

AUGUST 2000



President  
Rt.Hon  
Viscount Leverhulme KG

# WIRRAL MATTERS

NEWS FROM

**The Wirral Society**

(Estab. 1928)

The Wirral Committee of the  
Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE)

We Bring this Newsletter to members with a heavy heart. Seldom can a society have been faced with the sudden tragic loss of its two chief officers within the space of less than a fortnight. Our long-serving President Lord Leverhulme, died suddenly on the 4th July. Our much-revered Chairman, Keith Davidson, died equally suddenly after a short illness, just twelve days later on the 16th.



Lord Leverhulme was president or patron of over 50 societies and organisations in the county of Cheshire but there cannot be many which could claim as long an association with him as could the Wirral Society. He became our President after inheriting the title in 1949, so following in the footsteps of

his father, the 2nd Viscount, who became President when the Society was formed in 1928. This meant that for over 70 years no other name but Viscount Leverhulme has headed our notepaper.

Lord Leverhulme was, of course, a large landowner. Some of the lands and property he inherited but most he himself acquired. The fact that much of south Wirral is still very attractive countryside is due to his grandfather's initiative on buying up farms and land as it became available and the subsequent meticulous stewardship of the Leverhulme Estates.

The estates in Wirral cover some 1400 acres and when it was decided that a motorway (M53) should slice through the lengths of the peninsula he threw his weight behind the Society's successful efforts to have a less-damaging eastern route chosen. It meant that it would inevitably cross his land. But Lord Leverhulme was determined that it should not be the intrusive scar that characterised most other motorways. He promptly employed his own team of highway engineers who designed a route which took the road below ground level for a lengthy stretch so lessening the visual impact.

That was typical of the man.

Lord Leverhulme was proud to be a man of Wirral and was greatly irritated when the local government reorganisation of 1972 caused his beloved Thorton Hough and Thorton Manor to be 'evicted' from Cheshire and 'relocated' in the new fangled County of Merseyside.

His staff and his tenants were fiercely loyal and protective towards him and tell of his many kindnesses, his modesty and the way he always put their interests above all else. A most gracious man, he will be much missed.



The death of our Chairman, Keith Davidson, was a truly tragic and devastating blow. We feel greatly for his wife, June, and his family and offering our condolences, whilst utterly sincere, seems, under the circumstances, to be inadequate.

Keith had been Chairman of the Society Executive Committee

Vice-Chairman and committee member for many years before that. It is hard to believe he is no longer with us.

He was a much-respected architect with a practice in Liverpool and his professional knowledge and experience was of invaluable assistance to the Society on many occasions when planning matters were being discussed.

Although not Wirral-born Keith had lived in Caldy for well over 30 years and his love of Wirral and the conviction that it needed protecting from the excesses of avaricious developers was as fierce as anyone's.

At his funeral service, his rector, the Rev. Roger Clark, said: 'A few weeks ago I visited Keith at his home in Caldy. Already he was quite unwell but I was welcomed with charm, that gentleness and that openness that marked the man. Although he was unwell there was a quiet excitement about Keith as we talked about architecture, style, shape and space, and about particular buildings in Liverpool and on the Wirral. Architecture and design was Keith's work but it was a work he loved. It was an abiding interest, it was part of him. That is the memory that is uppermost for me - a quiet, polite and charming man, talking of the things he knew and loved and appreciated.'

We, on the Society Executive Committee will remember him for all those reasons but also for the way he conducted our committee meetings. He made them very happy occasions. The lighter side of life was never far from his mind and many a serious discussion that looked in danger of becoming boring was lightened with an amusing but apt anecdote or joke of which he had an extraordinary repertoire.

His passing has left a huge hole in the Society which will be difficult to fill.

# WIRRAL SOCIETY SCHOOLS AWARDS

## The First Winners

One of the ideas which Keith Davidson long nurtured was that the Society should do all it could to educate and encourage the younger generation to appreciate the need for protecting the environment in general and that of the Wirral Peninsula in particular. To that end we instituted an award of £250 and a framed certificate to the school which, in the opinion of the Society, had made an outstanding contribution towards protecting and improving the Wirral environment in some way.

The project must have involved a considerable input from the pupils and have been undertaken in the year prior to the closing date which, this year, was 31st January.

In the event, we found that many schools were too occupied with other projects and with their normal work to give the matter special attention and the response was somewhat disappointing.

However, there was one school which shone out like a beacon. Grove Street Primary School in New Ferry, with 365 pupils between 3 and 11 years of age, had risen in a big way to a challenge raised by pupils, staff and parents that they should embark on a programme of improving their environment and health, both in the local community and globally.

A 'Mission Statement' was drawn up which included the vows 'I will work with everyone in my school to make it a happy place where we are kind, caring and thoughtful towards one another' and 'We will continue to care about our environment at home, at school and in the wider world.'

To achieve these goals a number of projects were initiated. Supported by parents and governors of the school a *Grounds for Celebration* project aimed at improving the school grounds to provide physical and mental stimulation for pupils and to turn them into an educational resource that will help promote environmental awareness, health and safety both in school and in the wider community.

The *Energy Conservation Programme* included the monitoring of the school's energy usage by a group of six pupils who were charged with reporting their results and ideas for any economy to the governing body. The *Litter Watch* project (in association with Groundwork Wirral) aimed at improving the local environment by reducing litter. Concurrent with these ventures the school runs a Health Promotion project with a special Health Week each year when all aspects of health are covered from diet to the workings of the human body to road safety and environmental awareness. During the year pupils from the school entered the 1999 Children's Parliament on the Environment contest with a presentation entitled 'What can you and your community do to improve the environment to ensure that everyone becomes healthier'. Their entry took them to the regional finals and they were later invited to repeat their presentation to Wirral's Local Agenda 21 Forum.

It was felt that the whole approach to the problems of the environment by the Head Teacher, Mrs Na'amat Little, and her staff at Grove Street Primary School coupled with the resultant enthusiasm of the children was outstanding and we were delighted to declare them very worthy winners of this first Wirral Society Schools Award.

\*

*Editors Note:* By happy coincidence this is not the first time the Society has been associated with Grove Street Primary School. Back in 1994 all twenty-four pupils in Class 6 each wrote a personal letter to Wirral Council Environmental Department drawing their attention to the fact that there was a lot of litter blowing about outside their school but there was no bin for people to put their litter in. There was also a shortage of litter bins on The Esplanade where many visitors come to look at the Mersey scene. By chance their letters coincided with an offer from the Society to the Council to meet the cost of three litter bins for installation where most needed. The offer was made after it was reported that the bins installed at the Society's expense in various Wirral lay-bys were being used. Wirral's Recycling Offer was therefore in the happy position of being able to tell the pupils that their bins could be provided. One was installed in Grove Street and two on The Esplanade - all bearing a plaque acknowledging the Society's donation.



Grove Street Primary School

## SUMMER MEETING

The Executive Committee sends its profound apologies to all members for the Summer Meeting that never was. It would be very easy to blame the weather and the absence of any real summer weather as we used to know it years ago but the fact is that for all the scratching of heads and the collective cudgling of the Committee's brains we failed to come up with a suitable venue. The trouble is that more than 70 years' existence we've been everywhere!

We have drawn members' attention to this problem in past issues of this newsletter and have asked for suggestions. Alas, we had no response or, at least, no feasible suggestion was forthcoming and, sadly, we were faced with no other alternative but to abandon the idea.

We don't feel too badly about this since, this year - to mark the Millennium - we arranged a programme of four Victor Smith Memorial lectures instead of the agreed two. We would like to think that members consider that fair compensation.

And talking of the lectures don't forget those still to come in October and November.

That on the 16th October is incorporated with our 71st Annual General Meeting at the Heatherlands Restaurant, Irby, when (following an excellent hot pot supper) Elizabeth Davey will talk about and show slides to illustrate *Wirral before Victoria* (sub-titled *Farmers, Fishermen and Alehouses*). Those who heard Elizabeth's fascinating talk at last year's AGM will not want to miss this one.

The final lecture of the year on 16th November (at Wallasey Golf Club) will be given by Mr Graham Fisher who will talk about *Victorian Fantasies*.

## AERIAL BATTLES

Planning applications for the erection of telecommunication masts by the mobile telephone companies continue to be made at increasingly frequent intervals. All applications are, of course, considered on their respective merits and in not a few cases meet with hostile reception from local residents. In the main, they are worried about the health hazards which the masts may present (to which nobody seems to know the answer) rather than any environmental impact. But, of course, it is the latter aspect which concerns the Society and our Planning Liaison Officer visits proposed sites, reports to the Executive Committee on what he finds and the Committee decides whether to support or object. We have felt for some time, however, that an overall official policy should be drawn up to deal with such applications and, in fact, have said so to Wirral Council planning department. However, we feel that all planning departments should identify areas where masts would not be welcome under any circumstances and areas where they would, generally speaking, not be too intrusive.

Recently, we were pleased to learn an independent inquiry is expected to propose that local councils should be given full control over the building of new mobile phone masts.

The Government has, somewhat belatedly, recognised that the erection of telephone masts is a highly controversial matter and has urged the telephone companies to talk to each other and, where possible, share facilities on a single mast. To date, however, there is little evidence that much notice is being taken of the suggestion.

One telephone company, Orange, has however, found a way of installing their antennae in a national park to the approval of the authority concerned. They have made it look like an environment-friendly tree-trunk-like pole.

In the Yorkshire Dales National Park they have erected a 26 foot-high mast less than half the height of the existing masts - which is made of fibreglass disguised with an artificial wood grain. All the technology is housed in a 'discreet' green box at the base. This has found favour where previous suggestions for making the masts look like artificial trees have not.

There is no doubt that telephone masts, like telegraph poles and electricity pylons are here to stay as a future of modern life - until something different comes along.

## WEBSITE INSIGHT

Our Website wizard, Nick Lauro, is seeking members' help. Members with cameras which can take good colour pix. He urgently requires views of Wirral - both rural and urban - for insertion into the Society's website. He reports: 'I have started work on the planned interactive map of Wirral. When finished visitors to the site will be able to roll their mouse pointer over a Wirral place name and click on to a page featuring photographs of that area and some brief text about it.'

The idea of course, is to whet the appetite of people surfing the net who might click on to Wirral and wonder what sort of a place it is. It will also be of great interest to ex-Wirralians wherever they are.

Nick has also recently acquired some special software which has enabled him to make a start on the formidable task of archiving the complete contents of *Wirral Matters* from its first issue in Spring 1992 for inclusion in the website. The website has (at the time of going to press) recorded over 500 'hits' and brought in a number of new members as a result. It also brought the *Wirral Chronicle* to Nick's door asking for an interview.

If any member can help Nick with the loan of photographs he will be delighted to hear from you. His telephone number is: 0151 606 9068.

E-mail address: [thedrumdoctor@nlauro.19.co.uk](mailto:thedrumdoctor@nlauro.19.co.uk)

## GREEN STAYS GREEN

It was heartening to read in the local press that Wirral Council will not be supporting suggestions made by some members of the North West Regional Assembly that it may be necessary to remove land from the Green Belt to allow for new industry or housing. Councillor Steve Foulkes, the leader of the Wirral Council, described the Green Belt as 'Wirral's green lung' and says that it is protected by the Unitary Development Plan.

Wirral's UDP, which controls planning matters in the Borough, is only valid until March next year.

We must ensure that the Green Belt does not tighten when it is reappraised. Members of the Executive Committee will shortly be meeting a senior member of Wirral Council's Planning Department to discuss what action the Society might best take in support of the Council's stance

## THE SHOTWICK ROAD DEVELOPMENT

What has come to be known as the Shotwick Road Development is an application by the Welsh Development Agency for outline planning consent for industrial development of an area of land to the north-east of the Shotwick road - which runs round the north side of the Deeside Industrial Park to the new Dee Bridge - and between it and the Welsh border. It would bring industrial development to within some 300 metres of Shotwick Church and the rising ground that marks the edge of the old Wirral Peninsula down in that far corner.

This proposal has been hovering about for the past three years or more, some of the delay being due to the local authority changes in Wales. It is now going to be examined at a Public Inquiry in September.

There is a great deal of opposition from many bodies on the English side of the border. CPRE Chester Branch has come out strongly against the plan and intends to be represented at the inquiry and other protesters include Burton Residents' Association, Puddington Parish Council and various agricultural interests. The Wirral Society has added its voice to the chorus. The land is Grade 2 agricultural land and vital to a pig-breeding station at Puddington which is of international stature. Any suggestion that the opposition is just NIMBYism is countered by pointing out that this is not the Wirral's 'backyard' but its front garden. Its impact on the Welsh environment is non-existent.

One of the main grounds of objection is that WDA has not shown any real need for extra industrial development land that justified sacrificing greenfield land of this quality in such a sensitive setting.

We will report on the proceedings of the Public Inquiry in due course though the final decision will probably not be reached until early next year.

R.G.L.

## PIER HEAD FERRY TERMINAL

The Pier Head row rumbles on. Where to locate the proposed Ferry Terminal for the Irish boat is still a matter of much argument. The Mersey Docks and Harbour Company has received planning permission from Liverpool City Council for a scheme which would involve the filling in of the old Floating Roadway and establishing a car marshalling area and new terminal facilities on part of the Pier Head. Crucial to the plan is the closure of a footpath and bridge in St. Nicholas Place on the north side of the Liver Building but the Millennium Walks Committee (originally established to fight for more public access to the waterfront) successfully challenged that aspect in the High Court. The judge agreed with their claim that land which was dedicated for public use in 1871 (and again in 1921) should not be built upon.

The MDHC has now lodged an amended plan but, despite the judge's ruling, it still calls for the closure of the footpath and bridge.

The protesters' case is that the Dock Company already possesses enough land of its own nearby on which a marshalling area could be established and any incursion on to public land is unacceptable.

In view of the fact that the City Council has received some 150 protests from various organisations and individuals - including The Wirral Society, the Merseyside Civic Society, Victoria Society and the Merseyside

Pensioners' Association - a Public Inquiry has been ordered. The Dock Company claims that independent market research carried out on their behalf showed 77% in favour of the scheme. The revised plans have also been strongly criticised by the influential Liverpool Vision, the organisation set up to oversee the regeneration of Liverpool's city centre.

The revised scheme also envisages the use of a floating passenger terminal which will be towed to the Mersey from Scandinavia and tied up at the SuperSeaCat landing stage.

The Public Inquiry is expected to take place in October.

The Society has been taking a keen interest in this matter, despite it being 'over the water' since we believe that the future of the world-famous Pier Head, currently being considered for World Heritage Status, is something which concerns people on both sides of the Mersey.

## RO-RO NO GO

The Mersey Docks and Harbour Company, it would seem, regards the banks of the Mersey Estuary as their private domain to which the general public is not welcome. None of their various schemes over the years has included any provision for public access to the waterfront on either side of the water. This is again the case for the Ro-Ro terminal planned for the Twelve Quays site. If it goes ahead as planned there will be no public access to the river at this point; a point where the residents of Wirral would have the finest view of the Liverpool skyline.

The matter has been raised following the recent visit of the QE2 to the Mersey when people who decided that the Twelve Quays area would provide the best view of the ship discovered that the Dock Company had erected barriers denying access.

A campaign has been launched to persuade the Wirral Council planning department to try and do something about it. It is being vigorously supported by Birkenhead's MP, Mr Frank Field, who wants to know: 'Why should it be so difficult to run the ferry terminal and have a section open to the public at the waterfront? It is appalling (he went on to say) that one of the great sights of Europe is to be restricted because they want to build a lorry park right up to the waterfront.'

The answer to that, we would guess, is that the Dock Company never gave that aspect the slightest thought when the terminal was being planned. After all, their object in life is to run a successful port and the provision of public recreational amenities, they would almost certainly argue, is none of their business. In this case their spokesman responded to the complaint by pointing out, not very helpfully, that people on the other side looking towards Wirral would have something to look at other than the derelict site the areas has been for the past two decades. He also added that access to the Twelve Quays site had been terminated some by the erstwhile Merseyside Development Corporation.

The Wirral Society supports the campaigners in their protest. We, too, feel strongly that there should be more access to the Wirral waterfront between Woodside and Seacombe. We commend the Development Corporation for constructing the length of the promenade towards Cammel Laird's and are grateful for the short length they provide in the other direction. Before that, short of taking a ferry trip, Birkenhead residents had to go to Seacombe or Rock Ferry to get anywhere near the river.

We hope that the MDHC will heed the concerted protests and do something about it, though we say that without much conviction.

Editor: Alan Brack, 47 Upton Road, Claughton, Wirral CH43 8TQ Tel/Fax: 0151 652 5510  
Hon Secretary: Eric Sand, 96 Meets Drive, West Kirby, Wirral CH48 5DB Tel/Fax: 0151 632 3119