



# WIRRAL MATTERS

NEWS FROM THE WIRRAL SOCIETY • FOUNDED 1928  
THE WIRRAL COMMITTEE OF THE CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT RURAL ENGLAND (CPRE)

President: Professor John Tern OBE DL



## Observatory in Jeopardy

## Annual General Meeting

We make no apologies for continuing to voice our dismay at the threat to Bidston Observatory and the neighbouring Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory and a real threat it is too. Both buildings are to be vacated this month when the staff move across the Mersey to take over a new purpose-built building on the University of Liverpool campus. They will not be a part of the University but will remain under the National Environment Research Council (NERC).

The University and the NERC will also be the beneficiaries from any sale of the site and the developer has shown interest in converting the Observatory building into apartments and building houses on the site of the Proudman Laboratory.

The Observatory is a Grade Two listed building and the protection that affords applies only to the building's outward appearance. A new housing estate, situated alongside the Observatory and lighthouse, would be totally incongruous. It would also be treating with contempt the original idea and spirit behind the campaign which secured Bidston Hill as a cherished open space over 100 years ago.

Recently, at a meeting of the Wirral Council Finance and Corporate Management Select Committee, Peter Crawford, Chairman of The Bidston Preservation Trust, was given five minutes to state the case for turning the Observatory into a Museum and Visitor Centre. The committee was astonished to learn that the buildings and land being offered for sale were originally *gifted* to the University. One Councillor described it as 'outrageous' that they were now trying to sell it. Morally, most people would agree, the site should revert to the people of Wirral - or at least be offered to them at a peppercorn rent or a knockdown price. But, of course, in the grasping society in which we live today, such thoughts are quite naïve.

The outcome of this Select Committee meeting was a recommendation to Wirral Council cabinet that any decision should be delayed for three months to allow the Preservation Trust to complete a business plan. We understand that this is nearing completion and we look forward to the Council's reaction with great interest. In the meantime, it was encouraging to learn that Wirral Council cabinet members, representing all three parties, had unanimously endorsed the Committee's recommendation.

What would be really encouraging, however, would be to hear from Wirral Council that they really appreciate the historical importance and renown of Bidston Observatory and that they are leaning over backwards to preserve it, formidable a task though that may be.

We know full well that it can't be achieved from Council resources but funding has been found for lesser causes and, after all, Bidston Observatory and Bidston Hill are every bit as important a part of Wirral's heritage as The Priory or Birkenhead Park.

This year's AGM will be held on Tuesday 7th October. It will follow the well-tryed, popular format of meeting, Hot-Pot supper and illustrated talk.

This year the talk will be given by Mr John Moffat of Eastham and his subject will be 'Astronomers of the Wirral'.

Truly, a star attraction.

Please see the separate notice enclosed with this issue dealing with the Hot-Pot Supper arrangements.



### Special General Meeting

This year the Executive Committee will be proposing a number of amendments to the Society Constitution and since any changes require the approval of a Special General Meeting this will be held immediately prior to the business of the AGM.

Any member who might wish to peruse the Constitution beforehand should request a copy from Mrs Diana Lane (address below).

### Annual General Meeting

Election of Officers and Executive Committee for the ensuing 12 months:

Nominations are invited for the posts of Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Honorary Secretary, Honorary Treasurer, Planning Liaison Officer, Press and Publicity Officer and 10 committee members.

Nominations should be sent to:

Mrs. D.Lane, 6 Church Meadow Lane,  
Heswall CH60 4SB

to arrive not later than 30th September 2003.



## 75th Anniversary



## Wirral Society Art Exhibition

Another exciting event as part of our Anniversary celebrations! The Wirral Society has joined forces with The Williamson Art Gallery in Birkenhead to mount an exhibition of paintings of Wirral done by Wirral artists during the 75 years, 1928 - 2003.

They have been selected from the large reserve stock in the Williamson storeroom and, for the most part, have never been exhibited before.

The Exhibition will open on Tuesday 28 October and will run to the end of November. We believe this will be a big draw with many Wirralians but Society members and friends will have the privilege of a preview on Sunday 26 October from 3 - 5pm. Wine and nibbles will be served.

There will also be an opportunity to view The Wirral Society of Arts Annual Exhibition which will run in tandem with our exhibition in an adjoining gallery.

So, it's two for the price of none! See the enclosed leaflet and make a note of the dates **now**. No reminder will be issued.

## Litter Bins . . .

As practical part of our celebrations we have covered the cost of providing two litter bins in Ellesmere Port and Neston which are now sited, open and ready for use, in the newly-refurbished Whitby Park. The park was formally opened last month with our Treasurer, Peter Bowler, among the invited guests, representing the Society.

Each bin bears a plaque suitably acknowledging the donation commemorating our 75th anniversary.

## . . . and Ponds

At Poulton Lancelyn in Bebington, Wirral Wildlife is undertaking a programme of work which will see the restoration of two substantial and significant ponds located close to each other on farmland.

Excellent results have been achieved so far in clearing vegetation and accumulated silt from one pond, so allowing the water to return and with it, an abundance of wildlife.

The other pond is currently a sad sight as it is totally silted up with vegetation. The Society has made a contribution which will go towards the cost of hiring an excavator to clear away the silt and redistribute it on land nearby. Work will start once the remaining £200 has been raised.

It is claimed that Cheshire has more ponds within its boundaries than anywhere else in Europe. Most of them were former marl pits and their importance to the conservation of aquatic plants and pond life is comparable to the preservation of hedgerows for the birdlife.

## The Dinner

The Anniversary Dinner, held on the Society's 75th birthday, and attended by over 100 members and friends, was certainly a night to remember. Everything went without a hitch and a highlight was the receipt of a personal message of congratulations from HRH The Duke of Edinburgh.

Writing from Sandringham, Prince Philip recalled his three visits to Hilbre Island in the 1970s when he helicoptered in and out, staying on the island for two or three nights on each occasion to see for himself one of the greatest concentrations of wading birds in Europe. 'The photographs I took at that time,' he recalled, 'are a vivid reminder of this unique place.'

His Royal Highness expressed his delight at learning that a group of Friends of Hilbre had been formed and said 'Please accept my warmest wishes for a successful anniversary dinner and many more years to care for Wirral.'

Messages were also received from Sir Max Hastings, the President of CPRE, who wrote:

'I am sure your dinner will do full justice to the splendid contribution the Society and its members have made to the cause which means so much to us all, the English Countryside.'

In her capacity as President of CPRE Cheshire Branch, Lady Baker-Wilbraham, added to her congratulations that 'I note that your Society is only two years younger than CPRE itself.'

Jean Stainthorpe, Chairman of CPRE Cheshire, in sending her apologies for absence, wrote 'Organisations such as ours are a necessary balance to the demands made on the environment by society.'

Messages were also received from Mr Ben Chapman MP, Mr Ken Whittle, Chairman of The Friends of Storeton Woods who took the opportunity to mention 'the Society's generous help and donation towards savings the woods in 1989' and The Wirral Green Belt Council who wrote 'We are proud to have worked with you in improving wonderful Wirral.'

From Mr Barry Lello, Chairman, came a message saying 'Having been present at the birth of the Wirral Society, the Wirral Footpaths and Open Spaces Society is delighted to offer its hearty congratulations.' And indeed they were present. Representatives of the Footpaths Society attended our Inaugural meeting in St. Michael's Church Institute in 1928 and their experience was no doubt appreciated at the time. Experience? Oh, yes. They were founded 40 years earlier in 1888 - and they are still going strong.

Lastly - but by no means least - we were delighted to receive a letter from Mrs Ethn e Davis who lives in Carrickfergus, in County Antrim. As Ethn e Smith she served on the Executive Committee as the representative of the Bromborough Society throughout the 1970s/80s. 'My admiration for the work done by The Wirral Society remains.'

Please accept my warmest good wishes for a successful anniversary dinner and many more years to care for the Wirral.

## Welsh waste For Wirral ?

Well, not exactly *in* Wirral but certainly right on the doorstep. The Flintshire County Council (through its subsidiary A D Waste Ltd) proposes to build a Waste Disposal Factory and associated tip on land on the English side of the new bridge, not far from Shotwick village and within full view of Puddington and Burton about 1½ miles away.

Burton Residents' Association has reacted with alarm at the prospect since the very large buildings and waste tip are scheduled to reach a height of 60 feet when completed in 25 years' time.

To quote from the Residents' Association letter to its members. 'The development propose various measures to combat the effect of tipping 2.5 million cubic metres of waste over a period of at least 20 years. These effects include dust, dirty run-off, leachate, litter scavenging birds, vermin, smells and noise.' The prevailing winds would also blow over this site on to the Wirral Peninsula.

The proposal would also involve disturbing land covering years of steel processing.

The Association points out to its members that objections can only be based on sound technical reasons - it is unacceptable to say that we just don't like the idea.' To that end, they have sought expert professional advice to ensure that their objections are based on reasoned technical grounds.

The County Council has pointed out that the application does not accord with the proximity to Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Special Protection Areas and RAMSAR\* designated sites.

The proposals are at an early stage and it is likely that they will eventually be referred to a Planning Inquiry by the Welsh Assembly.

\* This refers to the Ramsar (Iran) Convention of 1971 which identifies wetland sites of international importance.

## Interpreting Hilbre

Our Vice-Chairman, Terry Edgar, recently represented the Society at the official re-opening of the Telegraph Lookout Station as an Interpretation Centre in Hilbre Island. For those fearless enough to make the trek across the sands of Dee, as our brave Vice-Chairman did, the Interpretation Centre will provide a display centre for information about Hilbre Island and the groups and interests connected with it.

The Telegraph Station has been renovated by volunteers from The Friends of Hilbre and the Raleigh Group in partnership with Wirral Council.

Terry reports, 'Invited guests assembled at the Dee Lane slipway and then walked the two miles over the sands to the islands, Wellingtons being the order of the day. After being welcomed by David Cavanagh, the Hilbre Ranger, the Interpretation Centre was declared open by Dave Cowling, Head of Parks and Open Spaces for Wirral Council. He thanked all those volunteers and organisations who had contributed to the restoration programme before refreshments, kindly provided by The Friends of Hilbre, and a short tour of the island using the excellent 'Explore Hilbre' guide. Guests then made a quick dash back (*sic*) to the mainland before the encroaching tide threatened to maroon them for the rest of the day.'

We are grateful to Terry for carrying the Society's flag on this occasion. Anyone who plans to visit Hilbre must first consult the tide times posted on the notice board at Dee Lane slipway. And whilst on the island remember the time of the incoming tide and leave before it's too late.

## CPRE Title Change

It is very fashionable (or 'cool') at the moment for businesses and organisations to change their name to 'make a statement' and show that they are 'pro-active', and 'forward thinking' and at 'the cutting-edge' of things. It doesn't always work out (remember Consignia?) but the recent change in the title of the CPRE from Council for the Protection of Rural England to Campaign to Protect Rural England makes sense. Its acronym remains CPRE and the new title clearly defines its role in life.

Recently, CPRE campaigned against aspects of the new Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill and, at the moment, CPRE's farming campaigners have been working with the Government on anti-environmental schemes. Their transport campaigners have been busy on traffic congestion, and have also campaigned for safer country lanes and more safeguard for countryside character while their Natural Resources campaigners have been pressing for measures to reduce energy demand. The *Communities not Concrete* campaign aims to promote the better use of existing urban areas and the more efficient use of land and CPRE's a recent endeavour was the *Night Blight!* Campaign to counter the increasing problems of light pollution.

Their latest is the *Country Character* campaign which sets out to acquire information to influence Government initiatives such as the national Countryside Quality Indicator, rural development and the Sustainable Communities Plan.

The name may have changed but the aim's the same.



Campaign to Protect  
Rural England

*The new logo*

## Ro-Ro No-Go

It is some time since we reported on the long running saga of the right of way along the Mersey front which has allegedly been contravened by the building of the Twelve Quays Ferry Terminal. But the fight has not been abandoned, only held up by bureaucracy.

Graham Handley, who started the campaign to restore the path, reports that the matter is now in the hands of the Secretary of State for the Environment. A decision is expected towards the end of the year.

*If you think that Wirral matters  
tell your friends about  
The Wirral Society*

## Summer Meeting

It was a fine and pleasantly warm summer's evening and one which the group of around 50 who turned up at Leahurst. The University of Liverpool's Veterinary Field Station at Willaston, are unlikely to forget. And the main reason for that was, without doubt, the personality of Dr Derek Knottenbelt, Head of the Large Animal Hospital. He was an outstanding guide and lecturer whose every word could be heard with great clarity and who liberally peppered his words with facts, figures and fascinating anecdotes. It was a lecture 'on the hoof' as we moved about the site and even though we were on our feet for nearly two and a half hours nobody complained and nobody dropped out. But no doubt everyone slept well that night.

Nothing was omitted. We were taken into the Operating Theatre and shown the unique operating table, capable of holding an elephant if need be. We learned how the animals can be X-Rayed and anaesthetised before being gently moved into operating positions by hoists and how, afterwards, the hoist moves them into the rubber-walled and rubber-floored Recovery Room.

A high spot was meeting 'Billy', the station's resident horse. As placid a representative of the equine species as one is ever likely to meet, Billy is the permanent blood donor and student bandaging model. By the time the students have

practiced bandaging every conceivable part, we were told, there's very little of Billy to be seen.

Billy also provided us with a vivid demonstration at exceedingly close quarters of how a horse walks, how a horse trots, how it canters and how a horse gallops at breakneck speed - without getting anywhere. It was all done indoors with Billy on an adjustable moving roadway with Dr Knottenbelt at the controls and providing a commentary. It is a facility intended for examination of a horse's gait and for checking on its recuperation. For Billy it was part of his daily exercise.

We are most grateful to Dr Knottenbelt for so readily giving up his Saturday afternoon and providing such a memorable occasion.

## The Ragwort Project

Dr Knottenbelt drew attention to the great danger of the deadly poisonous weed, Ragwort, which caused the deaths of around 6000 horses last year. There is no known cure and The Ragwort Trust has been set up at Leahurst to fund research into the problem. The Committee was pleased to authorise a donation of £100 from the Society.

## TWENTY YEARS AGO

This is the Wirral Society Executive Committee of 1983. The Photograph came to light recently and it is interesting to see who was keeping the flag flying two decades ago and who among them is still actively involved today.

The occasion, we think, is the July meeting of that year when the Chairman, Leslie Bibby, and his wife Margaret, hosted the meeting at their lovely home in Bebington. In fact, it was their generous and delightful habit for many years until quite recently to invite the Executive Committee to hold their July meetings at their house when the business of the day would be followed by canapés, freshly-picked choice strawberries and wine.

At the time this picture was taken Leslie himself was the Society's Chairman (he is now, of course our senior Vice-President) and, it will be noticed, our current Chairman, Rod Tann, and our Treasurer, Peter Bowler, were also on the Committee then.

Rod was recruited to the Committee in his early twenties by no less a person than the legendary W. Victor Smith (then Vice-Chairman), and was immediately appointed secretary.

Around the same time, Peter had qualified as a chartered accountant with Blease Lloyd & Company of Birkenhead, who except for one brief period, have provided the Society with a treasurer almost from the day it was founded. Almost from his first day Peter was given the privilege of carrying on that tradition and he has been in post ever since. This means that both Rod and Peter have served on the Executive Committee continuously for at least 30 years. Neither could (or would rather not) recall actual dates.

It is pleasing, too, to see our other vice-chairman, Peter Jones. We were delighted to see Peter at Leahurst recently and we can say, in all honesty, he looks not a day older than he does in the photograph.

The only lady in the group is Mrs Ethn e Davis (then Ethn e Smith) who now lives in Northern Ireland but who kindly sent her greetings and congratulations to the Society for our 75th birthday.

Sadly, some of the others in the photograph have passed away but we hope that this picture will, in a small way, commemorate their valued service.

**Back Row:** Rod Tann, Colin Taylor, Gordon Blair, Tony Colvin, Norman Pursglove

**Middle Row:** Peter Jones, Maurice Brown\*, James Spencer\*, G. Keith Davidson\*, Geoffrey Spencer\*

**Front Row:** Ethn e Davis (nee Smith), Ron Sumner\*, C. Leslie Bibby, Peter Bowler.

\* (Sadly, now deceased)



**Editor: Alan Brack**  
47 Upton Road, Claughton. Tel/Fax: 0151 652 5530  
[www.wirralsociety.f9.co.uk](http://www.wirralsociety.f9.co.uk)

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