



# WIRRAL MATTERS

JOURNAL OF THE WIRRAL SOCIETY  
The Wirral Committee of CPRE

Editor: Alan Brack, 47 Upton Road, Birkenhead, CH43 8TQ Tel/Fax: 0151 652 5530  
Hon. Secretary: Eric Szani, 96 Marsh Drive, West Kirby CH48 5DU Tel/Fax: 0151 632 3119

AUTUMN 1999

## THE 70th A.G.M.

The last Annual General Meeting of the century. The last AGM of the millennium. It called for something special and indeed it was. We had the biggest turnout for several years, a splendid talk and a hot-pot supper that might have been made by the good and great Delia herself. And, agreed many members, it was a splendid social occasion, too.

The speaker was Elizabeth Davey of West Kirby who probably knows more about the history, geology and ecology of the Wirral Peninsula than anyone else and her talk on "The Changing Face of Wirral" accompanied by some splendid slides, was rivetting. Beginning at the beginning when the Peninsula was - as she put it - 'just a few sandstone islands in a sea of boulder clay' she explained how the character and face of Wirral was fashioned and changed by the needs of the folk who lived there and, in turn, how those needs were determined by what was available. Step by step she brought us through the ages to the present day.

That is a simplistic précis of her hour's talk and there were many in the audience who, though they have lived in Wirral all, or most of, their lives, learned something new.

We are most grateful to Elizabeth for her contribution to a highly successful evening and we are delighted to report that she has been elected to the Executive Committee.

### Chairman's Report

Keith Davidson stated that whilst the Wirral Society had been very active during the year in dealing with environmental matters the highlight was undoubtedly the great success of the Victor Smith Memorial Lectures held in January and March. The inaugural lecture, given by Gavin Hunter, was, by chance, on the subject of The Leverhulme Estates and our President, Viscount Leverhulme, kindly accepted our invitation to attend. Gavin Hunter was excellent and held the attention of the packed house.

The second lecture given by Grant Luscombe, Director of the National Wildflower Centre, was equally successful and our Summer Meeting was an innovative coach trip to see the Wildflower Centre at Court Hey in Knowsley.

All the arrangements for these meetings were made by Dr Lilian Potter and Audrey Platt and we are very grateful to them for their hard work. Thanks are also due to Wallasey Golf Club who kindly allowed us to use their splendid clubhouse for the lectures.

### Bus Shelters

This year started with an appeal to Merseytravel to tone down its bright yellow bus shelters in sensitive areas such as Hamilton Square, by the Grand Entrance to Birkenhead Park and in conservation areas like Bidston Village. Although they have now changed them to green in the conservation areas it seems that they are not required to obtain planning consent to erect shelters where needed and can please themselves what they look like.

### Wirral Matters

We have been publishing *Wirral Matters* for the past year without the generous subsidy we used to enjoy from UML Limited. This has placed an added burden on Alan Brack yet the quality seems to increase with each issue. Our thanks are also due to him for his preparation of the Minutes of our Executive Committee meetings.

### Leas School site

We now know the result of the appeal into the Leas School site. We lost the battle but we owe a vote thanks to Geoff Loram, our Planning Liaison Officer, who devoted a considerable amount of time and work to the matter and for his attendance at the subsequent Public Inquiry at which he gave evidence.

The sad saga of the Leas School site illustrates several issues, particularly the complete failure of the Education Committee to grasp the opportunity of acquiring the site for the benefit of the very cramped West Kirby Grammar School.

We cannot criticise the Wirral Council Planning Department for giving Outline Planning consent for the building of a nursing home on the site but we heavily criticise them for the Detailed Permission they gave to a quite monstrous and unviable nursing home scheme when there was demonstrably a lack of commercial interest. It was this act which caused almost everyone except ourselves to say that housing would be preferable to the approved scheme. The plan could never have succeeded at

*continued overleaf*

the time when nursing homes were closing down. The result of this incompetence is the Wirral has lost 5 acres of Green Belt to housing.

#### Stanley Hotel, Hoylake

We lodged an objection to the plan for demolishing the elegant former Stanley Hotel on the grounds of density. The Council's own guidelines lay down maximum density of 20 dwellings per hectare in neighbouring Meols Drive yet the density which received approval for this site is around 88 dwellings per hectare. Although Wirral Council, for some reason, asked the Merseyside Civic Society for their opinion on the scheme the Wirral Society was not consulted. In the event the comments of the Civic Society were exactly in line with ours but, of course, they were ignored. The Stanley Hotel building has been sacrificed for commercial gain and, sadly, this corner of Hoylake will change for the worse.

#### Eleanor Road, Bidston

Congratulations are due to Geoff Loram on the marvellous work he did in establishing a Development Brief for Eleanor Road which runs across the lower slope of Bidston Hill. Our attention was drawn to the need for urgent action by Lilian Potter and Professor Bill Middlebrook of the Eleanor Road Residents' Association. 'In-fill' development was rapidly changing the character of the road and that part of Bidston Hill. To their credit the Planning Department acted uncharacteristically swiftly and agreed with Geoff's suggestion that guidelines be laid down as to density and character of any further developments.

#### Liverpool Pier Head

The Society made representation to the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company in support of The Millennium Walk Committee against the Dock Company's plan to acquire part of the Pier Head - a public open space - to build a marshalling area for motorcar traffic to Ireland and the Isle of Man.

We have long preached that we must not be parochial and we joined the protest against the plan as we feared for the future of the Pier Head, an internationally known spectacle of which we are all proud. As a result of our protest your Chairman and Alan Brack, together with Terry Edgar and Joy Hockey of the Wallasey Civic Society, were invited to meet the Dock Company's Chief Planning Officer to discuss the matter.

We made the point that we believed an attempt to accommodate a ferry terminal and car-park anywhere near the Pier Head was wrong since traffic to and from Ireland and the Isle of Man is expected to increase in the near future. We made a case for the terminal's siting on the Twelve Quays site in Wallasey where a Ro-Ro terminal is to be built. This was discounted by the Dock Company without giving any indication that it has seriously been considered as a possibility. The Dock Company's plan involved the closing of St. Nicholas Place in Liverpool for which they have already received planning permission from the erstwhile Merseyside Development Company. This was subsequently and successfully challenged in the courts by

The Millennium Walk Committee and completely wrecked the MDHC plan.

We were very surprised to learn that the MDHC planners had not even paid a visit to the Dublin terminal to inspect the situation there. They would have found that the terminal is located two miles from the city centre.

#### Other Matters

Our attempt at recruiting business houses in Wirral as Corporate Members proved to be a disappointment.

\*\*\*

We are concerned with the state of the Bidston Lighthouse and would like to see it refurbished. The Lighthouse is located within the bounds of Bidston Observatory (now known as the Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory) and Eric Sanné and I are due to hold a meeting shortly with Dr.Hill, the Director and the station secretary.

\*\*\*

During the year we were pleased to donate the sum of £100 to the Friends of Flaybrick and this has been used to mount an exhibition on the work of the eminent Victorian astronomer, Dr Isaac Roberts who lies buried in Flaybrick. The exhibition will be touring Wirral Libraries from the beginning of next year.

\*\*\*

Committee Member Nick Lauro is investigating the possibility of the Society having its own website.

G.K.Davidson  
Chairman

*(The Chairman's very comprehensive report has, of necessity, been abridged.-Ed.)*

## VICTOR SMITH MEMORIAL LECTURE

To make the Millennium a memorable year in the annals of the Society we are pleased to announce that no less than four Victor Smith lectures have been arranged. Two will take place in the spring and the others will be in the autumn with one of the latter being part of the Annual General Meeting. That, of course, will be held in the Heatherland Court Restaurant in Irby and the others will, as this year, be held in Wallasey Golf Club who are kindly allowing us to use their club house and facilities again.

Robert Philpott of the Field Archaeology Section of Liverpool Museum will begin the series in January with a talk on the Roman period. This will be followed in March by Paul Booth of the School of History, Liverpool University, who will speak about life on Medieval Wirral and Cheshire. Continuing the historical theme, in October, Elizabeth Davey of Birkenhead High School (whose talk at the AGM was so well received) will talk about aspects of the Tudor period and the series will end in November with Graeme Fisher, Vice-president of Chester Civic Trust and Chairman of the Liverpool Group of the Victorian Society talking about Victorian architecture.

The actual dates will be shown in the Membership Card for next and a reminder will be sent to all members nearer the time of each lecture.

## TREE DONATION SCHEME

A popular way of providing a memorial to a relative or friend is to purchase a bench dedicated to their memory and it seems not to be widely known that memorial seats may be purchased and displayed with an appropriate plaque in all Wirral's cemeteries. The benches are six feet long and an inscribed plaque measuring 7 1/2" x 2" with up to 140 letters can be added. Generally the bench will be placed where requested by a relative or family friend whenever possible. Each bench will be regularly maintained for a period of 20 years although the Council cannot accept responsibility for acts of vandalism.

The current cost of providing a bench and plaque is £490. An alternative method of remembering a loved one, however, lies in planning a commemorative tree and Wirral Council operates a Tree Donation Scheme. Donated trees will be used to enhance the overall appearance of the cemetery and although the final decision as to the actual location of the trees must rest with the Registrar personal wishes will be taken into account whenever possible. They cannot be planted on graves or in areas where cremated remains are interred or where they are likely to interfere with such areas.

Trees will normally be planted between December and the end of March and, although under no obligation to do so, the Council will normally replace a tree should it need replacing within a year. The trees supplied will normally be between 12 - 14 feet in height. Requests for planting a tree during the current planting season should be made before the end of February.

The cost of a tree is £60 and the cost of a memorial plaque is £35 and donors have a choice of Italian Alder, Cherry, Maple, Hornbeam, Rowan, Thorn, Crab Apple or White Beam.

Applications should be made to Superintendent at Landican Cemetery. Telephone Number 0151 677 2361.

## THE PIER HEAD

The campaign waged by The Millennium Walks Committee who successfully convinced a judge that the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company had no right to close a public right of way in their plan to build a car marshalling yard on the Pier Head has forced MDHC to think again. It has now been reported that it is planned to find space for the needs of the SeaScat services to Dublin and the Isle of Man boats by making use of the land presently occupied by pay and display parking bays and by filling in the old Floating Roadway.

At the time of writing no details are available but it is said that the new plan will not require the relocation of the Titanic Memorial nor the use of any public space.

MDHC have promised that when the plans are completed members of the public and organisations will be asked for their views. We hope they bear in mind the fact that the Pier Head is in the running for World Heritage Status and that the scheme they come up with must be worthy of the Pier Head as a whole.

The Society's Chairman and the Press Officer must be forgiven a wry smile. When they met the Dock Company's Chief Architect they were assured that "every possible site had been thoroughly investigated" and there was no alternative whatsoever to their original plan.

## HOOTON HANGARS

A few weeks ago The Society was contacted by the Griffin Trust, an organisation based in one of the three former aircraft hangers on the site occupied by Vauxhall Motors in Ellesmere Port. The Griffin Trust, was set up a few years ago by a few enthusiasts intent on restoring old Second World War vehicles and equipment. They have been given notice by Vauxhall that their tenure of one hangar would shortly be ended as it was planned to demolish the hangers and use the site for storing new cars awaiting delivery. They asked for the Society's support in saving the hangars which are the only reminder that the site was once Hooton Aerodrome and, during the war, became RAF Hooton, the home base of the famous 610 Squadron.

The hangars, it transpires, are of a type known as 'Belfast hangars' and are the most complete group of First World War aviation buildings anywhere in the country and, earlier in the year, English Heritage recommended that their Grade II listing should be upgraded to Grade II\*.

Hooton Park Aerodrome (as it was originally called) has its place firmly in the annals of aviation history. It was established during the early days of flying and during the 1914-18 war was a base for the Royal Flying Corps. When the famous Boy Scout World Jamboree was held in Arrowe Park in 1929 it was attended by the then Prince of Wales who journeyed from London by air to Hooton largely to popularise flying as a means of travel. It was also a host to the attempts to establish Hooton as a major airport.

When the Second World War broke out Hooton became an RAF base and housed three Auxiliary Air Force Units -633 Air Observation Post Squadron, 610 (County of Chester) Squadron and 611 (West Lancs) Squadron. 610 and 611 Squadrons were moved to the south of England and distinguished themselves in the Battle of Britain. The aerodrome also housed the firm of Martin Hearn Limited which, at its peak, employed 5000 people repairing and servicing aircraft. And for 15 years the skies of Wirral were alive with the noise of Meteor jets.

For several years after the war, before the arrival of Vauxhall, Battle of Britain Day every September was celebrated in style and drew vast crowds.

The campaign to save the hangars has brought backing from former Second World War fighter pilots and aviation societies and we understand that the Ellesmere Port and Neston Council has received over 2000 supporting letters. One suggestion is that they should become a North West Aviation Heritage Museum.

## ON THE SUPER HIGHWAY

If you have ever wanted to inspect a planning application and have jibbed at going all the way to the Planning Department at Wallasey Town Hall or Ellesmere Port Civic Centre you are not alone. Wirral Council have recognised this and, most sensibly, they are now putting the applications on the Internet. Not everyone has a PC, of course, though the number who have is growing by the hour but most people know someone who has one and would be willing to access the information for you. However, the Council appreciate that this would not always be possible and they are installing the services in every Wirral library. It is the first council in the UK to do this. Information can be accessed by going to [irdss.wirral.gov.uk](http://irdss.wirral.gov.uk) and selecting 'Planning Applications'

*continued overleaf*

## BEQUEST

Earlier in the year we were surprised and delighted to receive a letter from a solicitor in Prestatyn to say that the late Mrs Annie Blodwen Bennett (his aunt) had left the generous sum of £300 to the Wirral Society in her will. We were at first disappointed - and not a little mystified - to find no mention of this lady's name in our membership records. Subsequent inquiries, however, have revealed all.

We learned from Mr Lloyd Jones that Mrs Bennett died in January this year at the age of 91. For much of her life she lived in Allerton (where she played the organ at the Welsh Presbyterian Church). Her family was Welsh and she was Welsh-speaking. After her retirement she went back to North Wales where she stayed for 17 years.

None of this explained her interest in The Wirral Society but then we learned that during her working life she had been legal secretary to the Senior Partner of Alsop Stevens Bateman, the famous firm of Liverpool solicitors. And the Senior Partner of the firm was none other than our much-esteemed late Vice-president, W. Victor Smith.

There is no doubt that as Victor Smith's right-hand lady she would have heard all about the Society and probably did some unofficial work for it.

To that degree her bequest was also a mark of her regard and affection for her old boss. We are delighted that we can make full acknowledgement of her generosity.

## 'T WAS EVER THUS

This year CHESHIRE LIFE magazine has been celebrating its 65th year of publication and it is interesting to look back at its first issue in 1934 for it contained a contribution from Mrs A. Joan Royden, the then Hon. Secretary of the Cheshire Branch of CPRE. Joan Royden was also, of course, the Hon. Secretary and Founder of the Wirral Society. Did she, we wonder, give up the secretaryship of the Society to take on the CPRE job or did she do both? We don't know but it is interesting that the Society's present Hon. Secretary, Eric Sanné, is also the current Chairman of CPRE Cheshire Branch.

Be that as it may, it is fascinating to read that what she wrote all those years ago is not inappropriate today. Consider these extracts.

*"Too often it has been thought that amenity is a luxury which must always give way to questions of finance. To regard the matter in this light is to view the whole problem from the wrong angle. The weakness of the argument lies in the fact that it suggests that good taste is dependent on the amount of money available. The (Cheshire) Branch has always believed that the necessity for economy is not incompatible with the demands of good taste. This view was strongly supported in the Ministry of Health Housing Manual, 1927, which contained the following statement: "With a little care it is possible, even within the limits of strict economy, to avoid the grotesque and ugly buildings which so frequently disfigure the English countryside."*

*Unsuitable development has certainly contributed more largely than any other cause to loss of charm and character in both urban and rural districts. We have reason to be grateful to Mr Neville Chamberlain, Minister of Health in 1927, for exploding the myth that good taste is beyond our means, and for pointing out that poor development is due to lack of care and knowledge, not lack of money."*

In pursuance of this belief the Cheshire Branch formed two advisory building panels - one for east Cheshire and one for the west - which offered to give free advice on any plans submitted to them. They also supported a Manchester Society of Architects scheme through which any builder could buy designs for small houses at a nominal fee. The object being to "assist in the preservation of the countryside by supplying architectural guidance at a very low cost." A pamphlet (price 2d) was also published dealing with design and giving a list of suitable and unsuitable materials for the different districts of the country.

Miss Royden continued...

*"The other activities of the Branch are too numerous to deal with here. In all its propaganda it never ceases to point out that sound development on the right lines cannot spoil the countryside and it may add to its character and that much can be done to improve the appearance of petrol stations and to control advertisements and hoardings, while it continues to emphasise that the cure for litter lies entirely with each individual...Cheshire has county which can compare favourably with that of any other country. In asking for the interest of those who live in Cheshire to protect what is of the utmost value to them we cannot believe that we are asking for more than will be willingly given. If we are proud of our county we have a responsibility towards protecting it".*

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.

### WIRRAL SOCIETY COMMITTEE 1999 ~ 2000

CHAIRMAN	G. K. DAVIDSON
VICE CHAIRMAN	R. G. TANN
HON. SECRETARY	E. N. SANNÉ
HON. TREASURER	P. W. BOWLER
PLANNING LIAISON	
OFFICER	R. G. LORAM
PRESS OFFICER	A. BRACK
MEMBERSHIP	
SECRETARY	MRS. A. PLATT
EDUCATION	
OFFICER	G. PENDLETON
	and
	N. LAURO, Dr. D. BRITT, MRS E. DAVEY
	Ex officio
	T. EDGAR AND MRS J. HOCKEY (WALLASEY CIVIC SOCIETY)
	Dr. L. POTTER (ELEANOR ROAD RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION)
	MRS. C. JAMESON (HOYLAKES CIVIC SOCIETY)

THE COMMITTEE MEETS ON THE SECOND  
WEDNESDAY OF EACH MONTH.