

If you can't beat them, join them

At the recent AGM of the Wirral Executive for keeping English Pure (WEEP) the Chairman, Mr John Pedant, spoke of 'the latest arrow which has been fired into the heart of the English language.' He was referring, he said, to the appalling and growing misuse of the word 'iconic.'

Anyone conversant with an English lexicon, he continued, will be aware that an icon is a painted, carved or mosaic image of Christ or a saint as seen in Greek orthodox churches. Yet throughout Britain – and probably by now throughout the English-speaking world – the word has come to mean gigantic, colossal, elephantine, mountain-high, mind-boggling, far-fetched and similar words of gross exaggeration. I even saw recently, he said, in a distinguished local newspaper that a lady at a reception was said to be wearing 'an iconic white gown!'

We understand that Mrs Pedant keeps smelling-salts at the ready for such occasions.

The Chairman's remarks led to a debate on whether the Executive should recognise, albeit with deep regret, that the word 'iconic' - although grossly misused - has now been accepted into everyday speech. The motion was passed without dissent but with many mutterings about 'the modern age, ignorant TV producers and newspaper editors and the decline in education.'

The acceptance, however, permitted several members to confess that they had recently acquired copies (for research purposes, of course) of a newly-published book entitled Icons of England edited by no less a personage than Mr Bill Bryson, the Anglophilic President of CPRE.

This had led CPRE to conduct a poll of a thousand of its members asking them to name their favourite icons of England.

First came Pub Signs, second were Phone Boxes (the red kind presumably) and third were Local Shops. They were followed by Ancient Trees, Hedgerows, Traditional Livestock Breeds, Gardens, Village Greens and the Lake District National Park which many people would surely have put at the top of the list.

This report naturally made me wonder (Lord forgive me) about Wirral's own 'icons.' Some of them are obvious – the Mersey Ferries, Hamilton Square and the buildings in it, Birkenhead Priory, Birkenhead Park, the windmill and former observatory on Bidston Hill, the domed church of Saints Peter and Paul in New Brighton and, also in New Brighton, the lighthouse and Fort Perch Rock.

There are other ancient mills on the peninsula but that at Willaston is rather special. In the 1930s the Wirral Society bought the mill to rescue it from imminent demolition.

Then, of course, there is Port Sunlight (with all that is in it), Thornton Hough, Thornton Manor and Burton village. Ness Gardens surely merits inclusion together with the Eastham Yew, one of Britain's oldest trees.

All these are fairly obvious choices but one which is a little obscure and could easily be missed is the Thomas Brassey Bridge at Saughall Massie.

Brassey was the greatest railway contractor and bridge builder of the Victorian age who was responsible for building railways all over the world. He was born just outside Chester but started his career as a surveyor in Birkenhead. This little bridge at Saughall Massie was his first and it now bears a plaque acknowledging the fact.

I can't recall seeing a red telephone box in Wirral recently but I'm sure one exists somewhere and I am not well-versed in the history of the peninsula's pubs to say which, if any, merits iconic status. I invite members to put forward other buildings, houses or anything which they think should be included. I can be contacted via the Secretary or email alanbrackwirral@aol.com.



Eastham Ferry cab sign - it's old but is it an icon?

Members - register your email address

If you use email, contacting you for lectures and hotpot suppers is faster, reduces postage, printing costs and our carbon footprint, as well as time filling envelopes. Send details -

Surname First Name Email address

To wrlsoc@googlemail.com

Other enquiries - web site + contacts below

www.wirralsociety.net

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

Editor: Judith Railton, 22 Bracken Lane, Bebington, CH63 2LZ TEL: 0151-608-4498

Hon. Secretary: David Casement, 5 Cornwall Drive, Prenton, CH43 0RW TEL/FAX 0151-608-3039

Membership: Avril Wilmshurst, 6 Robins Croft, Great Sutton, Ellesmere Port CH66 2LQ TEL 0151-200-3920

HELP SUPPORT OUR WORK

send your name and address and tel.number to Avril with a cheque for £7 (£10 for a society) for one year's membership

Newsletter printed by D.B. Print, The Print House, Carr Lane, Hoylake. 1500 copies go to members, libraries and community centres and all Wirral Peninsula councillors

All images by Judith Railton except if otherwise named. 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

Keith Davidson Award

Dr. Hilary Ash - Botanist extraordinaire



Each year the Wirral Society gives an award in memory of past Chairman, Keith Davidson. He had the great idea to celebrate the environmental work that is being done by so many skilled and tireless volunteers on Wirral. Hilary Ash was proposed for this award by another passionate campaigner, the late Liz Hommel:

'I came into contact with Hilary about 25 years ago when struggling to understand wildlife issues in order to highlight, as a private individual, the intense development then just beginning to threaten the periphery of the Heswall Dales and which have increased with damaging intensity in the last five years. This made me aware of the hours of voluntary time and the hundreds of phone calls she must have fielded in her spare time working for Wirral Wildlife, as I usually had to contact her in the evenings!

She gave unstintingly of her advice and support to me as an individual with little knowledge of the technical vocabulary required to communicate with the experts in planning departments.

At any meeting I went to on Wirral I found she was there in a volunteer capacity quietly using her extensive and expert knowledge to highlight the dangers/benefits to wildlife of any given project. It is only having undertaken to propose her for this award that I have been aware of all she is involved with.'

Hilary has a great effect on the understanding of how wildlife issues need to be considered in any planning development. She has scientifically recorded Wirral wildlife for many years; makes botanical surveys, advises land managers, rangers, the Forestry Commission at Bidston Moss; is a planning consultant on coastal strategy, waste disposal, biodiversity and wildlife importance to tourism. Hilary was instrumental in setting up the New Ferry Butterfly Park – where she often gives guided walks, on summer Sundays, noon to 4pm – it is a park rich in plants too. She runs training on many aspects of our local wildlife – flora and fauna - and is active in promoting and propagating the distinctive Cheshire Black Poplar. Hilary is currently Wirral Wildlife's Honorary Conservation Officer.

[Lots of further information - how to get involved www.record-lrc.co.uk](http://www.record-lrc.co.uk)

Important 'Green Wedges'



Number 1 -The Allotment
'Scarecrow at Little Neston' painting by Kay Andrews

WHERE ARE THESE WIRRAL WALLS?



Boulder clay cliffs at Thurstaston shore



Along the Millennium Trail at Seacombe - find the art works set into the walls and promenade all the way to New Brighton



*Sandstone rock face along Barnston Dale - A551
Park up in Barnston Village and have a closer look*

What have the Committee been doing?
- discussing issues at monthly committee meetings, sending letters, lobbying MPs, councillors and council meetings.

Recent topics - who should tackle litter on the railway embankments? Listing buildings in Birkenhead Docks; The Million Ponds project at Willaston; Historic Building Protection; Transition Towns; Mersey Tidal Power; development on Green Belt land at The Warrens, Thingwall – expert protesters hope to ensure that trees are only felled after the nesting season is over.

'Green Wedges' – a planning policy that helps to conserve openness and character in urban areas

Two local history books

'Birkenhead – a History' by Committee Member Elizabeth Davey and

'Birkenhead – not so long ago' by Society Member Peter Reid.

Elizabeth is a well known historian who came to the Wirral in 1970 since when her enthusiasm for Birkenhead has become a passion. She is the author of a history of Birkenhead High School and a number of articles on local history. She is also well known for her talks on the Wirral. Her book sheds new light on the fascinating heritage of Birkenhead and traces its development from the earliest years to the present day. Elizabeth's book is available at Tesco, Heswall.

Artist and photographer Peter is an ex-Wirralian who lives in Devon. His small volume is mainly a pictorial record of his return visits in the 70's and 80's when he felt compelled to photograph the 'streets of his past' capturing the visual drama of many old or derelict buildings. The short essay accompanying the photographs is both a political and social comment of a time when developers and planners were 'doing irreparable damage.' Peter's book is available at the Williamson Art Gallery.

Both books will be available on Amazon



BUILDINGS UNDER THREAT Some were saved.....



Stanhope Hall - Photo credit: Rod Tann

There has been a significant house on the corner of Mark Rake and Spital Road in Bromborough since Tudor times. Look for the initials and date, 1693, above the doorway of the current Stanhope House, built of local sandstone. In 1939 it was renovated and used as a public library. Original oak panelling was removed, but later restoration used panels from Chillingham Castle in Northumberland. The Wirral Society fought to save the demolition of Stanhope House in the 1960s after a new library was built. It is now used as business premises.

Domestic buildings

Often the most manageable of buildings to keep going. Look for these colourful Victorian terraces in Tranmere and in many other areas of Wirral.



MEMBERSHIP DRIVE
Can you give the new leaflet, enclosed, to a friend who might like to join?

Some are in the balance..... THE CHURCH WITH A BIG GREEN DOME

Ss Peter and Paul Church, New Brighton, is a Grade 2 listed landmark building in the Renaissance style on one of the highest points in Wirral. In spite of protests and campaigns by dedicated parishioners on the S.O.U.L. Committee (Save Our Unique Landmark), the Bishop and Trustees of the Shrewsbury Diocese closed this church in August 2008 on the grounds of cost and maintenance. SOUL, via the High Court, have produced documents with which the Charity Commissioners realised the Trustees' closure decision had not considered the implications of a listed building. The Commission therefore met with representatives of all Roman Catholic Diocesan Trusts in England, the Bishop's Conference, and Patrimony Committee to determine the treatment of listed buildings. SOUL is still fighting.

Joy Hockey

Summer Meeting

Oxton Congregational Church - A Guided Tour - 2.30pm - Saturday 7th August

After reading about the closure of churches on the Wirral it is refreshing to learn of the restoration of the former Oxton Congregational church in Birkenhead. Local firms have been used for both design and building and Wirral Society were pleased to award our Civic Design Certificate of Merit to the Birkenhead based firm of Architects, Muir Associates, who were involved in the project.

This monumental building, a landmark in Birkenhead, remained derelict for many years before being bought by the Wirral Christian Centre. It had suffered from decay and vandalism both internally and externally and although still 'a work in progress', the refurbishment already carried out is imaginative and to a very high standard utilizing, where possible, many of the original features of the building.

Lilian Potter

The church is at the junction of Balls Road and Woodchurch Road - there is public car parking nearby in Balls Rd East off Borough Road.

To book your place - phone Mrs Doreen Grey on 0151 336 6109 or email wrlsoc@googlemail.com before 15th July.