

Ye Olde Greene Beltes

Have you noticed, a friend asked me recently, that whilst the Prime Minister is trying hard to push home his dream of The Big Society, the Little Society seems to be showing a few cracks here and there?

A whisper here, a whisper there, he went on, suggests that some voluntary organisations, whether do-good or just pastime, are experiencing slow membership leakage. The reason? Who knows? The irresistible lure of tv and computers and apps? The dreaded 'cuts' in some way? Or, simply, just the changing times? Whatever it is, members of the rising and maturing generation are proving hard to recruit into societies and clubs of all sorts and committee vacancies are even harder to fill.

Sadly, one recent victim has been the old-established and worthy Wirral Green Belt Council which has had to cease its activities for lack of voluntary support.

The Wirral Society, of course, has always been a keen member of the Green Belt Council and has come to the rescue and the good work is now continuing under our guardianship.

The original idea of Green Belts around cities and towns was to keep urban sprawl under control and prevent towns merging into one another. This would be done by designating and maintaining a belt of open countryside around the boundaries where building would be banned. This would also preserve the special characteristics of historic towns and help get rid of derelict areas. Moreover, green belts would preserve easy-gettable countryside where folk of all ages could play, go walking, hiking, camping and biking and generally relax and where children could play.

It seemed a simple and obvious course to take and, in modern Britain a green belt policy was actively pursued in the 1930s following a determined CPRE campaign and the London metropolitan green belt was established in 1935. Following the campaign, fourteen other green belts were also established elsewhere in the UK but they were by no means the first.

The green belt concept, however, was not a British idea at all and it was certainly nothing new. Green belts have been established in many countries around the world including, unexpectedly, countries which one thinks of as having vast open spaces. Countries like Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, the Philippines and South Korea.

Ironically, in Germany that infamous 'Iron Curtain' which, in the post-war years, split the country into two bitterly hostile factions had also protected a vast area of land from any incursions. So, when the barriers came down the land they had occupied plus holes made by exploding landmines which had become ponds became a de facto wildlife preserve and a ready-made green belt.

Moreover, even here in our green and pleasant land green belts established in the nineteen-thirties were not

the first. Way back in 1580 our own Good Queen Bess banned all building activities within a three-mile wide belt around the City of London. It was not done to provide safe archery facilities or duelling areas. It was an attempt to stop the spread of plague.

But green belts go back hundreds of years before that and the credit for originating them goes to none other than Moses. Yes, he of the Bible. The Old Testament outlines his proposals for a green belt round all the Levite towns in the Land of Israel. Furthermore, in the 7th century Muhammad established a sort of green belt around Medina. He did this by prohibiting the felling of any trees in a twelve-mile long strip around the city.

Ah, yes, there's nothing new under the sun.
Here endeth the lesson.

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WIRRAL HERITAGE OPEN DAYS
3 to 11 September, many venues
info@wirralheritage.org.uk

Some Current Society Casework

We are asking-

- Cheshire West Council to find out what is happening to the long-derelict garage on the A540 at Burton
- Wirral Council to make the owners of the retail units, at the former Champion factory at Arrowbrook, remove old signs & erect a proper sign board, for which they have permission.
- Wirral Council to reject plans for a further supermarket in Greasby, to help safeguard existing businesses
- English Heritage to List the Burton Factory building at Moreton, together with its important Jellicoe designed landscaping.
- Wirral Council and the Rail station operator to clear mounds of litter in and around Birkenhead North & Birkenhead Park stations
- Peel Holdings for a meeting to discuss how the Society can become involved in detailed arrangements for progressing 'Wirral Waters'.

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Mr. J. Miles Duncan's superbly layered hedges at Home Farm Landican received a CPRE certificate. CPRE encourages farmers and landowners to see hedges and trees as valuable, well managed ecological systems



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

BARRY LELLO

wins the Keith Davidson Award

Given annually to a person or group who has made an important contribution to the Wirral environment



Photo credit: Valerie Burnett

Barry joined the Committee of Wirral Footpaths and Open Spaces Preservation Society in 1997 and was elected Chairman in 1998. From then on he presented the views of the Society to the Highways Authorities of Wirral and Cheshire during consultations which led to the passing of laws such as The Countryside and Rights of Way Act and The Marine Act.

He carried out footpath inspections and led some of the monthly walks run by the Footpaths Society.

Barry also played a prominent role in the work of the Wirral Green Belt Council – dealing with planning applications involving properties and Rights of Way.

Margaret, his wife has supported the WFOSPS in various key roles and now cares for Barry after he suffered a stroke.

W.Victor Smith Lectures

Peak oil by Patrick Cleary, a professional economist, and Margaret Campbell, a retired doctor - members of Transition Town West Kirby.

World oil production peaked in the 1970s - now as supplies are hard to find, the citizens of the world need to look at alternative fuels and lifestyles. The UK, now energy poor, has an increasing trade gap.

Oil is so much part of our modern life – used in clothes and food, toys, paint and computers. The desperation for oil has led to energy inefficient schemes – including growing grain for bio fuel. Extracting oil from sand in Alberta has laid waste vast areas. A positive response is Transition Towns – communities can serve their needs with lower energy input. This is a worldwide movement – from Canada to Finland to Australia. West Kirby was an early Transition Town and has developed many local initiatives – raising awareness of renewable energy, allotments and local food; community planting and bread-making projects. They will help anyone to set up as a TT. Eastham, Bromborough and Chester have also joined the scheme.

The Wirral Society has supported a number of Friends' groups over the years, making donations towards community planting schemes. One recent donation to FROG – the Friends of Grange Community Park in West Kirby, enabled the group to plant two fine walnut trees, which now form part of the mini community orchard, which was started in conjunction with Transition Town West Kirby.

www.transitiontownwestkirby.org.uk

Social Housing by Professor John Tarn - former Head of Liverpool University School of Architecture,

Industrial towns in the 1830s were rife with typhoid and cholera – rich and poor alike were struck down. Novelists – Charles Dickens, Disraeli and Elizabeth Gaskell highlighted the desperate state of life for many of the workers.

Severely crowded housing had no proper water supplies nor drainage.

Gradually an awareness of the benefits of decent housing led to the 1875 Public Health Act. Many industrialists started to build well thought out, more spacious places for their workers to live in. Titus Salt at Saltaire in Bradford, Price in Bromborough Pool, Lever at Port Sunlight; Hartley's Jam factory at Aintree and Akroydon in Halifax. There was railway housing and colliery housing. Well built council house estates such as Woodchurch sprung up.

The 1980s council house sell off policy destabilized the once thriving communities and social problems began to again impact badly on residents' lives.



Good social housing – Brackenwood Estate, Bebington

A Comment from the Chairman

Many of you will have heard of the Coalition Government's 'Localism Bill', which has recently been making its way through Parliament. These radical proposals, if agreed, will introduce the new concept of Neighbourhood Planning.

CPRE has said - "Empowering local communities to the places where they live should be a central part of the new planning system... We welcome the aspirations that underpin the Localism Bill.....We want to work with the Government to ensure that local and neighbourhood plans deliver truly sustainable development that meets local needs."

One particularly welcome clause in the Bill would require proposers of major developments, to undertake pre-application consultation before submitting a planning application. In order to help shape this duty, the Government is seeking advice through CPRE and others, as what will be considered 'good practice'. The Society has thus been pleased to put forward several recent consultation examples we consider to have been carried out well.

It must be said, however, that the Society has been critical on a number of past occasions at the way in which certain major organisations have undertaken what they call 'consultations', when all they have been doing was merely telling the public what they were getting.

Let us hope if the Clause is accepted, this sort of charade will be a thing of the past and in future, genuine options will be properly presented, and the views of the public respected and acted upon.



"On a clear day you can see 80 wind turbines (395 if current plans go ahead), Blackpool Tower and sundry oil and gas rigs"

The future of Bidston Observatory is still uncertain

A Thank You

For as long as any of the Committee Members can remember, Wirral Society receives an annual gift from the P H Holt Charitable Trust – now the P H Holt Foundation whose office is in India Buildings,

Liverpool. They aim to concentrate their giving on strategic grants for work which contributes to the future wellbeing of Merseyside.

The Foundation recognise that the region benefits from the work of voluntary bodies which, like Wirral Society, are small organisations having core costs not easily funded or which are unable to devote significant effort to fund raising.

The capital and aims of the Foundation derive from a bequest from Philip Holt, a Liverpool ship-owner, who died in 1914. A brother of Alfred Holt, aka Blue Funnel Line, Philip Holt had a particular interest in Birkenhead as the company's vessels loaded cargo for the Far East in Vittoria Dock after discharging in Gladstone Dock on the other side of the Mersey.

We are extremely grateful to the Foundation for their continuing support; particularly when the local voluntary sector is undergoing changes as a result of both public expenditure cuts and the general adverse economic climate.

Enquiries, contacts, up to date news and views – see our website by Nick Lauro
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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, Hoylake.
1500 copies go to members, libraries, community centres and all Wirral Peninsula councillors

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Members - Can we contact you for meetings by email? Send your – Surname, First Name, Email address to wrlsoc@googlemail.com

JOHN DOUGLAS, ARCHITECT - 1830 -1911

By Elizabeth Davey

Few visitors to Port Sunlight, who walk over the Dell Bridge, realise that this was the work of John Douglas, one of Cheshire's most significant architects.

Best known for his black and white buildings in Chester and for that city's Eastgate clock, Douglas also designed a range of buildings in Wirral. In addition to the Dell Bridge these include Port Sunlight's Lyceum, originally built as a school, as well as a number of the village's houses and cottages.

Among his churches were St Andrew's West Kirby and the former Congregational Church, now Hoylake Chapel, both in Meols Drive.

For wealthy patrons his commissions included the vast mansion, Shotwick Park, Great Saughall, now renamed Shotwick House and Hill Bark farmhouse in Frankby.

Finally, and perhaps now the most overlooked and neglected of all his work, he designed the fairytale Bank Buildings at 1-7 Charing Cross, Birkenhead.

The Wirral Society is marking the centenary of Douglas's death by organising its summer outing to Hawarden, where Douglas designed the Gladstone Library and carried out work at Hawarden Castle and in St Deiniol's Church.

In October, Douglas is the subject of the talk at the Hot Pot Supper to be given by Graham Fisher.
[Tuesday, 18th October, 6.30 pm at the Heatherlands]



*Charing Cross
(from The Builder Magazine)*

Wirral Green Belt Council joins with the Wirral Society

As announced at the Wirral Society AGM, the Wirral Green Belt Council (WGBC) is joining with the Wirral Society.

For many years the WGBC and the Wirral Society have worked together in preserving the Green Belt on the Wirral.

Neil Parry, the WGBC Hon Secretary, has joined the Wirral Society's Committee as the Green Belt Co-ordinator and is the focal point for any Green Belt issues. His contact details are 0151 632 3481, email neil.parry@lineone.net.

In addition to a planned Green Belt summary in "Wirral Matters" there will be a Green Belt section on the Wirral Society's website. This will be launched with a most interesting summary of the WGBC, produced by Joan Whiteley, for many years the driving force in the WGBC.

The Wirral Society Civic Design Award

to Father Paul Elliott and the Friends of Rake Lane Cemetery, Wallasey.

In 2009 the cemetery chapel was home to pigeons, mice, mushrooms, vandals - fast becoming a ruin. Father Paul raised money through a national appeal to turn the chapel into a beautifully restored building - a Russian Orthodox Church which opened in July 2010. The church screen was built by a local bespoke carpenter and historic icons were donated. The Friends group and parishioners organised the final decorations. The cemetery has many interesting graves and memorial sculptures.

President John Tarn (left) and Father Paul Elliott – photo credit, David Casement



The restored Church of St. Elisabeth

