



# WIRRAL MATTERS

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

Editor: Alan Brack, 47 Upton Road, Bickerhead L43 8TQ Tel: 0151 652 5530  
Hon. Secretary: Eric Sarné, 'Clavis', Meols Drive, West Kirby Tel: 0151 632 3119

SUMMER 1996

## CONSERVATION WITH IMAGINATION

### The Transformation of Claremont Farm

What can be done with old, outmoded and redundant farm buildings, other than turn them into dwelling places, is currently being imaginatively demonstrated at Claremont Farm near Clatterbridge roundabout. Many members will know the farm for its farm shop and as a Pick-Your-Own soft fruit centre.

For nearly fifty years the farm buildings have been unsuited to modern methods of agriculture but the last war and death duties have made it impossible to bring them up to date.

The farm is part of the Lancelyn Estate and has been in the ownership of the de Launcelyn (now Lancelyn Green) family since at least the year 1093 when it is recorded that it was held by Scirard de Launcelyn. It has been farmed by a succession of tenant farmers ever since and over the succeeding 720 years various buildings were put up and demolished and replaced until the present buildings were erected around the time of the Napoleonic wars about 1810.

With the death in 1993 of the then tenant, Jim Pimbley, the tenancy passed to his son, Ian, and the estate management was now in the hands of the 32nd generation of Lancelyns, Scirard Lancelyn Green. He had already restored two sets of redundant farm buildings, including Poulton Hall Farm from which he runs Lancelyn Theatre Supplies and which, commendably, has created roughly the same number of jobs as the old farm would have done before the Industrial Revolution.

### The problem

The problem with Claremont Farm was that it was unable to cope with today's 40-foot long delivery vehicles and large machinery which could not be manoeuvred through an entrance arch designed for horses. It also became difficult to comply

with modern regulations. Something, decided Mr. Lancelyn Green, had to be done. Would the whole lot have to be demolished and a new farm built? Or was there another way?

### The solution

The solution arrived at was to create an entirely new farmyard next to an existing granary further down the lane and transfer to this new site a Dutch barn which had been erected on the existing farmyard some twenty-five years ago. This would restore the original farmyard and free the buildings surrounding it for other purposes.

### Arts centre

Over the past couple of years the work of stabilising, making safe and restoring the old buildings has been going on and planning permission has been granted for their conversion into craft and light industrial workshops and an exhibition gallery to be known collectively as Claremont Arts Centre. The work is proceeding fast (the barn must be relocated this summer before the potato harvest) and members of the Executive Committee who recently met at the adjacent home of Mr. and Mrs. Leslie Bibby were treated to a guided tour of the premises to see how the architect, Mr. J.E. Myers, was achieving the transformation.

We were most impressed. It is an imaginative project and great care is being taken to ensure that the character of the buildings is maintained. The slaters, joiners, stonemasons and other tradesmen have done their work well. Soon there will be a most attractive, spacious and airy art gallery where it is intended to hold exhibitions (and, of course, sales) of pictures and craftwork by both up-and-coming and well-established full-time artists. There will be a range of workshops, looking old but with all mod. con., with floor space of two hundred square feet upwards. Rents are expected to be around £1,000 a year. So far, a carpenter, a stained glass artist and a disabled craft worker together with someone wanting to start a pottery decoration and firing business have expressed interest.

"Much of the work is so discreet," said Mr. Lancelyn Green, "that you will not easily tell the restored work from the original—which is as it should be."



It is hoped that the work will be complete and the arts centre and workshops ready for occupation towards the end of October. Anyone wishing to start a cottage industry or looking for a workshop for light industrial use which does not involve the use of large or noisy machinery should contact Mr. Lancelyn Green (telephone 334 3000).

The long-established Farm Shop remains open as usual.



Claremont Farm

Drawing J.E. Myers BA BArch RIBA

## THE SUMMER MEETING

### Visit to Mostyn House School

For many years now the Society has been holding a Summer Meeting for members at some place of interest in Wirral. Over the years we have been everywhere from exploring some of the Peninsula's historic villages to factories and laboratories and even, on one notable occasion, to see what happens at a sewerage works. Each year the Executive Committee cudgels its collective brain trying to find somewhere we haven't yet been. A desperate appeal to members through these columns asking for ideas brought not a single response but, undaunted, the Committee came up with the notion of a visit to Parkgate and Mostyn House School.

This novel venue, in such an interesting part of Wirral, would, we imagined, bring out members in force. Mostyn House is such a well-known Wirral landmark but most people know it only from the outside. Curiosity alone, we thought, should ensure a good attendance. Alas, to our great disappointment only thirty-six turned up. And since some of them were family and friends of members that represented a turnout of not much more than five per cent of the membership.

That select three dozen, however, were treated to a fascinating tour of the School premises and a short walk round the historic places of Parkgate and its links with Lady Hamilton, all under the expert guidance of former Deputy Headmaster, Dr. Geoffrey Place and Clive Edwards from the Parkgate Society.

"Those members who did not come missed a rare treat," commented Keith Davidson, the Wirral Society Chairman. "We were privileged to be given a detailed guided tour of the school and everyone was most impressed with its striking Victorian chapel. We shall long remember it, not least the way everything positively gleamed with polish. Our grateful thanks are due to Geoffrey Place and Clive Edwards for all the trouble they took."

## UPTON MEADOW

The Upton Meadow saga drags on. At the time of going to press, the solicitors for Wirral Council and those for The Woodland Trust are still trying to iron out the minutiae of the agreement.

## THE FABLES OF FLAYBRICK



*In the early hours of Tuesday, 1st December 1925, Lock Ah Tam, aged 52, of 122 Price Street, Birkenhead, a highly-respected member of the community, shot and killed his 42 year-old wife, his 17 year-old daughter and mortally wounded his eldest daughter, aged 19. Ah Tam was arrested and sent for trial at Chester Assizes where he was defended by the most eminent counsel of the day, Sir Edward Marshall Hall, KC. Despite a plea of insanity and evidence that Ah Tam was subject to epileptic fits the jury took just fifteen minutes to find him guilty. Ah Tam was hanged in Walton Jail and buried within the prison precincts.*



This sad tale of a gentle, law-abiding, much-liked member of the community who was patently not of sound mind when he perpetrated this horrific crime, is recalled with one of the stops on the guided tour of Flaybrick Memorial Gardens (erstwhile Flaybrick Cemetery). The Trail takes in the grave of the murdered daughters.

The gardens, where over 100,000 burials have taken place, is a fascinating place and many a gravestone and monument betokens a tale worth telling. There is, for instance, the grave of James Taylor Cochrane who built 'Resurgam', the world's first mechanically-powered submarine designed by the Reverend George Garrett. It was launched in November 1879 after a team of thirty Shire horses (what a sight that must have been!) had hauled it 300 yards to the Great Float. It sank off the Great Orme on its maiden voyage and was discovered lying on the sea bed in 1935. Young apprentices are currently at work building a replica for permanent display at Woodside.

Some of the founding fathers of Birkenhead lie buried in Flaybrick. People like Sir William Jackson, the man behind the creation of Birkenhead Park (and who boasts the largest monument), members of the Laird family, Lewis Hornblower, the architect who supervised the building of the Birkenhead Park lodges, railings and all the mechanical work for which he was paid £2. 2s. 0d. a week, and John Williamson, a Cunard director who gave the town the Williamson Art Gallery.

There are the lasting resting places of people who gave their lives for others; people who devoted their time to helping their less fortunate brethren and people whose inventive skills and business acumen were influential in Birkenhead and Wirral's

development. All their stories are briefly related on the tour by Ray Johnson, the extremely knowledgeable and excellent guide from the Friends of Flaybrick.

The programme of guided tours has now finished for this year but printed Trail leaflets organised by the Friends are available from local libraries for anyone who wishes to go independently.



The Friends have many other ideas for improving the Gardens but they lack resources. Their 'shopping list' includes £5,000 for the repair of railings and coping stones, £50-£100 for the labelling of specimen trees and (are you listening Mrs. Bottomley?) £1.5 to £2million for the restoration of the two chapels.

The Executive Committee feel that the Friends are to be applauded and supported and whilst we cannot assist with the more expensive needs it was agreed to make a donation of £100 towards tree-labelling and the Friends' general funds. The Gardens contain so many splendid, fully mature trees, including some which are quite rare, that they represent the only arboretum in Wirral apart from Ness Gardens.

Wirral Borough Council has recognised the importance of Flaybrick Gardens and have now put them in the care of a full-time Countryside Ranger - a unique appointment. If you want to know anything about them, the Ranger, Steve Titley, can be contacted on 652 5269.

On a recent visit to Liverpool and its surroundings, it occurred to me that the professional classes there live a lot better than their counterparts in the South. A couple of days with friends at Hoylake last week convinced me of it.

You can work in Liverpool and be home in a quarter of the time it takes many of us to get in and out of London. The gardens are bigger; the houses, many of them built in Liverpool's heyday, are more spacious and cheaper. Dogs get better walks. At this time of year, the light that shines on the Welsh hills across the Dee estuary fills me with awe.

Yet I seem to remember from days in government that it was the dickens of a job to persuade industrial managers to move to Liverpool with their families. Some of them felt it was socially a step down. Well, today there are more middle-class professionals living graciously on the Wirral peninsula than you will find in most of the Home Counties.

-W.F. Deedes  
Daily Telegraph

## PLANNING MATTERS

The Wirral Borough Council wants to improve communications with its citizens, particularly as regards planning matters, and this most laudable aspiration is manifested in two separate but parallel initiatives currently being pursued by the Council.

The first initiative came from Councillor John Cocker, Chairman of the Planning Committee, who decided that public involvement in the planning process was a theme to be developed during 1996. As a result, in February this year, the Director of Planning and Economic Development, Mr. James Wilkie, circularised all the various voluntary bodies in Wirral that might have any interest in the planning processes to ask them to tell him if they had any views as to how the public involvement in the planning process could be improved.

The results of this consultation process were reported to the Planning Committee on 20th June at some length with the comments made on a series of topics compared with the existing procedures and, where possible, improvements to conform with the public's concerns were proposed. The proposals were all commonsense improvements and the report was adopted by the Council. The proposals are relatively low-key, such as sending to any non-commercial organisation, on request, the weekly list of planning applications. Previously, this was limited to a few select organisations of which this Society was one. A request that such non-commercial organisations should also be sent copies of the actual planning applications was treated more cautiously as, obviously, this could impose considerable extra costs and work for the Council staff. Here again the Society has been privileged to receive copies of applications when we have asked for them; a privilege that we have exercised abstemiously.

### Minor improvements

That the improvements to be adopted are only of a minor nature reflects two facts: firstly, the current system works pretty well and, secondly, that the planning legislation, the Government's series of Planning Policy Guidance Notes and now the Council's own Unitary Development Plan provide such a comprehensive framework within which the planning decisions must be taken that the issues to be decided, and on which the public might wish to be consulted, are limited. This latter fact led the Director of Planning to comment that there was a need

to educate the public as to what were, and what were not, planning matters. To this end, he intended to incorporate advice on this score in the standard letters sent to properties adjacent to a proposed development. One other significant change has been adopted and that was to increase, from 6 to 25, the number of names required on a petition against a planning application before a petitioner was permitted to address the Planning Committee. This was because it had been found that it was too easy for one objector to muster the other five names needed so that he could put his particular views to the Committee. It was considered that 25 petitioners would more accurately represent a widespread local concern that justified the additional complication to the procedures entailed in an objector addressing the Committee. At the same time the applicants are now given the right, which they did not have before, of addressing the Committee in response to a petition – which seems to be only logical and just.

### New initiative

The other initiative that is underway comes from the European Union in which the EC has funded a three year project involving selected local authorities across the Union who will instal computer terminals in public libraries – West Kirby and Bebington are those initially selected in the Wirral – to allow the public to access the data that the Council can provide to the public on the following topics: Planning and Development, Business and Tourism, Socio-Economic Data and Environmental information. The intention is to instal 'touch-screen' terminals that are easy to use and the system will be largely map based so that the user will be able to pinpoint the area – or even a particular property – and ask for the relevant data pertaining to it that he or she desires. The Council are anxious to hear from any readers who would be interested to use this service as to what information they want to be made available; but they want your response urgently so contact either Brian Knott on 691 8192 or Chris Malpas on 691 8193 for further information, or either of them by fax on 691 8180.

– R.G. Loran

### WIRRAL MATTERS

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

## UNAUTHORISED ADVERTISING

The Executive Committee has noticed that unauthorised advertising signs seem to be proliferating in Wirral. Big offenders are pubs which are festooned with banners and placards telling the world that they are now OPEN ALL DAY and provide LIVE ENTERTAINMENT or boast REAL ALE and GOOD FOOD and BIG SCREEN TV. Food shops and wine shops are almost as bad, even worse, with their windows plastered with so many special offers that the glass is almost obliterated.

Ah, yes, you might say, but it is the same everywhere. All over the country in cities, towns and pretty villages alike this sort of thing is going on. So what's different about Wirral? After all, anyone with a business must be allowed to advertise.

These are relevant points, of course, but are no reason why we should not raise our voice if we think things are getting out of hand. In the past we have drawn attention to noise pollution and sky pollution (from over-bright street lights blotting out the stars) and noxious pollution from industrial chimneys. Visual pollution (or, as the older generation would say, 'eye-sores') has not entered into our deliberations much. But it ought to. Do you realise that all advertising is illegal unless approved by the local authority?

We appreciate that huge roadside advertisements on permanent sites will have received Council approval and we are not quibbling about those, dislike them though we may. But when we see notices advertising pop concerts plastered on hoardings and vacant premises and adverts for one-day auction sales, car-boot sales, carpets, and on one occasion earlier this year, rows of posters tied on to trees announcing a one-day reduction in the price of a local newspaper, then we thought it was time to question the practice.

To this end the Chairman wrote in March to James Wilkie, Director of Planning, Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council, asking him to say what the Council's policy was in regard to advertising. No reply has been received but we have learned unofficially that the Council has no policy and will only take action if someone complains. If that is the case then it is up to us. If you see any advertising which offends (including pavement sandwich-boards which can be dangerously obstructive) let the Secretary know so we can ask the Planning Department to do something about it.

## Search for Tranquillity

The ever-diligent Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) has been searching out those areas of the country which can still be regarded as 'tranquil' and comparing the situation with that of thirty years ago. It needs little imagination to realise that road systems, industrial and housing development have made enormous encroachments on areas once deemed 'quiet' but as it has been done gradually down the years it is not often realised by how much they have been eroded. The researchers' findings are given in a series of Then-and-Now regional maps and the difference is an eye-opener.

Before they began their research it was first necessary to decide what constituted a Tranquil Area. This is what they decided:

A Tranquil Area lies –

- 4km from the largest power station
  - 3km from the most highly trafficked roads (like M1 or M6)
  - large towns and major industrial areas
  - 2km from most other motorways and major trunk roads and the edge of smaller towns
  - 1km from medium disturbance roads (i.e. roads which are difficult to cross in peak hours) and some main railway lines.
- A Tranquil Area also lies beyond airfields and airports, opencast mining sites and groups of electricity pylons or masts and settlements with a population of more than 2,500.

Thinking about those criteria cynics might suggest that the nearest Tranquil Area to Wirral is the Denbigh Moors but the map shows one area within the Peninsula. There are no prizes for guessing that this includes part of the Dee Marshes and an area south of Neston until, presumably (the maps are not precise), it comes within 3km of Shotton and the Queensferry power station. But that tiny area today is only half what it was in 1960.

To a degree this research might seem to have been a futile exercise for there is no turning the clock back to retrieve that which has been lost. All CPRE can do is to press on with the good work of warning the nation what is going on and trying to ensure that any similar maps produced in another thirty years' time do not show the only Tranquil Areas as being the moors and mountains.

## 'A GRAVE RESPONSIBILITY'

The following interesting (and still pertinent) extract from the letters page of the Hoylake and West Kirby Advertiser of 30th October 1930 has kindly been sent into us by Mrs. Sheila Saunders of Hoylake. No comment is necessary.

*The Rev. Dr. Budden and the Hoylake Land Purchase.*

*Sir; – I have read with some concern the report of the meeting held last week to protest against the municipal purchase of the land on the Frankby side of the railway at Hoylake and now partly used as the Hoylake Ladies Golf Links. For we have but to travel around South Lancashire and Merseyside to see the appalling tragedy of municipal neglect in the past. That places like St. Helens, Haydock, Wigan, Earlstown and Birkenhead, to mention only a few examples, should ever have come into their present form is a blot upon the record of all governing bodies associated with these towns. We blame the complete lack of foresight shown by our predecessors, but we continue to destroy our countryside and shatter our suburban amenities with a hand almost as ruthless.*

*It is a lamentable fact that Wirral is being rapidly ruined. Well may it be said that "the love of money is the root of all evil" for rapacity and greed are responsible for the destruction of rural England. It has been argued, and it seems to me with reason, that no District Council can be trusted to develop any area along the best town-planning lines. But at least a Council will not ruin a locality so completely as will speculative builders.*

*A grave responsibility is ours. We are trustees, not owners, and we must think of those who will follow us.*

*Yours etc., Chas W. Budden, Hoylake.*

(Charles Budden was a very well-known Wirral personality and the author of a number of books including 'Rambles Round the Old Churches of Wirral'. Though nearly seventy years have passed since he wrote this letter we cannot argue with his general sentiments. But he would surely have been cheered if he could see the great strides which have been made in refurbishing and redeveloping the town centres of Wigan, St. Helens and Birkenhead. – Ed.)

## BOTTLING OUT

As you conscientiously make your regular visits to the local Bottle Bank to dispose of your empties to eke out the Council's meagre resources have you ever stopped to wonder what becomes of all the beer bottles emptied in pubs and wine bottles emptied in restaurants and wine bars? Or what happens to all the empty bottles discarded by industry? No? You probably assumed that they, too conscientiously sent them not to the Bottle Bank but by the lorry load to the glass recycling plants. If you did, prepare for a shock.

A recent survey has revealed that for every glass bottle you take to those glass-fibre igloos at the supermarket or the recycling centre, public houses and restaurants throw one away. And what happens to them? They go into the bin and into landfill sites. In fact, whilst 430,000 tons are recycled through bottle banks between 375,000 and 430,000 tons are dumped into landfill sites by commercial and industrial concerns.

The waste collection company, Biffa, has been trying for the past three years to persuade the four major breweries (Whitbread, Bass, Scottish Courage and Carlsberg-Tetley) to start recycling schemes in their pubs but they were not in the least interested. Landfill disposal, they say, is cheap and it isn't worth all the hassle of re-educating their staff.

But, at last, the Government is doing

something about it. The Environment Secretary, John Gummer, has announced a nationwide scheme for recycling for bottles, cans and paper packaging. By the end of 1998 regulations will make it compulsory for supermarkets, retailers and manufacturers which produce packaging to recover and recycle a proportion of their waste. By 2001 legislation will make it compulsory for those people to collect for recycling 50 per cent of the bottles and packaging they sell.

It is also planned to provide by the end of 1998 recycling facilities for eight out of every ten households.

The fly in the ointment is, as you might guess, we, the consumers, will have to foot the bill. It is estimated that the new regulations will put 5p on the cost of every £10 of groceries.

