



It's always interesting to learn why people engage in a particular pastime. Why do some folk prefer collecting stamps rather than go scuba diving? Why do others obtain great pleasure from climbing mountains in weather unfit for cloven-hoofed beasts rather than playing Scrabble or solving crossword puzzles?

How, we may wonder, did David Casement, the Wirral Society's most efficient Secretary, come to spend so much of his spare time giving

talks on the many aspects of Storeton Woods? He has been doing it for many years and, patently, it is something which gives him great satisfaction and which he finds enjoyable.

It all began, he explained, after he was appointed Deputy Head Teacher of Mersey Park Primary School in 1977 and discovered that some of the pupils had not even heard of the woods and knew nothing of their part in Wirral's fascinating past. Nor did they know anything about trees, flora and fauna and all those things bright and beautiful that nature provides.

David set out to remedy this deficiency in their education by taking parties of children to the woods in different seasons of the year to witness and have explained to them the wonders of nature. And, stressed David, 'they walked there - and they walked back.'

In 1980 David was appointed Head Teacher where his first task was to merge The Dell Primary School and The Dell Middle School into The Dell Combined School. On retirement in 1995 he then worked part-time for Chester College for seven years.

David is a true-born, 24-carat Wirralian. He came into the world at Clatterbridge Hospital, was brought up in Bromborough and educated at Calday Grange Grammar School. Some time spent outside the peninsula in his early years was the two years spent at Westminster College in London doing his teacher training.

Like thousands of other young men in the years immediately following the Second World War David was called up for National Service. Recruited into the Cheshire Regiment he soon found himself promoted to Corporal and teaching the rudiments of education to soldiers in the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders and The Black Watch - in Berlin. Since most of the soldiers had broad Scottish accents it was no easy task.

Both before and after he retired in 1995 David was a member of various local organisations, and in most cases, that meant he was an active member as, of course, he immediately became when he was invited to join the Committee of the Society and cheerfully agreed to be our Secretary.

Among other voluntary commitments, he and his wife, Norma, are immersed in the management of Prenton Methodist Church where David is a Steward and also responsible for their Gift Aid giving while Norma is a Class Leader and serves on various committees.

Over the past 13 years he has given 210 talks - all splendidly illustrated with his own photographs - on Storeton Woods alone and has collected over £2000 in donations for The Friends of Storeton Woods.

But David and Norma are also great long-haul travellers. With their daughter Philippa's five-years sojourn in New Zealand as a teacher and their specialist-doctor son, Jonathan who is a consultant anaesthetist in intensive care at Auckland's North Shore Hospital, they have become very familiar with the world down under. It has, of course, enabled David to widen the scope of his talks and he can now add New Zealand and the lesser-known Samoa to his list. He also visited Lapland to see Father Christmas and he can offer a talk on that experience.

But the least-known of his topics is certainly his talk on the famous and recently-restored giant Laxey Wheel in the Isle of Man. Why? Because he is proud to say that this mighty structure was designed and built in 1854 by his grandfather's uncle, Robert Casement, and at the wheel's 150th Anniversary Celebrations in 2004 David and Norma, with eight other members of the family, were specially invited guests.

[www.wirralsociety.net](http://www.wirralsociety.net)

**Look at the Website ( by Nick Lauro) for up-to-date news and views**

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*Personal views expressed in WIRRAL MATTERS are not necessarily the views of the Wirral Society or the Editor.*



# WIRRAL MATTERS

NEWS and VIEWS from THE WIRRAL SOCIETY - FOUNDED 1928  
THE WIRRAL COMMITTEE OF THE CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT RURAL ENGLAND (CPRE)

President: Professor John Tarn OBE DL FRIBA FRSA FRHistS FSA

## W. Victor Smith Lectures



*Brackenwood golfing view*

The lectures are arranged as a memorial to W. Victor Smith, a past Chairman of the Society. Some of the Committee doubted if anyone would turn up during the winter months but the talks have remained extremely popular for ten years. The topics have been diverse and not exclusively connected to Wirral, but most of our speakers are 'locals' and Wirral Society members.

There are usually 90-100 applications for tickets which often arrive in recycled envelopes - well done! Used postage stamps are forwarded to a charity, personal details and addresses are shredded. Numbered tickets are usually sent out by return and as admission is free, they are issued to indicate the amount of seating needed and, of course, they serve as an aide-memoire for Members.

We are fortunate in being allowed to use the excellent facilities at Wallasey Golf Club and our thanks must go to Diane and her catering staff who not only serve tea and coffee but also arrange the seating for us.

*Lilian Potter*

**KEITH DAVIDSON AWARD - to an individual or group making a big contribution to the environment. Ring Doreen Grey, 0151-336-6109 for entry forms. Deadline 20 March 09**

## HISTORY FAIR - A last chance to see



**inside Wirral Museum?  
March 14th - 10am to 4pm**

## Fairways of Wirral - a talk by Gavin Hunter

The development of golf courses was an early Victorian thing. Previously the in thing had been race courses. Wirral now boasts 14 fairways, although some have disappeared - ploughed up for the First World War, to billet American Army troops in WW2, to build Vauxhall's car factory and many ordinary homes. Look out for clues to past courses in street names - eg. Linkside.

## The Rise of Birkenhead - a lecture by Elizabeth Davey

The written history of Birkenhead began with the foundation of a small Benedictine priory, which from its rocky headland operated a ferry across the Mersey and provided hospitality to travellers delayed by wind or tide.

When the priory was dissolved the ferry continued, the headland remained almost deserted - a small country estate owned by an absentee landlord.

The 19th century brought changes, as wealthy Liverpool merchants crossed the water, building summer cottages or staying at the new hotel, with its tea gardens, boating and sea bathing.

A steam ferry service was instigated and St Mary's church built to the design of Thomas Rickman. The Lord of the Manor and others saw the area's potential and commissioned architect, James Gillespie Graham, to design a 'New Town', a gridiron of broad, straight streets with their focus on Hamilton Square.

In successive decades, despite a series of 'credit crunches', the town acquired docks, a publicly funded Park and a host of fine buildings, the most impressive of all being its great Town Hall.

Today, despite its designation as a Conservation Area, the once prestigious Hamilton Square is struggling. Small businesses have closed and its centre piece, the iconic Wirral Museum, formerly Birkenhead Town Hall, is to be 'moth-balled' on March 31st and its ornate interior, the vibrant and descriptive stained glass, the mosaic flooring and the grand rooms no longer available to the public.

The ferry still runs. The shipyards are active once again but much else is under threat.

## SUMMER OUTING

May 23rd, 2pm

A tour of Chorlton Hall and Backford Church.

Members: book your place with The Editor.

Enclose an s.a.e.

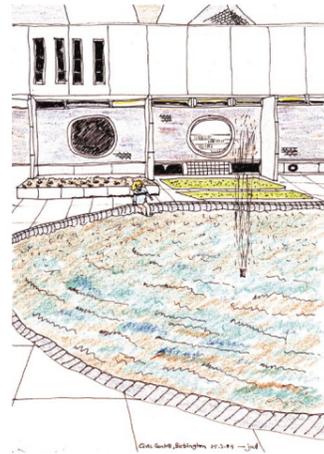
## Good design



Bebington Civic Centre, built in the 1960s, stands up as good design 40 years on. It, like many others around the Wirral that are now so inexplicably under threat, is a real community centre – with library, computer suite, meeting rooms and doctors' surgeries. It is extensively used for community groups of all ages, special interest groups, adult education classes and training and workshop sessions.



"Wirral Council requests the pleasure of our company at a book-burning"



1984 - a fountain and pool.  
Nowadays - a flower bed.



Congratulations to [Claire Mullen](#) for her winning photo – 'A Haven for Wildlife'

**As part of their 80th birthday celebrations, 10 trees will be planted in Parks by the Wirral Society with help from Wirral Borough Council**

## Exploring the Southern Borders Old villages discovered just off dual carriageways – Shotwick

In the porchway of pre-Domesday St. Michael's church there are deep grooves. When all the population had to learn the war skills of archery they sharpened their arrows on the sandstone. Kings once held war councils here, the important ford to Wales was guarded, ships left for Ireland.



Inside the church – an old map, historic artefacts and the oldest church bells in Wirral which regularly peel out across the Dee marshes.

## Conservation Conference



Detail of stone mosaic flooring in Birkenhead Park, one of Wirral's Conservation areas

The Wirral Society brought together 100 representatives of 30 local conservation groups to eagerly share issues with speakers from Wirral Borough Council, Liverpool City Council, English Heritage, Neston Civic Society and a firm of conservation consultants.

Venue – Wirral Museum.

The determination and skills of these dedicated people make a force to be reckoned with. We want to build on the ideas raised.

## Another 80th Birthday

The Williamson Art Gallery in Birkenhead, full of amazing collections of Wirral art and artefacts along with old masters and ever changing exhibitions of international importance.

## Annual Report March 2008- February 2009

WS committee members identified, investigated and commented on planning applications and other issues.

- proposed Health Centre at 'The Warrens', Thingwall on Green Belt land. WS submitted its objection to the Secretary of State. The Public Inquiry has now been cancelled by the PCT. Next?
- contentious West Kirby plans include a proposed seafront hotel and sailing school. Residents feel powerless to influence decisions being made by the Council. WS keeps questioning.
- proposed Hoylake Golf Resort - on Green Belt.
- WS discusses with WBC how it monitors at-risk historic buildings, since fire destroyed Liscard Hall.
- WS questions inconsistency of Road 5137 – east half is a 'B', west side is 'A'. Large lorries have encountered tight bends on this unsuitable road.
- Merseyside Probation Service painted footpath finger-posts in WBC area - paint funded by Wirral Footpaths & Open Spaces Preservation Society. WS aims to support a scheme across Wirral.
- many 'Cheshire' wrought iron railings decay. No-one yet takes responsibility.
- The Government has approved 250 wind turbines beyond Hilbre island; WS continues to probe arguments of benefits v. loss of seascape.
- other issues looked at - Park & Ride facilities; Trees cut down out-of-hours; illegal advertising; St. Peter & St Paul's Church, New Brighton.

WS responded to various planning legislations affecting the Peninsula, including – Local Development Framework, Waste Disposal Strategy and Regional Coastal Strategy.

As its main 80th Birthday event WS organised its first Conference, on Conservation Areas, (see Page 2).

WS supported the International Significant Cemeteries Conference at Wirral Museum.

Three successful lectures, a hotpot supper and tour of Port Sunlight were run. 3 issues of Wirral Matters were produced, including a bumper 80th birthday issue. The revamped WS Web-site was well visited. Our annual environmentalist award was given.

WS would welcome the support of more members and is advertising for a new membership secretary.

*Chairman, Rod Tann*

## Where is it wild on Wirral?

**Heswall Dales and Cleaver Heath**  
by *Liz Hommel*

On Wirral we are lucky enough to be able to experience one of the few remaining areas of low heathland habitat, so rare now in Britain and Europe. An acid, infertile soil favours small, low-growing species, normally seen on high wind-swept moors: here, in August, pink and purple patches of honey-

scented heather bells hug the ground, bright against young dwarf gorse shoots. This all provides shelter for many invertebrate species: such as spiders, heather beetles and emperor moths, and larger creatures such as lizards and birds.



Wirral's two sandstone ridges would have been all lowland heath habitat not so long ago. This semi-natural habitat is a reminder of the way we used to live. Way back, deer and then sheep, used to graze here, keeping tree seedlings under control. Gorse and bracken were harvested for fuel and for animal feed or bedding; trees were coppiced. The footpaths that criss-cross this land, are bound up with the history of this area and are recorded on the old maps, witness to human beings tramping across from hill to valley about their business.

Today, a battle for survival is taking place here! The fragile balance is easily upset. Rare but weaker species struggle against the strong invasive (and not nearly so rare) plants. Many people are working towards ensuring that the more delicate species have a chance to survive to maintain this rich diversity before it is lost. This is one of the reasons Natural England have declared it of special scientific interest and worthy of care and attention.

Some species have already lost the battle. The night-jar, for example, is, at present, no longer heard here nor anywhere in Wirral.

Property developments crowd ever closer around the periphery, changing water flows and drying up the damp heathland that used to be a special feature here. Explore this wild but now very rare habitat before it disappears!

Wading through the lush growth and cool, wooded ravines; clambering up rocky heights to look far out to sea, you could imagine yourself Robinson Crusoe exploring his island!

These areas are maintained by Cheshire Wildlife and accessed from various places including Oldfield Road. Thanks to Hilary Ash for all her help.

*The latest news. Big government grant just received. To restore heathland, bracken and gorse will be cleared with aid of excellent ranger.*