



WIRRAL MATTERS

NEWS FROM THE WIRRAL SOCIETY • FOUNDED 1928
THE WIRRAL COMMITTEE OF THE COUNCIL FOR THE PROTECTION OF RURAL ENGLAND (CPRE)

President: Professor John Tam OBE DL

BIDSTON HILL

In our last issue we reported at length about the concern the Executive Committee feels for the state and future of this unique and historic hill. Little or nothing has been done in the way of land management for the past 30 years. It is a concern also felt by The Friends of Bidston Hill.

Recently, however, we were encouraged by the news that a second Ranger was to be appointed and now Nick Harding, formerly Ranger of Eastham Country Park, has taken up the post to assist the present Ranger, John Jakeman, whose time is almost entirely taken up with the management of Tam O'Shanter Farm. Nick will also be responsible for Flaybrick Memorial Gardens.

Additionally Dr Hilary Ash of Cheshire Wildlife was commissioned to prepare a Management Plan. She has now furnished her Draft Plan and, at a recent meeting of the Friends, she was congratulated on her thorough appraisal of the situation and her proposals for improvement.

Dr Ash seems to have examined every square yard of the hill and has put forward detailed proposals for a 5 year plan of restoration. At the time of the Friends' meeting, the plan had not been put before Council officers or the Council itself but, commensurately, the two targets had reacted immediately and had prepared a preliminary course of action based on the findings. Moreover, Nick Harding had also laid on a programme of work to be done by volunteers on a monthly basis, alternating between Bidston Hill and Flaybrick Gardens. He had also drawn up a programme of Bidston Hill and Flaybrick events, ranging from a search for Bidston Hill's mushrooms and a walk round the hill looking at flora and fauna visible at this time of the year to bird feeder and bird box-building sessions. (For details of these and other event telephone 0151 653 9332).

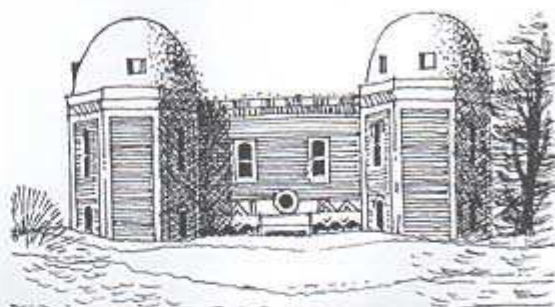
One of Dr Ash's suggested priorities is - we're delighted to report - that the main views should be opened up. The Rangers appreciate the need for restoring this unique attraction which is so bound up in Wirral's history and they plan to make an early start on doing this in part, at least.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS NOW DUE

Unless paid by Standing Order all annual subscriptions became due for renewal on 1 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, CH50 3RN

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Joint members of both The Wirral Society and CPRE (annual subscription £20.00.) should make their cheques payable to CPRE



FOR SALE: Bidston Observatory

Bidston Preservation Trust

The aim of this recently-established body is to ensure that the famous Observatory building is retained for public use of some sort when the staff of the Joseph Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory vacate the site next August for a new building on the Liverpool University campus. We understand that the National Environment Research Council are already advertising the whole site for sale.

The main aim of the Trust is to secure the listed Observatory building as a Museum and Visitor Centre which would reflect the history of astronomical and tidal research work which has been internationally acknowledged. The Trust is fully aware that such lofty objectives will require a lot of money to achieve but the Observatory has for so long been a feature of Wirral and, indeed, Merseyside life they believe that it is attainable. A number of famous names including Sir Patrick Moore and the Earl of Derby (whose ancestor built Bidston Hall), have expressed their support and wish to be kept informed.

Many Mobiles maketh more Masts

According to recent press reports battles by concerned local residents over the siting of mobile telephone masts should no longer be necessary. Last year's Stewart Report on the subject recommended that the consultation period for the consideration of planning applications for masts should be increased and that local authorities and residents should work together with the phone operators to find the most appropriate sites.

More and more use is being made of mobile telephones and, of course, that calls for more and more masts. Although it has been reported that some operators are starting to share masts, it is estimated that at the current rate some 50 per cent more will nevertheless be needed within the next five years.

That would increase the present country-wide total of 26,000 masts to 40,000.

STAINED GLASS AND HOT POT

The weather forecast was grim. Heavy rain followed by heavy showers, followed by more rain. In the event the evening weather on the day of our 74th Annual General Meeting was (as often seems to be the case in Wirral) not quite as bad as the forecast but, sadly, it was grim enough to put some members off attending. Nevertheless, 92 brave souls faced the elements and, once the official business was out of the way, we were treated to another splendid Hot-Pot Supper and an unusual but fascinating talk on the history of stained glass church windows.

The speaker was John Dewsnap, a retired schoolmaster from Liverpool, whose thorough knowledge of his subject and exceptionally articulate and clear delivery was much admired. From the questions that were put to him after his talk he had clearly caught members' imaginations.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Introducing his annual report Rod Tann spoke of the recent sad loss of our Secretary, Eric Sanné, and members stood in silence for a few moments in remembrance.

The Chairman also recalled a very wet day in January in Royden Park, Frankby, when members of the Executive Committee joined Keith Davidson's wife, June, and members of the family, in a short but moving ceremony to see June plant a Blue Cedar tree - Keith's favourite tree - in his memory.

Reporting on the Executive Committee's work during the year the Chairman spoke of the Draft Regional Planning Guidance which has been issued by the Government Office for the North-West. The main points were published in the August issue of *Wirral Matters* and it was indeed reassuring to see that the Green Belt appears to be safe for the foreseeable future. There should also be less pressure both from large-scale development. Our thanks are due to the expert help we received from Mr John Wesencraft of West Kirby in formulating our response to the draft.

At local level, the Chairman continued, Dr Lilian Potter had maintained a high level of activity, investigating and commenting upon many planning applications. Our grateful thanks are due to her for all her hard work and to those members of the Committee, notably Geoff Luram, Audrey Platt and Elizabeth Davey, who have helped by visiting sites and investigating particular applications.

Thanks are also due to Mr Barry Lello, Planning Co-ordinator for the Wirral Green Belt Council, for his valuable advice.

Fender Farm

The most dominant planning issue during the year has been the fight to save Fender Farm in the Fender Valley outside Moreton from development. A planning application to build 120 houses on the site was refused by Wirral Borough Council but following an appeal by the developers and subsequent public inquiry the Appeal Inspector ruled in the developer's favour.

Once again we are indebted to Mr Wesencraft for setting out our case against the proposal and thanks are also due to Joy Hockey and our Vice-Chairman, Terry Edgar, for their help.

Telephone Masts

Applications for erecting telecommunications masts in Wirral (as elsewhere) continue to present visual problems. The Society tries to be realistic, recognising the popularity of mobile phones. However, we continue to object to all applications for masts in the Green Belt and any which affect Listed Buildings.

Large-scale developments

Comments were made last year of the disappointment the Society felt at the threatened industrial development of high-grade agricultural land at Sealand. In the event, the proposal was successfully challenged by Cheshire Branch of CPRE and others at a public inquiry and was rejected.

The Twelve Quays Ferry Terminal at Birkenhead continues to be debated. We have never objected to the development of the Terminal itself - only to the loss of access to the footpath alongside the river which the Terminal has caused. The campaign to regain access was started by Graham Handley of Upton and taken over by the Ramblers' Association, supported by many other Wirral organisations. We were pleased to make a financial contribution towards the expenses incurred by both Graham Handley and the Ramblers' Association.

Flats Development, King's Gap

We objected to the proposal to build a block of flats in King's Gap, Hoylake, on the grounds of over-development in a Conservation Area. Following a public enquiry, at which Elizabeth Davey took a leading role, we are pleased to report that the plan was rejected.

Initiatives

We have continued to work closely with the local authorities and were pleased to welcome a Senior Planning Officer from each of the Borough Councils to speak to the Executive Committee. The occasions were useful opportunities both to exchange views and question the officers on matters of concern.

School Awards

Though we received fewer applications this year we were still delighted to be able to give awards to six schools who each put up very worthy schemes. Our thanks are due to Diana Lane for her efforts.

Publicity

We have again been lucky to have Alan Bracks' expertise in writing some excellent editions of *Wirral Matters* and, through his influence, coverage of the Society is now included in the esteemed pages of *Cheshire Life*.

Membership Drive

We were delighted with the response to our Membership Drive and thank all members who responded. As a result we have been able to welcome some 80 new members so far this year. Thanks are due to Alan Brack for preparing the recruiting literature, to his wife, Edith and Lilian Potter for sending out the appeal letters and Audrey Platt and Peter Bowler for the extra admin. work involved.

Other Matters

Summer Meeting: Our two guided tours of Storeton Woods were most successful and thanks are due to our guide David Casement and Kitty Stower of The Friends of Storeton Woods.

W. Victor Smith Lectures: The high level of support for these lectures continue to make these evenings especially memorable occasions. We would like to thank our speakers for this year - Martyn Jamieson and Gavin Hunter - and express our gratitude.

once again to the Captain and members of Wallasey Golf Club and Lilian Potter who organised everything.

Bidston Hill: The Chairman and Alan Brack attended the inaugural meeting of the Bidston Preservation Trust, founded by Mr Peter Crawford. The Trust's main objective is to secure the future of Bidston Observatory (shortly to be vacated) and create a museum and visitor centre there.

The Society is represented on the Trust by Alan Brack. He is also on the committee of The Friends of Bidston Hill.

The Committee is grateful to Alex Potter for representing the Society on the Bidston Village Conservation Area Advisory Committee in the absence of a representative from within the Committee.

Finally

Thanks are due to:

- Elizabeth Davey who, single-handedly, set up our stand at the recent Wirral History Fair at Port Sunlight, and to Terry Edgar who helped to man it.
- Dr David Britt, who acts as our liaison with Wirral Wildlife and Geoff Loram who represents the Society at meetings of the Dee Estuary Forum.
- Nick Lauro for maintaining the Society's website and Terry Edgar, our Vice-Chairman, for chairing some meetings

Editor's note: Our Chairman never fails to thank members of the Executive Committee for what they do but few work harder on behalf of the Society than the Chairman himself. Not only has he a full-time day-job as Wirral's Emergency Planning Officer but he is also Chairman of St. Bridget's Music Society and, ipso facto, Chairman of The Wirral Symphony Orchestra and all that entails, including playing in the orchestra, weekly rehearsals and acting as the orchestra's music librarian and general manager.

On behalf of The Wirral Society he gives illustrated talks to various organisations and attends spin-off meetings with other bodies, writes numerous letters and, of course, chairs the monthly Committee Meetings. He leads a very busy life.

On behalf of all members...thanks, Rod.

FLY-BY-NIGHT FLY-POSTERS

Has anyone ever seen a fly-poster at work? We see the result of their nefarious sorties but no-one ever seems to see them actually in the act of pasting up their posters or tying them on lamp-posts, railings and trees. Like fly-tippers, they are a mysterious breed, presumably operating in the small hours, flitting from place to place like frenzied bats. And, like bats in many a belfry, they despoil the place and what they do, of course, is quite illegal.

Two recent explosions of fly-posting in the borough, each advertising a night club prompted the Society to bring it to the attention of the Borough Solicitor. Flyers had been securely pasted on to nearly every telecommunications and traffic light control cabinets in Wirral, as well as on nearly every boarded-up window of empty shops. The culprits never return to remove their handiwork once the advertised event is over leaving the elements to dispose of them gradually, making them even more of an eyesore.

Not everyone appreciates that, unless first approved by the Council, casual advertising is illegal. That goes for A-boards outside shops, posters, banners and temporary signs affixed to trees, railings and gates. In many cases, it is offensive as fly-tipping or dropping litter.

We are pleased to report that in the case of the offending night club flyers Wirral Council has instructed the Borough Solicitor to prosecute.

The Wirral Society Established 1928



The Society will be holding a
Grand Dinner on Thursday 22 May 2003
at The Grange Country Club, Thornton Hough
to celebrate its 75th Anniversary

Alan Waterworth Esq
Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant
for Merseyside
will propose the toast

Tickets £20.00

Full details will be mailed to all members
early in the New Year

Open to all members and friends



Other Events

Other events being arranged to mark this auspicious anniversary include a special exhibition of hitherto unseen Wirral paintings from the Williamson Art Gallery archives and a special section for new paintings of Wirral in Wirral Council's Annual Summer Open Exhibition for which the Society will sponsor a special Purchase Prize.

Additionally,
there will be a Commemorative Tree-Planting
and a donation of litter-bins to
both Wirral Boroughs

and, as usual, we shall have
two W. Victor Smith Lectures,
a Summer Meeting and the now traditional
Hot-Pot Supper and talk at the AGM

Willaston's Old Mill



The Mill
at Willaston

When we all relied on the village baker for bread and the baker relied on the local miller for flour Willaston was served by a wooden peg-mill owned by William Lightbound. After his death in 1797 his mill was demolished and replaced by a stout brick-built tower mill. At 80 feet high it was the tallest ever built on the peninsula and boasting 10 pairs of millstones it was the most powerful. The miller's name was, yet again, William Lightbound, possibly a nephew.

Over the years the mill changed hands several times and in 1860 it was bought by the ambitious Radford family of Liverpool. They installed a steam engine to drive six of the millstones, leaving the other four dependent on the wind. They later built a bakery at ground level, bought two ships to import grain from Russia and a traction engine to bring the cargo from Birkenhead Docks. At one time they had a workforce of 40.

In the end the Radford enterprise could not compete against the huge factory mills which arose in various parts, including Birkenhead. In 1879 the mill was sold to a Mr T.A. Hope who used it for producing cattle-food. So it remained until 1930 when a severe gale caused such extensive damage that the business was forced to close.

What, you will be asking yourselves by now, has all this got to do with the Wirral Society? The answer is that as the mill became more and more derelict something had to be done about it. Wirral's tallest mill was too great a landmark and too historic a feature to be pulled down although this was, in fact, suggested. It could be sold as rubble for road building, it was claimed. But the problem of how to keep the historic mill standing and find a use for it so engaged the minds of the Society's then Executive Committee that in 1936 they decided upon a most audacious step. They bought it.

The Committee fondly hoped that someone with the money would come along and repair it and even replace the sails, out of sentiment if nothing more. Sadly, this dream was dashed when war broke out and during the war years the old mill served as a Home Guard look-out post.

When the war was over the mill was once again put on the agenda meeting after meeting after meeting - for years. It was, quite literally, a millstone round their necks.

In 1949, a millwright who was consulted suggested that the stones and all the machinery should be removed, leaving the stairs and platform intact. If that were done, he said, the mill would make a splendid viewpoint over the countryside.

Later that year, an offer was received from a retired Lieutenant-Colonel to turn into a dwelling but the cost of the conversion was estimated at £2800 and that proved too costly for the would-be purchaser.

From time to time there was cause for hope as someone came to view the mill with a bright idea of how it might be used. A boys' club, a youth hostel, Boy Scout base - all were suggested, all came to nothing. In the end Sykes Waterhouse were asked to put the mill on the open market. There were no takers. Then, on 1st April 1957 - quite out of the blue - came an offer from Mrs Theresa Morris of Heswall to buy it for £150 with a view to

making it into a residence. The date of her offer must have caused some doubts in the minds of the Committee but she was serious.

Mrs Morris's offer was accepted but legal quibbling over small triangular plot of land held completion up until February 1958. So 22 years after first acquiring the mill the Society, let it go for £400 less than they paid for it.

By the time the Morris family acquired the mill it was in near-derelict state and it took them another two years before it was fit to move into and a further two years before they could say the conversion was finished*.

And why are we telling you all this? Simply because, as we go to press, we see that the mill is on the market again. It is described by the estate agents as "a very substantial six-storey mill which has been skilfully converted and lovingly restored to create a quite unique residence offering spacious and versatile accommodation.

The asking price is £585,000.

(We are pleased to say that one of Mrs Morris's sons is still a member of the Society - Ed)

A Slight Case of Over-Development

A former Mayor of Antibes, a very prosperous property developer (*The Sunday Telegraph* recently reported) decided to build himself a palace - Hoogstraten-style - on a five acre-site on an islet on the southernmost tip of Cap d'Antibes. A modest-sized house was already there but that was pulled down and the house he built on the site boasted 20ft-high bronze entrance doors, a 10ft-wide corridor 100ft long, an enormous living-room with terrace and a lift to the beach below. But seen from the air it was an L-shaped villa, much larger than any of its neighbours, but still within the local planning regulations.

His neighbours, however, could not but wonder why, after the house was apparently finished, there was still a constant stream of lorries coming and going every day removing tons of earth and rock from the site.

It was what was going on *beneath* the surface that needed the lorries. When the planners eventually investigated they discovered "an underground Ali Baba's cave of opulence and vulgarity, a curious mixture of luxury and blatant bad taste". There were more bronze doors leading to a swimming pool, jacuzzis, Roman-style thermal saunas with plastic and concrete 'rocks' and fake marble statues, a cinema, tennis courts and even a nuclear bomb shelter. The 'palace' was dotted with alarms, infra red detectors and hidden doors. The planning application was for a modest 220 sq.ft. extension but what had been built amounted to 8,000 sq.ft. - at a cost of £15 million.

The property tycoon, a chum of former French president Francois Mitterand, is now in jail, doubtless reflecting on what wonderful times he would have had if only his neighbours had minded their own business.

And, oh yes...he was also fined £1.5 million and ordered to pay £95,000, the cost of demolition.

Editor: Alan Brack

47 Upton Road, Cloughton. Tel/Fax: 0151 652 5530

www.wirralociety.t9.co.uk

Printed by: Hil-y-Gem Computer Printing
Tel/Fax: 0151 625 7509