



# WIRRAL MATTERS

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

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Winter 1998

## THE A.G.M.

THE GLASSES WERE CHARGED with sparking wine and the Society Chairman, Keith Davidson, rose and said: 'The Wirral Society is now 70 years of age, having been started by Miss Joan Royden in 1928. I ask you to rise and toast the health of The Wirral Society and the memory of Miss Joan Royden.'

This was the unusual start to the Annual General Meeting held at the Heatherlands Court Restaurant on 19th October last. The Society has been so linked with the famous name of Patrick Abercrombie, the Chairman continued, that the part played by Joan Royden in starting the Society and becoming its first Secretary has tended to be overshadowed.

The early Committee members included such illustrious names as the cotton-broker Sir Alfred Paton (whose generosity is remembered in Paton Field, the sportsground in Telegraph Road at Caldy), Sir Percy Bates, a director of the Cunard Steamship Company and William Fergusson-Irvine, a prominent local historian of the day. And it was said on one occasion that when a Committee meeting of The Wirral Society was called the business of Liverpool almost came to a halt!

## Our Presidents

The Society's first President was the second Viscount Leverhulme and his son, the third Viscount, is our President today so that the Leverhulme connection has spanned all those three score years and ten.

'We are honoured and indeed fortunate,' continued Keith Davidson, 'in that when Lord Leverhulme reduced his many commitments a few years ago the Presidency of The Wirral Society was one office he wished to retain.'

## As it was in the beginning

The Chairman explained how The Wirral Peninsula had changed over many thousands of years until it reached its present shape in mediaeval times. Right up to the 18th century Wirral changed little and even the beginning of the 19th century only Neston had grown to be anything like a town and that only boasted a population of 1,486.

It was the arrival of steam-propelled ferries which changed everything. In 1815 when the 'Elizabeth,' first steamship ever to enter the Mersey, the population of Birkenhead was little more than 100. By 1860 it had risen to 35,000 and by 1915 to 100,000.

It was this mushroom growth which was responsible for the start of The Wirral Society. Many thinking people became extremely worried about the haphazard and uncontrolled development which was taking place, the crude and obtrusive advertising signs which were being erected and the ribbon development.

Ever since the Executive Committee have tried to continue the principles which laid down, albeit, that the controls which the Society sought then have brought their problems in the form of town planners.

## The present day

This brings us to the present day and to the rather stupid situation where, in the case of the Local Inquiry into the Leas School site (which was ably dealt with on behalf of the Society by Geoff Loram) both HM Inspector and the Wirral Planning Department agreed that the anathema-thought of building houses on Green Belt land would be a better solution than the development of a nursing home which the planners had granted.

As you will know from Wirral Matters the Society's point of view is that housing must be refused on this land in the hope that, eventually, common-sense will prevail and, in the long term, the site will be used for a new West Kirby Grammar School for Girls. The land this would release in Graham Road could then be developed for housing.

## New Vice-President

In the Chairman's Report at the last AGM I reported the resignation of Peter Jones from the Executive Committee. I am now pleased to announce that Peter subsequently accepted our invitation to become a Vice-President in recognition of his diligent work on the Committee over many years.

## Education Officer

The early part of 1998 saw Gilbert Pendleton join the Executive Committee as our Education Officer. We have asked him to organise our sponsorship of prizes and a competition within the peninsula's schools and he has started this with enthusiasm although regrettably he has encountered some apathy.

## MP's visit

In January 1998 we were pleased to meet Stephen Hesford MP for Wirral West who had asked to meet the Committee to discuss matters of environmental interest in Wirral. Since then we have enjoyed a great deal of fruitful contact with him including wide-ranging correspondence on the subjects of nodal transport, planning problems, signage and urban regeneration.

## Bus shelters

We are currently concerned about the new Merseytravel bus shelters which with their bright yellow colour offend when placed adjacent to listed buildings and in Conservation Areas.

*Continued overleaf*

*from previous page*

These shelters are outside normal planning controls but with the help of Mr Hesford we have gained the ear of Merseytravel and we are trying to set up a meeting with the Conservation Officers of the two councils in the hope of finding an acceptable solution.

### Bidston Lighthouse

We have held a meeting with Birkenhead History Society and I am pleased to be able to report that our two societies are to form an action sub-committee with the aim of refurbishing the historical Bidston Lighthouse.

### Rock Ferry Marine Lake

We continue to monitor the proposed marine lake at Rock Ferry and steer a sensible course between the habitat needs of the wader-birds and the needs of the people.

### Membership Secretary

This year has seen Mrs Audrey Platt kindly take on the role of Membership Secretary with quite dramatic results. The lists are up to date and next year we hope to see the introduction of Membership Cards.

### Victor Smith Memorial Lecture

Dr Lilian Potter is kindly arranging the inaugural Victor Smith Memorial Lecture which will be held on Tuesday 19th January 1999 at Wallasey Golf Club.

*continued above*

G.K. Davidson Chairman

The Summer Meeting had to be abandoned this year as we seem to have exhausted all possible venues but we hope members will make every effort to attend this lecture which, if successful, we hope will lead to at least two lectures a year.

### Wirral Matters

Thanks are due to Alan Brack for the ever-increasing quality of Wirral Matters, for his work as Minutes Secretary and the additional work which he faced as a result of the end of our sponsorship by UML. We now hope to produce the newsletter by providing camera-ready copy 'in-house' for a local printer. Alan is also working on Corporate Business Membership through which we hope some of the leading Wirral business houses will join our ranks.

### Many Thanks

Thanks are also due to our Secretary, Eric Sann'e, our Treasurer, Peter Bowler, our Vice-Chairman, Rod Tann, and all the other members of the Executive Committee for all their hard work.

### C.P.R.E.

Our links with CPRE London continue to grow. Earlier in the year they sought our opinions on the problems of urban regeneration. The recently produced report on Regional Planning Policy is really excellent and I would like to remind members that, where possible, we would ask them to take out membership of CPRE. It is hard to visualise the limited progress we might make were CPRE not in being.

#### Second

#### VICTOR SMITH MEMORIAL LECTURE

**Mr Grant Luscombe, Chief Executive of LANDLIFE,**

will give an illustrated talk on the work of the

#### NATIONAL WILDFLOWER CENTRE

**WEDNESDAY 28 APRIL 1999 at 7-30pm**  
at Wallasey Golf Club  
Bayswater Road Wallasey

Landlife is a registered charity, founded in 1975, and supported by funds from the National Lottery, donations from private trusts and foundations, large firms and grants from English Partnership and the European Regional Development Fund. Its major project has been the establishment of a National Wildflower Centre on 37 acres of Court Hey, a mansion in the Bowring Park area of Liverpool. The first phase which cost £3.7 million was officially opened last April and patrons for this venture include the Duke of Westminster and the Earl of Derby.

The work done at Court Hey has been described as 'quite remarkable and a real eye-opener.' There is no doubt that this talk, which will be illustrated by slides, will be well worth hearing and we are expecting a keen demand for tickets. First come, first served!

We hope to be able to arrange a coach trip to Court Hey for a guided tour of the Wildflower Centre as our Summer Meeting. Details later.

To obtain tickets please complete the slip below/or other paper and send to the Programme Secretary.  
A Stamped Addressed Envelope would be appreciated.



To: Dr. Lilian Potter  
Programme Secretary  
'Bernina' 120 Eleanor Road,  
Bidston Wirral  
L43 7QS

Please send me \_\_\_\_\_ tickets  
for the Victor Smith Lecture on the 28 April 1999  
SAE enclosed

## When is a plan not a plan ?

The Society has supported a protest by the Chester Branch of CPRE against an outline planning application by Peel Holdings (owners of the Trafford Centre and the Manchester Ship Canal) for an industrial development on a site at Ince Marshes which has been designated as an SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest)

Chester Branch sought our support since Ince Marshes is on the fringe of the Wirral area.

The nub of the objection is that Peel Holdings have not indicated what precisely they have in mind for the site other than its 'industrial development.' In his submission to the Head of Planning Services, Ellesmere Port & Neston Council, Geoff Loram has pointed out that whilst this application fails to be decided under the existing Local Plan and the Cheshire County Structure Plan cognisance must also be taken of the policies envisaged for the Cheshire County Replacement Structure Plan which is at an advanced stage.

The latter lays down that any proposed development in this area must be one of national significance and shown to be too large to be accommodated on an existing vacant site within the Stanlow complex. In that respect, the applicant would need to furnish a detailed plant description and layout to demonstrate that it (whatever it may be) could not be built on a site which is vacant.

The application was supported by a voluminous Environmental Assessment which, in our opinion, is nothing more than a dense smokescreen designed to obscure the issue. In fact, furnishing an assessment of the development's impact on the environment without specifying what that development might be is, in Geoff Loram's memorable words 'an oxymoronic absurdity.'



## Rubble Rouser

A member has drawn our attention to the illegal tipping of rubble and rubbish on The Leas School site in Meols Drive, West Kirby.

'I think the work done there recently on the entrance and the "foundations" he writes, when a bulldozer scraped a bit of topsoil away and the driver put up a bit of red plastic "fencing" so the planning application would not lapse has only served to draw attention to the derelict nature of the land. The pile of sand and topsoil inside the tatty "fence" makes it look like a tip so others are starting to tip there.

'But what can you expect, he goes on, when you actually witness one of the respectable burghers of Meols Drive tipping his own garden rubbish over his wall on to the footpath which runs across the golf course from Stanley Road to Meols Drive . . .'

*(Golfers shout 'FORE!' when a drive goes astray. Did this miscreant have the grace to shout 'NIMBY' !!!!' ? - Ed.)*

## Dr. Lilian Potter

We are delighted to report that Lilian Potter who represents the Eleanor Road Residents' Committee on the Society's Executive Committee has been awarded her PhD degree at the University of Liverpool.

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The degree was bestowed on her by Lord Owen, Chancellor of the University, at the Degree Day ceremony in the Phi Harmonic Hall.

Lilian joined the committee two years ago and her unbounding enthusiasm and ever-willing help-particularly in organising the Victor Smith Lectures- is greatly appreciated. We offer her our hearty congratulations. We are also pleased to say that Lilian has assumed the job of Programme Secretary with responsibility for organising future talks and the Summer Meeting.

## Major Toad Ahead

Members will recall that five years ago we funded the excavation of two 'scrapes' on the shore at Red Rocks, Hoylake, to help Cheshire Wildlife in their efforts to resuscitate the declining colony of very rare Natterjack Toads. The scrapes were made to provide breeding areas but Bufo calamita disappointed and two years ago it was decided, after a lot of heart-searching by the experts, to introduce tadpoles from the flourishing colony in Ainsdale Nature Reserve. The tadpoles were collected (such is their importance) by the Natterjack Toad Project Officer for the Herpetological Conservation Trust) and kept at Cheshire Wildlife Headquarters until they had grown into tiny toadlets. The toadlets were brought to Hoylake in several successive batches and now a delighted Jacki Hulce, Cheshire Wildlife Reserves Officer, reports: 'The success rate is the best we've had so far. Hundreds of toadlets have been seen emerging from the scrapes and making for the sand dunes.'

Sand dunes are the toads' natural habitat. Males of the species take a year and the females two to three years to grow to maturity so don't go to Red Rocks just yet and expect to see scores of Natterjacks hopping around. They burrow into the sand but when they do emerge they can be distinguished from the Common Toad by a thin yellow line down the centre of their backs. And, of course, by their croak. It is said that in the breeding season they can be heard a mile away.

## Corporate Business Membership

As one way of marking the Society's 70th birthday the Executive Committee has decided to open our ranks to Wirral's business community by inviting them to take out Corporate Business Membership.

Many Wirral firms have already demonstrated a keen interest in protecting the environment in which they operate and it is felt that their support would be invaluable and, from time to time, their advice could be most helpful. We are pleased to report that this move has the support of our President, Viscount Leverhulme, and letters addressed to selected firms bear his signature and that of our Chairman, Keith Davidson.

## ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS DUE

Unless paid by Standing Order or through CPRE, all annual subscriptions became due for renewal on 1st 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  
L60 3RN

Joint members of both The Wirral Society and CPRE (annual subscription £17.50) should make their cheques out to CPRE and send them direct to:-

CPRE  
Membership Department  
25 Buckingham Palace Road  
London SW1W 0PP

(Those members who joined the Society in the latter part of the year will not be expected to renew their subscriptions until 1st January next year.)

## Hoylake's Flat-Foot Plans

First it was horrendously re-named Flat Foot Sam's then it became the totally ridiculous Orange Grove. Now comes the final insult. A developer has applied to be allowed to demolish the venerable Stanley Hotel in King's Gap, Hoylake, and build a block of flats on the site. A huge block of flats. A building four storeys high (with a pitched roof) for accommodating 50 flats with car-parking.

The plan aims to maximise the site to the full and clearly no regard has been paid to any impact it might have on neighbouring properties nor on the Hoylake town scene. It is a plan wrought by commercial ambition. Architecturally, the design is poor. It is without interest and lacks the modelling which exists on the old hotel.

The applicant might point to the former Hoylake Town Hall and claim that the block of flats as proposed would be in keeping with that building. But the Town Hall was a gross planning error and quite contrary to the character of Hoylake. The error must not be repeated.

The Society has made its objections known to the planning authority.

We do not dispute that a development of flats would be appropriate for this site if the hotel must be torn down but the proposed standard of design, its four-story height and overall size make it undesirable.

We trust that this application will be refused - if only to enable the developer and the architects to discuss with the Council Planning department what would be acceptable.

On the other hand, one solution which would surely meet with no opposition would be to convert the existing hotel building into flats and apartments -- provided they don't call it 'Sam's Foot Flats'.

*(As we go to press we learn that the planning application has been referred back to the developer for reconsideration of the height of the proposed building. - Ed.)*

### STOP PRESS

Revised plans have been received which, to our dismay, in no way meet our objection that the proposed building is totally out of scale with the surrounding property and far too dominant for the site at this gateway to Hoylake.

From an examination of the revised drawings no reduction in size is proposed and the resultant elevations appear to have increased rather than reduced the impact with a new sense of monumentality being introduced. This is even more disturbing and we have conveyed our objections and detailed misgivings to the Borough Planning Department.

## A Lake for Rock Ferry

The proposal by the Lairdside Regeneration Team of Wirral Council for the building of a Marina and a Marine Lake on the shore of the Mersey at Rock Ferry met with some opposition when it was first made public. After an exhibition of the plans and consultations with local residents it was decided to abandon the idea of a Marina but to press on with the plans for a Marine Lake running alongside The Esplanade.

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The idea of a lake alone, however, also brought protests and the Save our Shore Campaign raised a petition bearing 500 names against the scheme. But an opposing petition in favour bore 3,000 names and a third petition in support was signed by around 65 per cent of the residents of the adjacent Rock Park.

There were also voices raised in protest by bird lovers who claimed the wading-birds would be deprived of feeding ground.

The Society supports the scheme. This interesting part of Wirral has long been overdue for refurbishment and regeneration and a Marine lake would bring some much needed colour and life back to The Esplanade in the same way the Marine Lake at West Kirby adds to the scene on the other side of the peninsula. As for the birds, will the establishment of the lake really reduce their food source to any great extent? Compared with the size of the Mersey Estuary the area taken for the lake would be relatively small so won't the birds simply relocate further upstream?

The scheme is impressive. It involves the demolition of the existing tanker cleaning jetty and the clearance of the derelict oil recovery installations. The reclaimed site will become a car-park for the lake.

The lake itself will occupy a length of foreshore which, at low tide, is an unlovely stretch of mud and rubbish. It has been planned to allow for, in addition to sailing and windsurfing facilities, a competition rowing course of national standard and a two-storey water sports centre which will provide facilities for sailing and rowing instruction, boat hire, toilets and a small cafe. Local residents who keep boats at river moorings will have the benefit of their own slipway.

The lake will be 1,200 metres in length (about three quarters of a mile) with a width of 210 metres at its maximum and 125 metres at its narrowest. It will be bigger than West Kirby's Marine Lake.

The famous but now sadly dilapidated Rock Ferry Esplanade which was built in the middle of the 19th century for the pleasure of the well-heeled residents of the villas in Rock Park will be reconstructed and increased in width. There will be landscaped areas and seats provided for those who want to sit and watch the passing scene.

All in all, this seems to be a highly laudable solution to a tricky problem. We look forward to the day when Rock Ferry can boast its own 'Riviera.'

*If you really believe that*

**WIRRAL MATTERS**

*tell your friends about*

**THE WIRRAL SOCIETY**