

MARCH 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'RE ON THE WEB!

www.wirralsociety.f9.co.uk



Yes, you can now log on to the Wirral Society's own web site. That's the URL above. URL? That stands for Uniform Resource Locator which is computerspeak for 'address'. We have actually been on line since early February and, without advertising the fact until now, the site has already been 'visited' by scores of people wanting to know who we are and what we do.

'We are an old-established organisation', said Keith Davidson, our Chairman, 'but we must keep up with the times. Wirral Council has shown the way with putting planning applications on the Internet - the first local authority to do so - and they are to be congratulated on that. I believe our being on the net will be of great benefit to us and bring news of our activities to Wirralians now living elsewhere as well as Wirralians still living in Wirral who may still not be aware of our existence or what we do.'

The web site was the idea of the Executive Committee's youngest member, Nick Lauro of Saughall Massie, and he did all the work in getting it online (at no cost the Society) and we are most grateful to him.

'The site is still in its infancy', explained Nick, 'and material will be constantly added or changed to keep it absolutely up to date.'

At the moment, the web site explains the Society's origins and aims and, for those in other parts of the world who may surf the net and wonder about us, it gives the location of the Wirral Peninsula and, in due course, it will show views of places of interest. It also tells how one may become a Wirral Society member and just who is on the Executive Committee and gives details of our year's programme, including details of the Victor Smith Lectures and Annual General Meeting. There is a news page giving details of our current concerns and this issue of Wirral Matters will be included.

If you have any ideas about anything else which you think should be included please let us know.

WHAT'S NEW?

A New Year, a new masthead for *Wirral Matters* and a new logo.

There was a time when firms had trade-marks, societies

and charitable organisations had emblems and clubs had badges. Now every organisation has a logotype (or 'logo') which in some subtle way symbolises the organisation's purpose in life. Many are so subtle that few appreciate their meaning but we are sure that the logo now adorning this newsletter will be self-explanatory.

However, for anyone who might be just a little puzzled at its significance the outline map of the Wirral Peninsula in its 'globe' symbolises the fact that Wirral is the centre of our particular world and the enveloping laurel leaves represents the protective arms we endeavour to put round it.

PIER HEAD FERRY TERMINAL

We have been showing a great interest in the proposals to site a new ferry terminal at the Pier Head ever since our attention was first drawn to it by concerned parties 'over the water'. They realised that the future of the Pier Head is not entirely a Liverpool matter but as a prospective World Heritage Site it is of widespread interest. And since we in Wirral are fortunate to enjoy the best view of it and, moreover, since so many Wirral folk have close Liverpool connections in one way or another, we were invited to take a look at the proposals and make our comments. In the event, we found much to object to, as we reported in last issue.

As a result of objections to the original plans (which would have impinged on the site of the Pier Head and also involved the moving of the Titanic Memorial), together with a court injunction against the closure of a public right of way, a revised plan has now been submitted.

The revised proposals meet the objections to impinging on the Pier Head proper by envisaging the in-filling of the disused Floating Roadway and the creation of a car-park on and around the site. There was no provision for any vitally-important passenger facilities. In this respect, at a meeting between the Society's Chairman and Press Officer and MDHC officials, we were astonished to learn that none of the planners had ever been across to Ireland to see the facilities at Dublin and Dun Laoghaire.

In a Press Release, our Chairman, Keith Davidson (who has been travelling back and forth to Ireland several times a year for the past 37 years), spoke of the 'truly appalling conditions which ferry travellers, whether on foot or in cars, have to endure when travelling from Liverpool.' Whilst waiting for the Superseacat ferry there is no shelter from the weather, whether on foot or in cars, only minimal toilet facilities and nowhere to get any food or drink and not even a seat to sit on.

continued overleaf

We now understand that the planners hope to solve this problem by bringing in a *floating* terminal, which would be bolted to the Landing Stage.

We have also challenged MDHC's repeated claims that the ferry companies are insisting that the terminal must be in the city centre. This is not the case on the other side where the Dublin terminal is two miles from the centre of the city whilst Dun Laoghaire is six miles away.

The crux of this long-drawn problem is that whilst MDHC have land available on the in-filled Princes Dock they plan to build a more commercially-advantageous office block on the site.

(Our Chairman's detailed observations on MDHC's revised plan were addressed to the Liverpool City Planning Officer. Our Press Release, based on the report, was used by Wirral Newspapers as the basis of a report which was published in all seven editions of the News on 1 March 2000.-Ed)

MERSEYSIDE 21 AWARDS

The two Groundwork organisations on Merseyside - Groundwork St. Helens, Knowsley and Sefton and Groundwork Wirral - last year inaugurated an award scheme to mark the efforts of community groups, environment organisations and schools who have made positive contributions to the cause of environmental improvement of their locality in some way.

The awards were presented at a buffet lunch in the new Crowne Plaza Hotel near the Pier Head early in February. Rod Tann (Vice-Chairman) and Alan Brack (Press Officer) represented the Wirral Society.

There were four categories in the competition to cater for projects which had changed the environment in some significant way. The Lord Winstanley Award was given for a project which had made a significant change to the local environment, another went to a project which had changed the lives of people in the locality in some way and a third acknowledged a scheme which displayed great care of an environmental feature. There was also an award for the school which had made or embarked upon a scheme for improving its own environment in a material way.

The Society figured in the Lord Winstanley Award class and was Highly Commended and received a Certificate to the effect that:

This is to Certify that the Wirral Society was short-listed in the Lord Winstanley Changing Places Award Class and was awarded this Certificate of Recognition.

Winning School

We were delighted when the winning school turned out to be Grove Street Primary School, Rock Ferry. This was the school with which the Society was associated in 1993 when, members may recall, a class of six year olds wrote to Wirral Council complaining about litter on The Esplanade at Rock Ferry. There were no bins for people to put their litter in, they wrote, so how could you expect people to be tidy?

Council officers took this to heart but, cash-strapped as ever, they could not supply any bins. They asked if The Wirral Society could do anything to help. Impressed by this display of civic responsibility at such a tender age the Executive Committee financed the purchase and installation of three cast-iron bins on The Esplanade.

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The school's current improvement scheme is the establishment within the school grounds of a Millennium Garden. It's an ambitious scheme in which all the children have been involved and their Merseyside 21 Award was richly deserved.

W. VICTOR SMITH MEMORIAL LECTURES

The first Victor Smith lecture of the year which was held in Wallasey Golf Club in January brought the full house that we have now come to expect. Dr Robert Philpott, Liverpool Museum's archaeological expert, gave us a memorable talk on the sojourn of the Romans - and the ancient Wirralians who preceded them - in Wirral.

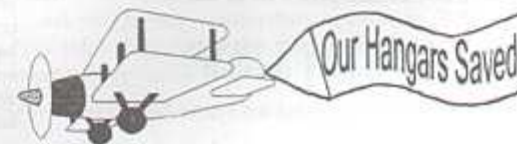
Illustrating his talk with some splendid slides Dr Philpott showed us the evidence of the existence of Iron Age Wirralians and the Roman presence in the area. In particular, he showed us where the Romans settled in Wirral. That proved to be in Irby - in the garden of a bungalow. Not only did the occupants encourage the archaeologists of Liverpool University to dig up their garden, to see what they could find but immediate neighbours reacted by inviting the team to dig up their gardens, too. In the end, the site extended to no less than nine private gardens - and no doubt the occupants are still dining out on the story to this day.

The 'dig' yielded no major surprises but a number of Roman artefacts were found which excited the archaeologists. And no doubt when any of the houses come up for sale the estate agents will not fail to add: 'Evdnce Rmn occpn' to the other attributes.

HOOTON HANGARS

The historic hangars on the site of the onetime airfield at Hooton have been saved. In the face of the huge opposition - which may well have taken them by surprise - Vauxhall Motors have now submitted a revised plan for their vehicle distribution centre which excludes the site of the hangars and does not call for their demolition.

The hangars were built for the Royal Flying Corps in 1917 and the campaigner's hope is that they may eventually be renovated and become the home of The North West Aviation Museum.



IT'S AN ILL WIND

What can be done with hundreds of tons of unwanted sand? That is what Wirral Council would like to know. And whilst it is the sands of Dee to which they are referring it is sand in places where it ought not be which is the problem. It might be of use to dads currently digging sandpits for the kiddiewinkies but there would have to be a nation-wide sandpit building craze to make any real impression on the amount the Council has to dispose of every year.

Those folk who enjoy an occasional summertime walk along the shore at West Kirby or Hoylake but who do not live in the district are probably unaware that hundreds of tons of the stuff they are walking on finds its way with monotonous regularity every winter when the winds blow hard on to the promenades and into the adjoining houses and gardens. It also blocks roads and drains and altogether is a confounded nuisance. It has been removed, of course, but this takes time and money. Last year it cost the council taxpayers of Wirral £70,000 for the sand to be collected and put back where it came from - on the shore. The collected sand is unloaded into little piles at the water's edge and when the tide comes in it neatly spreads it out over the foreshore.

But, as you may well know, beach levels are rising every year and that means the surface dries out more quickly than is used to do. The next gale immediately blows it back on to the promenade and into people's houses and gardens where it blocks the drains...

Wirral Council have made various attempts to combat the problem, including the erection of sand-trap fencing on the railings, but to no avail. Now they are seeking residents' ideas. They have issued leaflets to houses throughout the affected area and have also made available a booklet which contains detailed analyses by experts on coastal changes and are offering to make presentations explaining the problem to local groups. There will also be displays in local libraries.

The Executive Committee will be wracking its collective brain but, says the Council, 'when we realise we are pitting our actions against the forces of Nature it becomes clear that there isn't an easy answer.'



BIDSTON LIGHTHOUSE

As previously reported the Executive Committee were concerned at the deteriorating state of Bidston Lighthouse which is within the grounds of Bidston Observatory. Our attention was drawn to it some time last year by the Bidston Hill Countryside Ranger. He wished to see it refurbished and turned into a Bidston Visitors Centre where, among other things, visitors to the Hill could enjoy the wonderful views the lighthouse provides across North Wirral and Liverpool Bay.

To achieve that will cost quite a lot of money and we were willing to take this on as project and begin raising funds for its restoration. But we are happy to report that the matter has been taken out of our hands. We now understand that Wirral Council is currently negotiating with the National Environment Research Council (NERC), the parent body of The Joseph Proudman Laboratory and the Observatory, with a view to the Council taking control of the lighthouse and ensuring its proper refurbishment.

NEW COMMITTEE MEMBER

The Executive Committee has been pleased to welcome to its ranks Mr Pat Blackmore of the Westminster Tenants Support Group in Ellesmere Port.

We have long hoped for representation from that part of Wirral and we are delighted that in Pat we have patently found someone who not only shares our aims but who does so with seemingly boundless and infectious enthusiasm. We look forward to playing a part in protecting the environment in Ellesmere Port and Neston Council area.

TALK SHOW

For some time now Rod Tann, our Vice-President, has been giving illustrated talks on the work of the Wirral Society to all manner of clubs, societies and organisations. He says he is willing to accept dates for more talks provided they are in the evenings - for which he earns our gratitude for so generously giving his spare time.

Any organisation which would like a slide talk from Rod should telephone him on 0151-625-1234

PROBLEMS ??
IF YOU HEAR OF ANY
ENVIRONMENTAL
PROBLEMS WHICH
NEED TO BE
INVESTIGATED,
PLEASE LET OUR
SECRETARY KNOW
AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

CPRE MATTERS

As we go to press the Cheshire Branch of CPRE is actively involved in a public inquiry being held in Chester into Phase One of a controversial scheme proposed by Cheshire County Council for a Guided Busway system to ease traffic congestion within the city centre.

The scheme aims to make use of the unused Mickle Trafford - Shotton railway line which cuts through the city below ground level. At first this would seem to be an admirable idea. In a small, compact and crowded city centre like Chester's something clearly needs to be done.

But CPRE Cheshire Branch is strongly opposed to the plan.

First, they point out that this is but the first phase of a three-phase scheme and yet no environmental appraisal has yet been conducted on the effects of the plan as a whole. They claim that the County Council's appraisal only deals with the land immediately affected by the scheme and has not considered the effect on the wider environment. Thirdly, the scheme does not adhere with the Department of Transport best practice guidance for such plans in that it fails to take into account enough factors and not enough imagination has been employed in identifying alternatives, including a counterproposal put forward by Chester District CPRE.

They also point out that the consultation documents were only available for public scrutiny for a very limited period and then only in Chester and the Environmental Assessment was only made available after the closing of the public consultation period and only two days before the Council's Environment Committee was asked to make a decision.

The wider Cheshire public were not made aware of the environmental impacts of the scheme and it was not made clear that a successful bid for funding for the scheme would deflect potential funding from other projects. It would appear that funding for this very expensive plan has now leap-frogged over the funding for the long-awaited Alderley Edge Bypass Scheme despite assurances that the latter was top priority.

One very big bone of contention is that a large site of Green Belt land has been ear-marked for a Park and Ride site to be linked with the busway terminal. Not only is the designated area considerably larger than would be required but a supermarket chain has bought the adjoining land and, patently, they have not done so to farm it or turn it into a public open space.

The Public Inquiry was expected to take a month and it will be some months ahead before the Inspector makes his report and recommendation.

Said Eric Sanné, CPRE Cheshire Chairman: "This appeared to be an admirable scheme at first glance but second and subsequent looks at it revealed its flaws. Our transport Campaign Group - and, in particular, Mrs Lilian Burns, its vice-chairman, who prepared the excellent Statement of Case, ably assisted by Mrs Ann Jones, have worked exceedingly hard and given a lot of time to it. They are to be congratulated on a job very well done.

TOAD REPORT



Ever since we answered the call of Cheshire Wildlife back in 1994 to sponsor the digging of two 'scrapes' on the shore at Red Rocks, Hoylake in order that the rare and dwindling Natterjack Toad colony settled thereabout might be encouraged to go forth and multiply we have maintained an interest in their progress. Whilst a few have gone forth and have been spotted they have not, as yet, multiplied. In view of this, you may recall, Cheshire Wildlife went to a lot of trouble to bring in several batches of toadlets which had been spawned in the flourishing Ainsdale colony in an endeavour to move things along a bit.

'It's a slow process,' says Jacki Hulse, Cheshire Wildlife Field Officer, 'but the females take three years to mature to the point where they crave male company and begin croaking loudly for mates.'

Some Natterjacks were seen last year but none since but the herpetologists remain very upbeat about the situation. In fact, the site has been visited by no less a personage than the National Natterjack Toad Officer of the Herpetological Conservation Trust. He has expressed his satisfaction with the state of affairs and as we go to press consideration is being given to the scraping out of a third scrape further along the shore towards West Kirby. This, it is hoped, will enable the Natterjacks, male and female, to become better acquainted to the extent that romance may blossom and Wirral will see its first tiny toadlets in years.

Watch this space.

300 UP!

Mrs Audrey Platt, our hardworking Membership Secretary, poured herself a glass of something suitable recently to celebrate the fact that the Society's membership has now passed the 300 mark.

'We always recruit some new members at the Victor Smith Lectures,' she said, 'and at the last one eight joined on the night and another half dozen filled in the Membership Forms when they got home.'

We are delighted that our membership is in the ascent but with an annual subscription as small as £5.00 we think it really ought to be even higher. After all, one would think that everyone who lived in Wirral would want to support a society which had long devoted its efforts to protecting the Wirral environment. With a total population of over 400,000 we think our 300 membership - excellent though it is - should be more in the region of 3,000.

Ask your friends whether they are members. If not, and you think they should be - tip us off and we will send them an application form.