



WIRRAL MATTERS

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

President: Professor John Tarn OBE DL

For People who Care about Wirral Exciting new Annual Award

We have used the words 'For People Who Care about Wirral' on our official stationery for the last couple of years and believe the phrase neatly encapsulates the aims and ambitions of our Constitution.

The motto is also the essence of a new and most important annual award which the Society is instituting to give recognition to those many people who give their time and, in many cases their labour, quite voluntarily to improving or preserving the Wirral environment. There are scores of people who are 'Friends' of various parks and open spaces, or 'Friends' of some historic Wirral feature and other bodies with various titles quietly working away with little or no publicity and doing so because they believe that the Wirral Peninsula is a rather special place and worth looking after.

Among these volunteers there is always one whose enthusiasm, hard work and dedication stands out above the rest and is a shining example of what can be achieved. With this Award we hope to find and honour whoever that may be.

The award has been made possible by a generous bequest in the will of our late Chairman, Keith Davidson, and consequently will bear his name. It will be known as 'The Wirral Society Keith Davidson Award' and will be made to the person or body considered by the Judging Committee to have made an outstanding contribution in some way to the preservation or improvement of the Wirral environment over the preceding twelve months.

The award-winner will be presented with a framed Certificate of Merit and the organisation of which the winner is a member will receive a cheque for £250 in furtherance of their objectives. In the event of the award being given to a private individual, not a member of any organisation, the cash prize may, at the discretion of the Judges, be given to that person for furtherance of the work for which the Certificate was awarded.

Nominations, duly proposed and seconded (which are acceptable from societies, clubs, corporate organisations or private individuals) must be made on a Nomination Form which can be obtained on request from Mrs Doreen Grey, the Awards Organiser, on 0151 336 6109. The first award will be made for notable work carried out during the year ending 31 December 2004. The closing date for receipt of nominations is 28 February 2005.



G. Keith Davidson

Keith Davidson was Chairman of the Society for 17 years and until his sad death on 4 July 2000. He also served a period as Vice-Chairman and before that he was a member of the Executive Committee for many years.

Keith was a much-respected architect with a practice in Liverpool and for over 30 years lived in Caldy where his love and affection for Wirral was nurtured. His professional knowledge and experience was of invaluable assistance to the Executive Committee on many occasions when planning matters were discussed. His bequest to the Society was a typical gesture and it is fitting that this new annual award should bear his name.

The Right to RO-ROam

Hoist the flags! Ring the bells! Pour the champagne! It has taken a mighty long time to reach a decision but when it came it was the right one.

Members will remember that over the past four or five years we have been reporting at intervals on the progress of the claim that the building of the Ro-Ro ferry terminus on Twelve Quays breached the public right of way alongside the Mersey between Seacombe and Woodside.

Now, at long last, the Department of the Environment has come to a decision. We agree with the claimants, they say, that there has always been a public path there and they have ordered Wirral Council to recognise the fact and put matters right by modifying their definitive map of the Borough's Rights of Way.

In the light of 47 statements and affidavits showing clear evidence of use of the path for many years prior to the MDHC blocking it off by erecting fences in 1988 they could hardly have come to any other decision. Mind you, Wirral Council's Licensing and General Purposes Committee chose to ignore the evidence, overwhelming as it was, and supported the Dock Company's claim - weak though it was - that it was not and had never been a right of way.

Members will recall that the campaign was sparked off by Graham Handley of Upton who, along with many other people, went to Twelve Quays to see the QE2 sail down the Mersey only to find their way to the waterfront blocked off by stout wire mesh fences and No Entry signs.

He reacted as very few would. He knew the waterfront had always been open to the public and felt highly indignant that the Dock Company had so blatantly ignored the fact. He set about challenging their action. We have reported in the past how Graham painstakingly gathered support by researching Council archives, by writing to and telephoning everyone he thought might be able to help him. He sought out people who had walked the path for many years and he visited all kinds of Wirral clubs and societies armed with an overhead projector and some splendid photographs to explain his case and seek support. He was invited to attend one of the Society's Executive meetings where he impressed with the clear exposition and strength of his case. We gave him our full support.

One of the organisations he approached was the old-established Wirral Footpaths and Open Spaces Society and this led to the support of The Ramblers' Association. They, with their vast experience in such matters, were glad to take over the case though Graham remained heavily involved.

Whilst Graham is to be heartily congratulated on his perseverance and the successful outcome of his campaign we cannot yet say 'and the rest is history.' The Council has made no response as yet but we understand that the Modification Order is being prepared and is expected to be issued early in the New Year. Most people expect the Docks Company to appeal against the decision but what grounds they might have for challenging the ruling are hard to imagine.



What people expected to see....



What they actually saw....

Our New Year's Honours

Hidden away in the Society's Constitution is a clause which says 'The Executive Committee may confer Honorary Membership, as appropriate.' It is a provision which is patently intended to be an honour and acknowledgement of outstanding service to the Society in some way but over the years it has seldom been activated.

Recently, however, the Executive Committee decided that there were two members of the Committee whose long, faithful - and continuing - service should have been recognised long before now.

The Society's Chairman, Rod Tann, is one - the other is the Society's Hon. Treasurer, Peter Bowler. Both have served on the Executive Committee for over 30 years though neither can say for exactly how long.

Rod's association dates from the time when, as a youth, he was concerned about the fate of some trees in West Kirby. His one-man campaign to save them not only brought him into touch with the Society but also found him knocking on the door of the then Speaker of the House of Commons to seek his support. The Speaker was, of course his MP, Mr Selwyn Lloyd.

His plea to the Wirral Society brought him into contact with the great W.Victor Smith who promptly recruited him into membership, put him on the Executive Committee and made him Secretary. He has remained on the Committee in one capacity or another ever since.

Peter Bowler's introduction to the Society and Executive Committee was not dissimilar. On qualifying as a chartered accountant Peter joined the well-known firm of Blease Lloyd and Company which his grandfather had founded. He was very soon told that the firm had provided the Wirral Society with an Honorary Treasurer ever since it was formed and that would be one of his duties. He has continued to serve the Society in that capacity ever since.

At their December meeting the Committee unanimously agreed that both these gentlemen should immediately be made Honorary Members and our Vice-President, Terry Edgar, expressed the Committee's deep appreciation and gratitude for all they had done over the years.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS NOW DUE

Unless paid by Standing Order all annual subscriptions become 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 CH60 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

The Membership Secretary reports that last year some members seemed uncertain about the annual subscription rate and what it covered.

To clarify - the annual subscription in accordance with the Constitution is £5 per person. If more than one person in a household wishes to be a member the subscription is £5 each.

Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting seems to increase in popularity every year. It is not all that long ago since we struggled to get an audience of around 25 or so and half of those were Committee members. The 2004 AGM, however, will be long remembered for attracting no less than 134 members to the Heatherlands Court Restaurant causing a congestion problem.

Annual General Meetings of any organisation are not the most exciting of occasions and most have an additional, more entertaining element to follow the real business so there is no intention of changing the format. However, the Executive Committee must give serious thought to the arrangements for the next AGM and how we are going to cope with this ever-increasing interest.

The Chairman's Annual Report

Rod Tann, in his annual report, recalled the Society's 75th Anniversary celebrations. They involved a lot of extra work by Committee members but it was gratifying that all went well.

Casework

The Committee considered Wirral Council's review of their Unitary Development Plan (UDP) and duly responded to the opportunity for commenting. This was a major task and the Chairman expressed the Committee's gratitude to John and Heather Wesenraff for their great assistance in preparing the Committee's response.

New developments

In December 2003 Wirral Council, in compliance with the Regional Planning Guidance, placed a virtual embargo on planning applications in west Wirral which sought to build multiple residential units on sites occupied with sound dwellings and gardens. The Society was very supportive of this action but is now asking the Council why it appears to be ignoring the Planning Guidance in the easterly side of the borough where enough new developments have been allowed to satisfy requirements for the next 10 years.

Planning

The task of monitoring planning applications is now shared among members of the Executive Committee who consider the implications of plans relating to the area in which they live. Many thanks are due to them for their conscientious efforts.

Bidston Observatory

The Society continues to support The Bidston Preservation Trust in their efforts to save historic Bidston Observatory and the adjacent Proudman Laboratory following the move of all activities to a new building on the Liverpool University campus.

Port Sunlight

The proposal for high-density flat development on the village boundary has caused much controversy and the Society has voiced its concern. Whilst being aware of needs of the Village Trust to raise funds for maintaining the village structure we concluded that a more sympathetic scheme was needed for this important part of Wirral's heritage.

Other activities

Thanks are due to Joy and Phil Hockey for organising a most interesting visit to New Bright Lifeboat Station and St. James Church, to Lilian Potter for arranging another successful series of W.Victor Smith Lectures and to the Wallasey Golf Club for making its splendid Clubhouse available for our use and to Alan Brack for his work in producing excellent issues of *Wirral Matters* and to the Committee for their continuing work in support of the Society's aims.

(It should be mentioned that the President thanked Rod Tann for all the work that he puts in despite the fact that he is in full-time employment and has other pursuits which also occupy his limited spare time. - Ed).

Wind in the Billows

Now that we have all had the chance of seeing the presentation by German-owned *npower* (formerly National Power Ltd) of the gargantuan wind farm they propose to build in Liverpool Bay is there cause for any alarm? To start with, many saw who the computer-generated pictures and the video of how it would look compared with those already operating on Hoyle Bank were staggered by its size. It will consist of 200 turbines, each with three blades, with each blade over 100 feet in length (twice the height of a modern two-storey house), standing 500 feet high from sea level to tip (one and a half times the height of Liverpool Cathedral tower) spaced out almost in battle formation so that, in all, the 'farm' will cover a sea area of 80 (yes, eighty) square miles. Though 14 miles out to sea it will dramatically despoil the sea views enjoyed by all who live in or visit Wirral. And not only Wirral. The sea views from the coasts of North Wales, West Lancashire and possibly the Isle of Man will also be affected.

It would not be surprising to learn that it would also be clearly visible from outer space. In the video presentation the turbines looked like a gigantic Darlek armada waiting to invade.

The main questions asked of the staff in attendance concerned the turbines' electrical output (enough, they claim, to serve 500,000 homes), the effect on the tens of thousands of seabirds flying in to winter in the rich feeding grounds of the Dee and Mersey estuaries (an environmental study is in progress) and what effect the turbines will have on shipping (following a survey of the existing North Hoyle operation they will not impinge on authorised shipping lanes). It has subsequently been reported that engineers (at the behest of the promoters) have conducted tests on the Hoyle Bank turbines and say they will have no significant effect.

As for wildlife, Professor David Bellamy has painted a frightening picture. If he is right the whirling blades will cut to ribbons thousands of birds, bats and other flying creatures like onions in a food processor.

The government's target is that 10 per cent of the nation's energy requirements should come from 'renewable' resources by the year 2010. That would require a grand total, it is said, of 25-30,000 turbines scattered across Britain's hills and round our coasts. 2010 is only five years away and the number erected and working so far 1,100. And since it was recently reported that there could soon be a serious shortage of deep sea divers - an essential requirement for working on the sea-bed - and that other countries are similarly planning to harness the wind the chances of that target being reached seems rather doubtful.

As you would expect, CPRE has been giving its attention to the pros and cons of wind power and has found that pros are not easy to come by.

In the latest issue of *Countryside Voice* they point out that the average wind farms in operation at the moment have just nine turbines and their combined power produces 157 megawatts. That is about one-eighth of the power output of a single large, conventional power station.

Planning permission has so far been given for the establishment of 26 wind farms but they have yet to be built. Dozens more are the subject of planning applications yet to be decided upon. The British Wind Energy Association hopes that around 500 more onshore turbines will be erected between now and 2010.

The government's plan is, of course, to reduce the global-warming effects of carbon dioxide to which coal, oil and gas-burning power stations are the biggest contributor. Or so it is claimed. Little is heard of the contribution to global pollution made by the biggest villains in the piece, aeroplanes.

Aircraft are not fitted with any kind of catalytic converter like motorcars and it has been said that in the course of one flight from Heathrow to New York an aircraft spews out more carbon dioxide than do 200 motorcars making journeys between Liverpool and London - and back. And when one considers the number of aircraft journeys made every 24 hours through the earth's atmosphere one cannot but wonder why this is seldom mentioned.

Erecting wind farms seem merely to be tinkering with the problem.



Editor: Alan Brack 47 Upton Road, Cloughton, CH43 8TQ Tel/Fax: 0151 652 5530
Hon. Secretary: David Casement 5 Cornwall Drive, Prenton, CH43 0RW Tel/Fax: 0151 608 3039
Membership Secretary: Mrs Audrey Platt, 21 Latchford Road, Gayton, CH60 3RN Tel: 0151 342 5522

www.wirralssociety.net

Printed by: Hil-y-Gem Computer Printing Tel/Fax: 0151 625 7509
e-mail: hil-y-gem.diamond@virgin.net
www.hil-y-gem.co.uk or hil-y-gem.com