most influential statesmen and public men in Great Britain'. He appeared at popular meetings, not least in Chester, encouraging people to emigrate to western Canada. A paper he wrote in 1884 for the Liverpool Geological Association on British Columbia's gold mines described the area as the 'garden and golden province of Canada'; other phrases he used to describe his former home included 'God's country' and a 'terrestrial paradise'.

Holbrook's interest in Canada and concern for native peoples were to be matched by Wilfred Grenfell, son of the headmaster of Mostyn House School. Wilfred became a famed medical missionary looking after indigenous coastal communities in Labrador and Newfoundland. He was born in 1865 and did not go to Canada until 1892, so his time in Parkgate and studying medicine in London overlapped with a dozen of Holbrook's years in this country. It seems highly likely that the two met and the worldly Holbrook may even have influenced Grenfell's thinking and future direction.

Throughout his life Holbrook was a devoted freemason. He founded a Lodge in New Westminster in 1861, an occasion commemorated by a medal depicting him which was issued on its 50th anniversary (*Figure 5*). In Parkgate he was leader of the Dee Lodge which met regularly at the Union Hotel (now the Ship). If he had not done so before he would probably have first met Zebby Roscoe there. She was a newly widowed young servant at the hotel; her drowned husband, Charles, had worked in the Holbrook household before becoming a

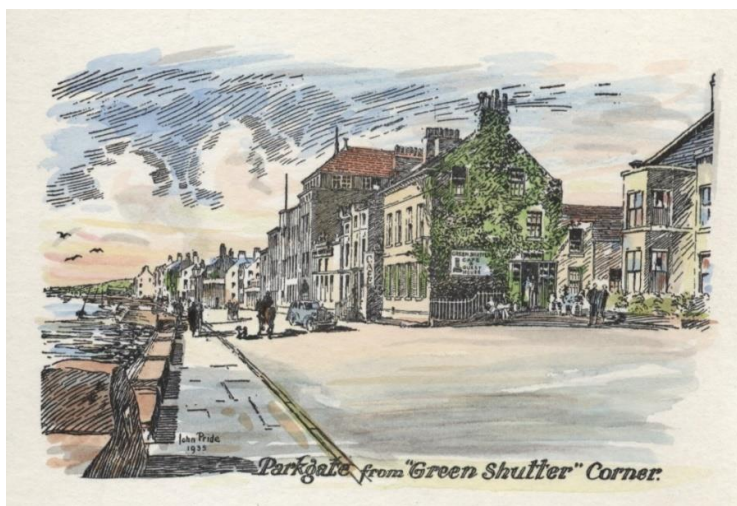
mariner. Soon after her husband died, she moved to New Westminster, joined by her deceased husband's brother, who she married within days of her arrival. There are many questions about her motivations, but there can be little doubt that it was Holbrook who had influenced the choice of destination. (You can read more about Zebby's extraordinary story of love and tragedy at Nestonpast.org). It is indicative of how well-loved Holbrook was locally that in 1887 Parkgate Hall Choir went to Talbot House and gave him gifts 'as a token of their respect and esteem' (Parkgate Hall later became St. Thomas's church).



***Figure 5:
A medal depicting Henry
Holbrook issued on the
50th anniversary of the
Union Lodge which he
founded.***

Henry Holbrook died in 1902 and was buried at Sandbach (where he had gifted two illuminated clock dials for the parish church tower in 1890 in memory of his mother and other family members). He had led a full and rewarding life and many complimentary things were said about him in obituaries, not least that he was 'a staunch friend of the fishermen of the Dee Estuary'.

AAS March 2021



*Talbot House depicted as
the 'Green Shutters Cafe
and Guest House' by
local artist John Pride in
1935*



High Tide, Parkgate

Full moon.

Tide.

Enters gullies,
Slides through reeds,
Runs fast to shore

Marsh birds rise:

Churr, squeal, pipe, reel.
Water oozes eel-like slithering paths,
Bubbles, runs and flows,
Overtakes unwary.

Voles,

Scuttling clockwork mice
Paddle, skim and scurry,
Rush to beat advancing tide
Freeze from swooping gulls.

Marsh weeds,

Rotting,
Floating boats,
Sail on currents swift
Then calm.

Tide

Starts to flow
From shore to sea
Again.
Moon wanes.

Morag Youd

High Tide, Parkgate, by Morag Youd

Heritage Open Days 2021

Saturday 18 and Sunday 19 September

Parkgate Heritage Trail: Guided Walk

Meet at the Ropewalk carpark, Station Road, at 3.00pm

St Thomas's Church is also open to visitors on these dates.

Contacts

If you wish to raise issues of general relevance to the Society, please contact our secretary:

Alan Passmore: Tel: (0151) 336-2917

Email: secretary@parkgatesociety.co.uk

Queries about membership should be addressed to our membership secretary:

Derek Haylock: Tel: (0151) 336-4461

Email: membership@parkgatesociety.co.uk

For queries about litter picks please get in touch with Dr Peter Enevoldson; environmental@parkgatesociety.co.uk

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

Alan Passmore, tel: (0151) 336-2917 or email:

secretary@parkgatesociety.co.uk

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The Parkgate Society is a registered charity, No. 503718, founded 1972.

Don't forget our website: www.parkgatesociety.co.uk

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