



# WIRRAL MATTERS

JOURNAL OF THE WIRRAL SOCIETY  
The Wirral Committee of C.P.R.E.

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SPRING 1997

## NEW LAKE FOR NEW BRIGHTON ?

Ever since New Brighton's famous open air swimming pool was damaged beyond repair in a ferocious storm in 1990 and subsequently demolished, the pressing question has been: What can be done with the site? There was an immediate demand from some folk that the opportunity should be seized to build a bang up-to-the-minute replacement pool, possibly with a sliding roof so that it could be used in all weathers and for other purposes. It would bring New Brighton back to life, they said. But the sort of money that would have cost was not available and whether it was really desirable was questionable. Its future lay in the hands of the Merseyside Development Corporation who had been charged with refurbishing and regenerating New Brighton. In the end they decided to put the site up for sale in the hope that some highly optimistic (and highly moneyed) entrepreneur might come along with a suitable leisure proposal for it. But as the years went by nothing happened and the site lies desolate and forlorn like an old bomb crater.

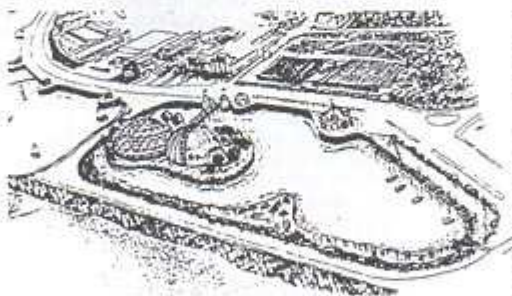
But now, in a brave attempt to end the stalemate, the Wallasey Civic Society supported by the Wellington Road Conservation Area Committee have come forward with a proposal. It is a highly practical and commendable scheme and one which The Wirral Society is glad to give its wholehearted support. It is comparatively inexpensive and will bring back to life an area which if not dead is certainly moribund. It is in fact a revision of a scheme put to the MDC by the Civic Society six years ago.

The Civic Society's imaginative plan is to turn two sunken seafront sites (the bathing pool site and a sunken overflow car-park) into a seafront lagoon, suitable for dinghy sailing, windsurfing, canoeing and other aquatic pastimes. And, as the Marine Lake

does at West Kirby, it will not only bring a welcome splash of colour to an otherwise uninspiring scene but give residents and visitors alike something interesting to watch.

At the north end of the site is an area of raised ground which could be made into a small island and become the site of a restaurant or a swimming pool or some other appropriate facility. The Civic Society points out that prior to the sudden demise of the former Riverside Restaurant tea dances were enjoying a comeback and advantage could be taken to restore a facility which is very much missed by many people.

The Riverside Restaurant was situated on the exposed north side of the bathing pool and was frequently battered by the full force of the elements. On some wet and



squally days those customers brave enough to struggle to the restaurant's front door needed to be dressed in survival kit. This island site would be on the protected south side and easily accessible by both car and bus.

One further asset of a lagoon – and one not to be dismissed lightly – is that at times of very high tides and gale-force winds which bring the waters of the Mersey roaring over the sea wall on to the prom, the lagoon would act as a relief overflow and help to counter possible flooding.

The plan proposes that landing stages should be provided at the west end of the lagoon for use by the dinghy sailors and windsurfers and this shallower end would be ideal for youngsters and beginners learning any of the water sports. It could also contain an artificial beach with sandcastle-making and paddling facilities

for the tiny tots.

That is the essence of the scheme and we hope that it will receive the serious and careful consideration it deserves. With the MDC going out of business in eighteen months time there is no time to lose.

Joy Hockey, the Secretary of the Wallasey Civic Society's Planning Advisory Committee (and also a member of the Wirral Society Committee), points out that a lake, even one without any facilities, would be more acceptable than the eyesore of the undeveloped bathing-pool site and the very rough and ready hard-core sunken car-park. 'The development could easily be phased,' she said. 'The island site is already there and it would be just a case of breaking through each side to flood the whole area.'

The specialist parts could be done as funds became available. Unless something is done soon the promenade will be blighted for years to come.'

The day has long passed since New Brighton was a seaside resort. In recent years it has become more and more a residential area. The sites of former places of entertainment have given way to houses and flats. Houses have been built on the Tower Grounds funfair site; flats have been erected on the site of the Tivoli Theatre and on the site of the Winter Gardens. The main street, Victoria Road, once full of gift shops, amusement arcades and shops catering for holidaymakers and day-trippers, has been transformed by the MDC and is now largely residential and houses and flats have been built on the sites of former hotels, cafes and clubs. What leisure facilities still function are largely confined to the Marine Promenade between Rowson Street and Victoria Road.

The first priority, says the Civic Society, must be for the people who live there twelve months of the year and any tourism development should be extremely low-key and less grandiose than has been suggested to date. Wirral Borough Council must never be tempted to allow anything crowded or obtrusive or any ugly development which might bring in the wrong type of visitor.

## UPTON MEADOW SAVED !

It is understood that – at long last – the T's have been dotted and the U's crossed on the agreement between Wirral Council and The Woodlands Trust and that Upton Meadow is now safe from development for at least the next ninety-nine years.

At a recent celebratory gathering, hosted by The Woodlands Trust, at The Greave Dunning in Greasby, it was announced that the scheme has been given a major boost with a contribution from The Millennium Fund. Additional contributions, however, are still needed and it is hoped that local firms will make donations.

Maintaining Upton Meadow as a green space is something The Wirral Society has been advocating ever since Wirral Council tried to market the site as a (then fashionable) science park some twenty years ago. We congratulate The Friends of Upton Meadow whose initiative in securing the support of The Woodlands Trust has brought about this happy outcome.

The fund raised by The Friends is still open and more contributions are invited. The Society's donation of £1,000 (the largest single donation to the fund so far) is an indication of our concern that this precious green space shall remain green and open to the public.

Denis Evans, secretary of The Friends, said: 'Within twelve months the Meadow is going to be quite magnificent. The substantial improvement plan will include the planting of many thousands of trees and bushes; new ponds and pathways will be completed by the year-end and The Friends will be involved with the day-to-day maintenance. Questionnaires are being handed out to the local residents seeking their ideas and everything will be drawn together by the Woodlands Trust.'

'It is our hope,' continued Mr. Evans, 'that after all our efforts, more and more people of all age groups will come to enjoy the Meadow.'



## FLAYBRICK GUIDED TOURS

The first issue of the Flaybrick Memorial Gardens Newsletter has reached us and it is pleased to read of the highly laudable work being done by the Friends of Flaybrick and what is gradually being achieved.

The newsletter reports that as part of National Tree Week eight new trees were planted with the help of Crossways Tenants Association. The trees are all species new to Flaybrick and one of them, *Sequoiadendron Giganteum*, when it matures will be the biggest tree in the area.

There is no doubt about that. This particular species of *Sequoia* is sometimes known as the Wellingtonia or Sierra Redwood and on the slopes of its native Sierra Nevada in California they grow up to 300 feet tall. One which was felled some

(continued in column 3)

## SAVING 'THE GORSE'

The campaign to save 'The Gorse', an open green area adjacent to the water tower in Gorsehill Road, New Brighton, is well underway. It now has the enthusiastic support of the New Brighton Action Group who have lived up to their title by organising a petition signed by 1,200 local residents.

Not unreasonably, the Conservation Officer of North West Water (the owners) wanted to know what the campaigners intended to do with the site if they got it and asked to see an outline plan for its possible restoration and conversion for local community use. These demands have now been met. Groundwork Wirral have drawn up an imaginative draft plan for discussion purposes and have provided estimates of possible costs involved. They have also furnished a list of names of organisations from whom grants might be sought.

The plan was presented to the Conservation Officer at a meeting with him at the end of March and his response is awaited.



## USING THE RIGHT MATERIALS

Shortly before we went to press we received from Ellesmere Port & Neston Council Planning Services a Draft Local Policy Guidance Note relating to the choice of materials acceptable for use within Conservation Areas. The aim is to help protect and enhance the conservation areas of Ince, Ellesmere Port Docks, Willaston, Burton, Ness, Neston and Parkgate.

The Society's comments were invited. The Guidance Note detailed the particular types of bricks, slates and roof tiles which would be acceptable. It also wisely suggested that anyone intending to submit a planning application affecting any of those conservation areas should first seek preliminary discussions with the planning staff before doing so. Samples of the materials it is intended to use must also be furnished. These will be checked for suitability at the proposed site prior to any approval.

Replying on behalf of the Society, our Chairman, Keith Davidson (an experienced architect), made several technical observations which he hoped would be useful but also voiced concern that sensitive design within the Conservation Areas might only be subject to scrutiny by Town Planning Officers who may not be trained architecturally. He enquired whether the architectural expertise within other departments of the Council could be drawn upon by way of consultancy.

To this end Mr. Davidson suggested that more stress should be placed upon the necessity for preliminary discussions between would-be applicants and the planning department as it is at this stage that the architectural design input would be most effective before the design thoughts of an applicant became too entrenched.

## MILLENNIUM GREENS

One possible funding source for the Save 'The Gorse' campaign could come from the Millennium Greens scheme being promoted by The Countryside Commission. This is a plan to enable at least 250 local communities in England to have a Millennium Green by the year 2000. It is being funded by the Millennium Commission.

What is a Millennium Green? It is, simply, a 21st century village green though not confined to country villages and hamlets. It will be 'an open space to be enjoyed permanently by the local community. It may be located in a city, town, suburb, village or hamlet. It may be very small or perhaps as large as thirty acres and is within easy walking distance of people's homes. Each will have its own character – there may be trees, bushes, ponds, streams, paths. It is a place where people can relax, children can play and everyone can enjoy nature.'

There are, of course, some criteria to be met but 'The Gorse', would seem to fit the bill exactly.

(from first column)

years ago was 365 feet tall. And they last for hundreds of years. Some are over 1,000 years old and on record is one which had 4,000 rings.

While we don't enjoy California's climatic conditions – at the moment, anyway – in two or three hundred years' time Flaybrick's tree should stand higher than the Livel Building!

There are already sixty different species of trees growing in Flaybrick and the planting of additional species is part of a plan to increase that number to create an arboretum which will be matched in Wirral only by Ness Gardens. One thousand daffodil bulbs have also been planted in the public grave area to add a splash of colour to an otherwise plain part of the gardens and additional buddleia bushes have been planted to attract even more butterflies to the fifteen species already recorded.

The tombstones and graves at Flaybrick tell fascinating stories, of triumph and disaster and great achievement. For anyone at all interested in local history the Gardens are well worth a visit. You can join one of the monthly Sunday morning guided tours (themed this year – military, nautical, industrial, etc.) or obtain a Trail leaflet and go at a time that may be more convenient.

The Guided Tours are 1st May, 1st June, 6th July, 3rd August and 7th September. All will commence at 11.00 a.m. Prior booking is essential. Telephone the Flaybrick Ranger on 0151 652 5269. He can also let you have the Trails leaflet.

The entrance to Flaybrick is in Tollemache Road off Upton Road, Cloughton.

**WIRRAL MATTERS**  
is sponsored by UML Limited as  
part of their Wirral Community  
programme.

THIS YEAR'S SUMMER MEETING  
*will be*  
A GUIDED TOUR OF BIDSTON VILLAGE

on  
TUESDAY 20th MAY 1997

OPEN TO ALL MEMBERS, RELATIONS AND FRIENDS  
ASSEMBLE AT BIDSTON PARISH CHURCH AT 7.30 P.M.

Many members will have seen a few weeks ago that fascinating BBC2 television programme in the series *The House Detectives* when a team of experts researched the mystifying history of Church Farm, Bidston. This remarkable house, with its twenty-six rooms and thirteen staircases is patently no ordinary farmhouse and has been subjected to many alterations over the years. The experts finally proved that it was originally a mediaeval manor house which had been radically altered by succeeding occupiers, particularly during the 17th century.

Church Farm is only one intriguing aspect of this ancient village and for those not familiar with it, this visit should prove an eye-opener and a memorable occasion.

To assist with the organisation and catering, please complete the form below (or use plain paper) and send it to the Secretary not later than Friday, 16th May 1997.

To: Eric Sanné, Secretary, The Wirral Society,  
'Clavis', Meols Drive, West Kirby L48 5DB

Please reserve \_\_\_\_\_ places for the Summer Meeting at Bidston Village  
on Tuesday, 20th May, 1997.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone No: \_\_\_\_\_



*Bidston Church as it was in 1800*

**AND WHILE WE'RE ON ABOUT BIDSTON ...**

Over the past five years the Wirral Borough Council Department of Leisure Services (in the shape of the Central Library, Borough Road, Birkenhead) have adopted an admirable policy of republishing annually a facsimile of a past book about the Wirral Peninsula; books which have become minor classics and are now only to be found in reference libraries or occasionally in antiquarian book shops at very high prices.

Their latest reprint, published just before last Christmas, is H.B. Neilson's *'Auld Lang Syne'*, a book much treasured by those lucky enough to possess an original copy which was published in 1935.

The book is sub-titled *Recollections and rural records of old Cloughton, Birkenhead and Bidston with other reminiscences* and is a marvellous evocation of life in those places in the latter half of the 19th century and the years up to the First World War.

Harry Neilson was born in 1861 in Westbourne Road, Birkenhead when 'the house was most pleasantly situated amid green fields.' Two years later his family moved to a large villa his father had had built in Forest Road, Cloughton, where there really was a forest.

The young Neilson spent an idyllic childhood in and around the forest of firs

which lay between Forest Road (then just a country lane) and Shrewsbury Road and terminated in a meadow near Cloughton Village and playing on Manor Farm which adjoined the bottom of the garden. He recalls travelling into Birkenhead on the horse trams and also being taken to the races at both Parkgate and Hoylake.

Friday was an exciting day of the week when the ladies from the suburbs and other parts of Wirral travelled into Birkenhead to do their shopping for the weekend and the week ahead.

'No telephones were at hand to ring up tradesmen to give orders. So the good housewives went themselves, sampled butter and cheese, selected chops and joints, and often carried home some of their purchases themselves. The carriage folk went in their broughams while the less fortunate travelled in hackney cab or tramway car.'

He describes the many delights of the old Birkenhead Market with its sparkling fountain at the centre and its friendly stallholders.

In those days, too, 'in Birkenhead Park the nurses sat about chatting and keeping a watchful eye on their precious charges playing near.' Then on the soft grassy verge by the roadside long strings of well-bred saddle horses and harness horses were daily

brought for exercise, each groom mounted on one and leading another, the horses' clothing of buff and blue bearing the monograms of their various owners.'

After an apprenticeship at Cammell Laird's Harry Neilson went to sea as an engineer and his book includes memories of his travels to foreign parts. But when he finally comes ashore he settles in a house in School Lane, Bidston, where he spent the last thirty years of his life.

He became a pillar of the community in Bidston which he describes in some detail, telling us who lived in which cottage and what they did for a living. Most worked on the many farms which then encircled the village. His account, peppered with anecdotes, brings the village vividly to life.

What adds greatly to the charm of this book are the illustrations which are all the author's own work. Harry Neilson became known as a local artist and never was a book more copiously illustrated. His fifty-four 'chapters' have yielded no less than one hundred and sixty-one delightful and amusing drawings.



*Copies of 'Auld Lang Syne' are still available from Birkenhead Central Library (or can be ordered from any branch library). Price £12.95 (Hardback).*

## THE AMAZING MR. SEYMOUR

Environmentalists everywhere (which includes everyone who at heart wants to see Britain's countryside protected) will have been greatly cheered to have read of the amazing exploits of sixty-three year-old Mr. Colin Seymour of Flamborough in Yorkshire. Described as 'Britain's most successful amateur lawyer' Mr. Seymour has, over the past twenty years, taken out no less than eighty-one private prosecutions to protect the environment against some dire threat of one sort or another - and won them all!

His legal knowledge comes from intensive research into ancient laws (as far back as the 15th century) and old Acts of Parliament which might be relevant to the particular case and the court cases have been fought without any financial help from anyone else or any organisation. Now rather deaf and only partially-sighted because of glaucoma, he lives alone with his old dog, Fred (also deaf) in a small unheated cottage. His sole income is £40 a week disability allowance.

What propelled him into the news this time was his successful resort to law to save fifty yards of ancient hawthorn hedge in his own village from being uprooted to make way for a bowling green.

How does he manage it all unaided out of just £40 a week? Simple. Costs awarded to him for one case go towards paying for the next. The latest case over the hedge involved him in four hundred and fifty hours work and cost £3,000. One book he needed - *The Declaratory Judgement* by Lord Woolf - cost him £450. Had he enlisted professional legal help the bill would have been around £450,000. Any spare money he might have over goes to a hedgehog hospital in Hull.

Among his more recent successes were forcing his county council to re-open a bridleway they had unlawfully closed and also to repair a road leading down to the sea and making his borough council withdraw the prosecution of three of his neighbours whom they had wrongly accused of encroaching on to the roadway. He has had leisure craft removed from the River Derwent to protect the otters and put a stop to proposed opencast coal-mining near his cottage.

In the 1960's he prosecuted British Waterways, Leeds Council and British Coal for unlawfully demolishing a bridge over the River Aire. Not only did he win the case but the three defendants had to build a new bridge - at a cost of £1 million. The original bridge was known as Caroline Bridge. The new one bears his name: Seymour Bridge.

His success in preventing the removal of the hawthorn hedge in his village may not seem particularly significant but it could set a precedent which could save 40,000 miles of hedgerow throughout the country.

Colin Seymour's astonishing record in protecting the environment embodies the true spirit of The Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE). It epitomises everything it stands for. The least they could do is to make him an Honorary Vice-President.



Mr. Seymour's successes will surely hearten and may possibly give ideas to CPRE Cheshire Branch.

By coincidence, a few days earlier, Mrs. Judy Butler, the Branch Publicity Officer, issued a Press Release expressing the fears of the Branch over new draft regulations which would leave eighty-three per cent of Cheshire's hedgerows unprotected. With the alarm bells ringing Judy Butler appealed to farmers and landowners in the county not only to retain existing hedges but also to allow any saplings found in the hedges to grow and mature. There are, it is estimated, some 800,000 potential oaks, ash, sycamore and hazel saplings rooted in Cheshire's hedges which should not be allowed to fall prey to the mechanical hedgecutters.

If her appeal to farmers' better natures falls on deaf ears perhaps CPRE should warn offenders that they could be reported to Colin Seymour if they don't mend their ways.

## REPAckaged

An organisation which seems to have sprung from nowhere over the last twelve months is the Environment Agency. It is frequently in the news but the report of its birth seems to have gone unnoticed by many people.

On the 1st April last year a merger took place between the National Rivers Authority and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution to form a new authority called The Environment Agency.

The new authority took on the functions of both the merged organisations together with the waste regulations functions of local authorities.

It is always encouraging when there is a reduction, however slight, in the number of Government organisations but whether this particular marriage will result in any saving is a moot point. It may even cost more since the new agency will operate through seven Regional Environmental Advisory Committees (known as REPACs) who must be consulted on the manner in which the Environment Agency carries out its functions in the region.

Their remit is 'to identify issues of special importance to the region, to act as a sounding board for ideas emanating from the Agency, and to provide advice on various activities in the region.'

Wirral is part of the North West Region of the Environment Agency which has its head office in Warrington.

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## IN ALL CONSCIENCE

We have all seen from time to time on the back of greetings cards or catalogues and brochures small type apologies for the paper being used. Words like: 'Made from paper from sustainable trees' or 'For every tree cut down three are planted' and, of course, 'Made from recycled paper'.

One of the biggest users of paper in recent weeks has been the Halifax Building Society who, it is reported, will use up no less than 50,000 trees in the paperwork leading up to the Society's conversion to a bank.

They are patently very much alive to possible criticism of this arboreal holocaust and are nipping it in the bud by initiating a nationwide tree-planting programme to create new areas of woodland for the enjoyment of future generations. The scheme will be managed by The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers and Groundwork.

A very laudable reaction to an acute attack of conscience.

On the same subject we're not quite sure what to make of a tiny-type footnote to a recent Cheshire County publication: 'Printed on 60 per cent Sugar Cane Waste, 40 per cent Softwood fibre. 100 per cent Chlorine-free paper'.

It brings to mind the words of Poo-Bah in *The Mikado*: 'Merely a corroborative detail, intended to give artistic verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative.'

## NOT TO BE SNIFFED AT

It has been reported that Britain's first sewage-fuelled electric turbine has been opened at the foot of 130 ft. shaft. It will provide half the power needed to run Northumbrian Water's Treatment works at Dawdon, Co. Durham.

