

DECEMBER 2000



President

# WIRRAL MATTERS

NEWS FROM

**The Wirral Society**

(Estab. 1928)

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

## BUY ONE - GET TWO FREE!

THAT was the unbeatable offer we made to members with the notification of our 71st Annual General Meeting. Buy a delicious hot-pot supper at £6.25 and enjoy not only the AGM but also another fascinating Victor Smith Memorial Lecture.

It was an offer that members rapidly snapped up. Over the past few years our AGM attendances have been no more than 30-35 (and on one occasion it was in the low twenties) but this time, in view of the attraction of the Victor Smith lecture, we estimated 50-60. But that estimate was soon surpassed and the requests and cheques continued to pop through the letter-box of our Programme Secretary, Lillian Potter, by every post. Every day she had to telephone the Heatherlands Court restaurant to ask anxiously 'Can you manage another two (or four or six or - whatever)? The most the restaurant has catered for in the past had been 95, they said - but 'no problem'. The final attendance was a record, heart-warming 102 (almost double last year's) which, we imagine, may well have been the largest attendance at the Society AGM since it was founded in 1928.

Before the commencement of the meeting Rod Tann, the acting Chairman, spoke of the tragic loss of both Lord Leverhulme, our President, and Keith Davidson, our Chairman, and invited all present to stand for a few moments in silent tribute.

The Victor Smith Lecture was once again given by that most knowledgeable Wirral historian (and member of the Executive Committee) Elizabeth Davey who, of course, was also the speaker at last year's AGM. There seems to be no end to the aspects of Wirral's past life on which Elizabeth can speak informatively and she comes armed with a splendid collection of slides to illustrate her points. This time, the eye-catching title of her talk was *Farmers, Fishermen and Alehouses* which proved to be an explanatory and fascinating commentary on how life on the peninsula changed from medieval to Victorian times.

### CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT

The Chairman's Annual Report was given by Rod Tann. He spoke of the planning issues with which the Society had been concerned over the past year and, in particular, with the proliferation of telecommunications masts. This is not a problem peculiar to Wirral and but one which the Society believes should be addressed nationally and a proper co-ordinated siting strategy should be devised. Until that happens, we can only be vigilant and try to see that masts are sited where they do the least visual damage.

#### Hooton hangars

The campaign to save Hooton's historic hangars was a success. They are now listed buildings and the hope is they will eventually house a Northern Aircraft Museum.

#### Shotwick Road development plan

It is disappointing that there has been a revival of efforts by the Welsh Development Agency to develop a large area of high grade agricultural land at Sealand for industry. We had hoped that the success in stopping this development some years ago would have killed this proposal for all time. The proposals have evoked much opposition from many organisations including CPRE Cheshire Branch and Cheshire County Council.

#### Ro-Ro Terminal at Twelve Quays

The Society lent its voice to the mounting opposition to the present configuration of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company's proposals for a roll-off roll-on terminal for the Irish traffic which, if allowed to proceed as planned, would deny public access to the riverside at that point and thus impinge upon the best view of Liverpool's famous Pier Head.

We have given our support to the vigorous campaign organised by Mr Graham Handley of Upton to have the plans amended and are most grateful to him for his efforts.

#### Bidston Lighthouse

We are pleased that our efforts as part of a team approach to refurbish and find a use for the historic lighthouse adjacent to Bidston Observatory has met with success.

*continued overleaf*

### Wirral Society Schools Award

We were delighted that this year saw the establishment of our Wirral Society Schools Award. This was a cherished idea of our late Chairman, Keith Davidson, and its aim is to encourage an awareness of and interest in the environment by children at an early age.

The first winners are Grove Street Primary School, New Ferry, for outstanding environmental improvements made by the pupils and staff both to their school and local environment under the guidance of their Headteacher, Mrs N. Little.

The award took the form of a framed Certificate and cheque for £250.

### Other Matters

• We are pleased to be able to report that Wirral Council had declared its intention to maintain Wirral's Green Belt as it is delineated at the moment.

• We hope to expand our sources of information by closer links with organisations such as the Wirral Green Belt Council, Cheshire Conservation Trust and the Local Agenda 21 Forum. To this end, we would very much like to hear from any member or members who might be willing to represent the Society at meetings of one or other of these organisations.

We also hope that other local societies and organisations with an interest in protecting their local environment and that of Wirral in general will accept our oft repeated invitation to send a representative to the Executive Committee, as provided for in our Constitution.

• Our Society website is now well established and our thanks go to Nick Lauro for setting it up and developing it.

• The Society needs to be more pro-active by undertaking directly initiatives which go toward improving the Wirral environment (like litter clearance schemes, tree planting etc) or, indirectly, as was done in 1965 with the publication of a booklet entitled *A Cautionary Guide*. Though some telling photographs, drew attention to some of the less attractive features of the Wirral Peninsula which, without incurring much work or expense, could be improved. It was very well received and we think the time is ripe for a new up-to-date issue.

• We are delighted with the success of the Victor Smith Memorial Lectures. Each one has attracted a full house and we must thank Wallasey Golf Club for so generously allowing us to make use of their excellent premises.

### New President

We have been giving much thought as to who might be invited to succeed the late Lord Leverhulme as the Society's president. It is hoped that we will be able to put a name before you at the next Annual General Meeting.

### Executive Committee

• Thanks are due to all members of the Executive Committee for their hard work during the year. In particular, we are most grateful to Geoff Loram, our Planning Liaison Officer, for all he has done; to Lillian Potter for so efficiently arranging the Victor Smith Memorial Lectures and, of course, this hotpot supper; to Alan Brack for editing and producing *Wirral Matters* and to Audrey Platt for so conscientiously performing the duties of Membership Secretary.

I must congratulate our Secretary, Eric Sanné, on the marvellous work he has done as County Chairman of the Cheshire Branch of CPRE despite suffering several bouts of ill health and, as ever, we are most grateful to Peter Bowler who, uncomplainingly, carries on, year after year, as our Honorary Treasurer. Somehow, he manages to find time for us despite being a very busy Chartered Accountant.

ROD TANN  
Chairman

### OFFICERS AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

2000 - 2001

The Officers and Executive Committee for the ensuing year will be :-

President : Vacant

Vice Presidents : C.L. Bibby, Esq., P.L. Jones, Esq.,

Chairman : Rod Tann

Vice-Chairman : Terry Edgar

Hon. Secretary : Eric Sanné

Hon. Treasurer : Peter Bowler

Membership Secretary : Audrey Platt

Planning Liaison Officer : Geoff Loram

Press and Publicity Officer : Alan Brack

Education Officer : Vacant

Programme Secretary : Dr. Lillian Potter

Website Officer : Nick Lauro

Representing Wallasey

Civic Society : Terry Edgar and Joy Hockey

Westminster Tenants'

Support Group : Pat Blackmore

Hoylake Civic Society

and Hoylake Heritage Group : Elizabeth Davey

Eleanor Road Residents'

Association : Dr. Lillian Potter

Additional Member : Diana Lane

### BRITAIN'S FINEST DOLE OFFICE

That's what the wags called it, anyway. The Priory, in Meols Drive, Hoylake, is a splendid and spacious, black and white, neo-Tudor house which served for many years as a rather superior employment exchange and, more recently, as Hoylake's Job Centre.

The Job Centre has now moved into the former, refurbished, Hoylake Town Hall, and when that happened The Priory was put up for sale. It has been acquired by a developer but, at the time of going to press, exactly what he plans to do with it is not known.

The Priory was built in 1901 for Lord Stanley of Alderley. It was later occupied by William Holt (of the Blue Funnel Line) and members of the Holt family who occupied the house until the outbreak of World War II when it became an army recruiting office. In 1940 it was requisitioned by the Government for use by the American forces. In 1950 it became a National Insurance office and subsequently an Employment Exchange.

This handsome black and white house overlooks at the rear the Royal Liverpool Golf Club links and is adjacent to the Conservation Area. While many will mourn its passing and consider a block of modern flats a far less aesthetic replacement there was little that could be done. The house, after 60 years as a public building, was no longer likely to attract a buyer wanting to live in it and because of the many internal alterations down the years it was not considered worthy of listing.

## THE 20-YEAR PLAN

In the wake of the much-trumpeted establishment of the Scottish and Welsh Assemblies the Regional Assemblies for England seem to have arrived in their stocking feet. Many people, even now, don't seem to know of their existence or what they do or what their powers may be. But exist they do though it must be admitted that without some research we cannot offer much enlightenment on when they meet, where they meet, who the members are or what they get up to.

But one thing the North West Regional Assembly has done is to issue an 82-page Draft Regional Planning Guidance for local authorities in the North West.

Under the title *People, Places and Prosperity*, the draft guide aims to bring up to date some guidelines first drawn up in 1996. Since they are felt to be in need of amendment after only four years it seems a brave move to say that this revised version will have a life of 20 years once it is finalised.

At its September meeting the Executive Committee was pleased to receive a visit from Richard Lewis, a senior planning officer from Wirral Borough Council, who kindly accepted an invitation to enlighten members about the new guidelines.

In brief, the new Guidelines comprise a strategy which:

- establishes a broad framework for the preparation of Development Plans by local authorities in the North West.
- incorporates a regional transport strategy for local transport plans.
- sets out a regional approach to waste management.
- provides a long-term planning framework for the NWDA's regional strategy.

It also takes into account the need for social progress which recognises the needs of everyone and the need for effective protection of the environment. It advocates the prudent use of natural resources, the maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment. In support of these aims it lists the three key principles as being economy in the use of land, enhancement of existing environmental, social and economic capital and achieving quality in new development.

The more detailed objectives identify a number of Priority Regeneration Areas, including Liverpool City centre, and call for new warehousing and distribution developments to make the best use of the rail network to avoid unnecessary movement of goods by road. It also seeks to protect and enhance town centres by encouraging development within or on the edge of existing centres. The expansion of existing out-of-town centres (like the Trafford Centre and Cheshire Oaks) is to be resisted.

Space does not allow for summarising all the proposals but they include a requirement that development plans should take into account health, education and other social considerations, they should also be required to promote the creation and enhancement of urban greenspace, a target of a 15% increase in the region's tree cover by 2020 and the (very timely) avoidance of development which would suffer from or cause flood risk.

The Society has been invited by the Assembly to take part in public consultation. At this stage we will be represented by CPRE but will be available to contribute further, if required.

## ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS DUE

Unless paid by Standing Order or through CPRE, all annual subscriptions are due for renewal on 1st January. Cheques or postal orders for £5.00 should be made payable to The Wirral Society and sent to :-

The Membership Secretary  
Mrs Audrey Platt  
21 Latchford Road  
Gayton Wirral  
CH60 3RN

For joint membership of both The Wirral Society and CPRE (annual subscription £17.50) cheques should be made out to CPRE and sent directly to :-

CPRE  
Membership Department  
25 Buckingham Palace Road  
London SW1W 0PP

*(Those members who joined the Society in the latter part of the year will not be expected to renew their subscriptions until 1st January next year).*

## News from CPRE Cheshire Branch

In the current newsletter of CPRE Cheshire Branch the County Chairman Eric Sanné (aka Wirral Society Hon.Sec.) writes of coming across the first branch annual report for the year 1931-2. The then Duchess of Westminster had graciously consented to be the branch president and the list of committee members contained many distinguished names. The subscription was One Guinea (£1.05).

At the branch annual general meeting that year the following resolution has been carried:

"That this meeting, recognising the beauty of the countryside to be a heritage of spiritual value, pledges itself to support the movement for protecting the County and for promoting seaminess in modern development"

Later in the report it states:

"The branch cannot carry out its work effectively without further financial assistance and would appeal to all those who value the Cheshire County to become a member".

"Need I say more!" exclaimed Eric. "Nearly 70 years on things haven't changed one bit!". The Cheshire Branch continues to work under great financial straits. Our work is increasing month by month as we become actively involved in planning proposals and transport schemes which we believe would be, in one way or another, detrimental to the Cheshire environment.

"But it takes money and the Branch needs more help - both financially and actively. In short, we urgently need to increase our membership. It is healthy enough but when one considers the size of Cheshire's population there is ample scope for improvement."

Vitaly important planning battles are still being fought in the county, he pointed out. The Welsh Development Agency is attempting to turn valuable Grade 2 agricultural land on the boundaries of Burton and Puddington villages into a huge industrial estate.

At the recent Public Inquiry CPRE voiced their strong opposition. "It was an expensive exercise" declared Eric "but it had to be done."

## LET THERE BE LIGHT

It is pleasing to see that all three Wirral lighthouses have emerged from years of darkness. Leasowe Lighthouse is already floodlit nightly while Bidston and New Brighton have been illuminated as part of the Millennium celebrations.



### BIDSTON LIGHTHOUSE

We have previously reported the Society's concern at the deteriorating condition of Bidston Lighthouse but now it appears to have been saved. For that we have to thank Wirral Council which has now reached an agreement for leasing the lighthouse from the National Environment Research Council (of which the erstwhile observatory - now the Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory - is a part).

We also have to thank the pupils of Hilbre High School. Their award-winning lighting scheme (in a Millennium Festival competition) using a wind-powered generator saw the lighthouse lit up for the first time since it was extinguished in July 1908. The light, of course, has not the power to shine miles out to sea but is nevertheless a very pleasing sight. It will stay lit between the hours of 6pm and 10pm until the end of this Millennium Year. It can easily be seen from the M53 approaching Junction 1.

During August and September the lighthouse was opened to the public for inspection in groups of no more than 25. There was an enthusiastic response and it is hoped this can be repeated next year.

### NEW BRIGHTON LIGHTHOUSE

It was pleasing, too, to see a light shining again in New Brighton lighthouse for the first time since 1973 when the opening of the radar station at Seaforth Dock made it obsolete.

The lighthouse was a star of a light, laser and music show as part of the year-long River of Light Millennium Festival. During the show messages were beamed from the former navigation aid at the mouth of the Mersey and the names of the 170 people who lost their lives in the sinking of the Ocean Monarch in Liverpool Bay almost 250 years ago were flashed in Morse Code from the top of the 90 foot high lighthouse.

The Ocean Bay was an American ship carrying 358 emigrants out of Liverpool. Just six hours into the voyage tragedy struck when a fire broke out, caused by a passenger who mistook a ventilation shaft for a chimney flue.

It seems that the importance of the lighthouse, both to New Brighton and the Mersey scene generally, has finally been recognised. As part of the regeneration scheme for New Brighton the lighthouse is to undergo a £116,000 refurbishment. External renovation and the installation of architectural and feature lighting will make the lighthouse a landmark once again.

## THE W. VICTOR SMITH LECTURE

If ever a man had enthusiasm for his subject it was Mr Graham Fisher who gave the last of the year's Victor Smith Lectures in Wallasey Golf Club on a miserable wet night in November. His subject was *Victorian Fantasies* and his total admiration for the achievements of Victorian engineers, architects and railway builders almost oozed out of his pores.

With two carousels of splendid slides he demonstrated how the years of Queen Victoria's reign was not the fuddy-duddy era it is often made out to be. He showed us, by way of demonstration, some of the mighty feats of engineering and architecture which we now take for granted but which were - and still are - astonishing achievements. He instanced the building of the Houses of Parliament, Liverpool's St. George's Hall and the other fine Victorian buildings in the city, the country's imposing Town Halls (particularly those in the north of England), the erection of the many magnificent bridges and viaducts for the burgeoning railway system, the cutting of the canals, the building of great steamships and the famous locomotives. He gave example after example and by the end of his talk his audience certainly shared his feelings.

The heart-warming response to all the Victor Smith Lectures which have brought about a full house each time has been most gratifying to the Committee and, in particular, to Dr Lillian Potter who not only made all the arrangements for the speakers but also found the venue.

Wallasey Golf Club has proved to be the ideal place. It is easy to get at, has a large car-park and a comfortable room in which the talks are held. We would like to take this opportunity of sincerely thanking the Captain, officers and members of the club for their generous hospitality.

This year we held extra lectures by way of a Millennium celebration. Next year there will be two, both in the Spring, and, of course, there will also be a talk following the Annual General Meeting and Hot-Pot Supper.

### THE POWER OF THE WEB

Nick Lauro, the Society's web master, has received an e-mail message from an Internet surfing lady in Tasmania who logged on to the Wirral Society website. It immediately rang a bell. Didn't her uncle come from Birkenhead in Wirral? I wonder if anyone can help?



HAS ANYONE ANY INFORMATION ON MISSIONARY HOUSES AT THE BEGINNING OF THE LAST CENTURY? MY UNCLE WAS A MISSIONARY IN CHINA AT THAT TIME. ANY HELP WITH THIS MATTER WOULD BE APPRECIATED. HE WAS FROM THE BIRKENHEAD AREA BUT WE HAVE NO IDEA WHERE THE MAIN MISSIONARY HOUSE WAS.

If anyone knows the answer or can help the lady in any way her name and address is:

Patricia Valetic, 38 Powell Road, Blackmans Bay Tasmania 7052 Australia

If you can reply by e-mail the address is <belgise@tasmail.com>