

I ask this question in the full realisation that I shall not be here in 50 years from now to see what becomes of this Peninsula we all love and cherish nor, for that matter, will the major part of the Society's current membership. But it is interesting to speculate.

I am not concerned very much with which political party will be in power by then. Political changes in the nation's town halls come and go and despite all the differing local overlords may do to upset the apple cart life manages to stagger on.

But what will be of concern to Wirral Society members five decades up the road will be precisely the same concern which brought about the founding of the Society in the first place back in 1928. That is, the Peninsula's appearance.

I mention this now in the light of Messrs Peel Holdings, the powerful overlords of the River Mersey Docks system (and much else besides), who are dead set on restructuring the riverside entrance into the port of Liverpool in the style of Sydney, New York or Shanghai. Cruise passengers on ships entering the River Mersey fifty years from now will, we're promised, experience the thrill of sailing though a great aquatic Manhattan, lined on both sides with cloud-busting, sky-scraping tower blocks in which thousands of office workers will be beavering away and hundreds more will be domiciled in apartments and able to enjoy the wonders of world city life in (I quote) "an international quality leisure destination."

You can get the essence of what Peel have in mind by looking at the artist's impressions of the scheme on their website. Anyone not knowing better would probably guess that they are looking at scenes in Sydney, New York or Shanghai. Or Toronto or Los Angeles or Dubai.

So intent are Peel Holdings to realise this ambition that they have already made a start and money seems to be no object. At the end of last year they lodged what is said to be "the biggest planning application in the country" for redeveloping the major part of the erstwhile Birkenhead docks system. The projected cost? Four and a half billion pounds.

And so determined are they that this will go ahead they have said that, given planning approval, a start will be made this time next year.

But Peel have also threatened that if the plans are "Called In" for ministerial consideration they will immediately abandon the scheme. Which is not very nice. The inference from that bullying statement is that they will brook no opposition to their plans.

Yet it is very feasible that many Wirralians will not like the idea of being Shanghai'd. Skyscrapers are an anathema to many people who see no beauty in them and heartily dislike having to enter small confining cubicles to be whisked with the speed of light up to workstations among the clouds.

Peel also claim that when finished, the scheme will provide offices and workshops to support more than

20,000 jobs, hundreds of dwellings of one sort or another, bars, restaurants, leisure facilities and other facilities.

But no-one seems to have asked how that figure was arrived at. An educated estimate or simply plucked out of the air? And where are all these 20,000 jobs coming from? What kind of jobs will they be? Will the scheme make the Wirral bank of the Mersey a new gold-rush area bringing in job-seeking, life-enhancing immigrants not only from all over Britain but from all corners of the European Union and beyond?

Wirral Council have received the plans with great enthusiasm. But do they - and Peel Holdings - seriously believe that building can go on, plan after plan after plan for 30 years without any snags or anyone voicing the slightest criticism? And do they imagine that the next 30 years will be years of peace and plenty, unsullied by conflicts, economic disasters, pandemics, acts of terrorism, tsunamis, earthquakes, heavy snowfall winters and the unknown terrors of global warming?

The last century, remember, brought two fierce world wars, a great depression, workers' unrest, the Falklands war, the Iraq war and, currently, the Afghan war and, of course, a financial crisis which may still be a bit of problem 30 years from now.

That is why this piece is titled 'Wirral 50 years on.' Hasn't experience shown that few grand-scale building plans are ever completed on time?

Allowing for 50 years for completion of an estimated 30 year project seems reasonable.

www.wirralsociety.net

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

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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

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WIRRAL MATTERS

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

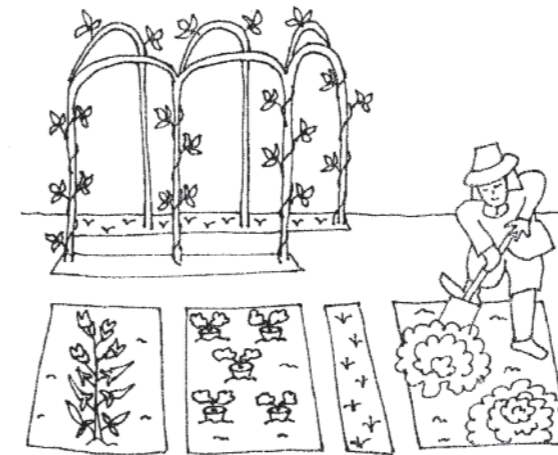
President: Professor John Tarn OBE DL FRIBA FRSA FRHistS FSA

Two W. Victor Smith Lectures

'Creating a Garden... or Casting Greenhouses on the Waters' by Michael Corfe

West Kirby is a Transition Town – where occupants pledge to grow their own food and improve their recycling, to combat effects of climate change and unnecessary use of fossil fuels.

Michael and Faye Corfe acquired an overgrown strip of their neighbour's driveway and through hard physical work have transformed it, in one growing season, to a place of many vegetables, trees, herbs and espaliered fruit trees.



There's a bartered greenhouse, a compost bin, and reuse of sandstone rocks found on the land.

William de Grouchy supervised the building of many of West Kirby's sandstone walls - the only Street in town is named after him. Look for the upside-down stone heart he fitted into one wall – coming down the main road from Heswall at Hilbre View, opposite the entrance of Grange Old Road. The tale is told that he placed it in memory of a lost love.



Photo-credit Arthur John Picton

Follow a West Kirby walk devised by author Adele Cosgrove Bray - hubpages.com/hub/west-kirby-walk

'A..Way with Waste' by Dr. Steve Anderson

Waste can be an emotional issue; there are often technical solutions which rely on political decisions to make them a reality.

Rich countries use far too many resources in order to keep their economies going and have had to address the waste that comes from these products.

EU legislation has driven much of the improvements we see today – local separation of waste, changing packaging - and those that we don't know so much about – what happens to our waste eventually.

There are many regulations now that make dealing with waste a lot cleaner – incineration now has a very good recovery rate – 90% when producing electricity and heat. Anaerobic (without air) digestion is very efficient. Industrial composting produces low amounts of methane, home composting allows you to enrich your own soil.

Within the EU some countries have a much better history in dealing with waste. The UK is improving but political leadership for good investment is lacking.

Contrast poorer countries such as India – where in Mumbai 80% of waste is recovered; mainly by people who sort through piles of rubbish by hand and sell on specific materials.

The end message for the future must be – think of waste as a resource, not a useless inconvenience.



Waste disposal in Conservation Areas?

Thanks to Mr. Parry for his observations – Birkenhead's Pumping Station at Shore Road still pumps water from the Mersey Rail Tunnel each day.

BUILDINGS UNDER THREAT - SEE PAGE 3

ICY WIRRAL



Temporary mural in West Kirby painted in aid of Claire House, children's hospice. Organised by Barbara Singleton



A fine and capacious igloo built on Brackenwood Golf Course this January by a group of 17- year- old students

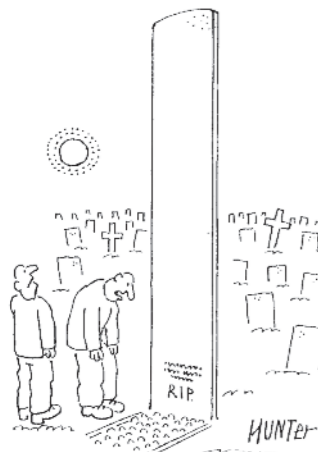


'Piggy Lane' in Spital, one of many footpaths built into the Poulton Lancelyn housing estate

-----In 1895 blocks of ice could be seen floating down the Dee-----

Some current issues the Wirral Society Committee are active on

- discussing at monthly committee meetings, sending letters, lobbying MPs, councillors and council meetings



"He was an architect"

Wirral Waters scheme

We believe that the Wirral Waters proposal for Birkenhead Docks is far too big a planning issue for the local council to decide on and should be referred to Government Office North West. (see Alan Brack's article on Page 4)

Coastal Partnership

Coastal Partnership – plans have been drawn up for measures to protect much of the Wirral Coast into the next century.

Butterfly Park, New Ferry – Wirral Borough Council will issue a compulsory purchase order so that owners of the land, Brock plc, will not destroy this valuable, well managed wildlife reserve. Cheshire Wildlife Trust issued an injunction on the owner of the land who has now made a legal undertaking not to damage the Park but is still applying for a Court Order to try to get the Park lease terminated.

CPRE News

Yvonne Sanné has long been the Wirral Society representative to the Cheshire branch of CPRE.

Here she is accepting Hedgerow and Tree certificates from Lord Grey of Codnor (Cheshire CPRE President) on behalf of Wirral Farmers - Mr. Rob Gregory, White house Farm, Raby and Mr. Dave Hughes, Westwood Grange Farm, Thornton Hough. Mr. J. Miles Duncan of Home Farm Landican also gained a certificate. The annual awards are aimed at encouraging farmers and landowners to see hedges and trees as valuable, well managed ecological systems. Photo by Becca Nelson



For more information about Cheshire Hedgerows Network - email hedgenet@cprecheshire.org.uk

BUILDINGS UNDER THREAT

Do we think they are worth keeping?

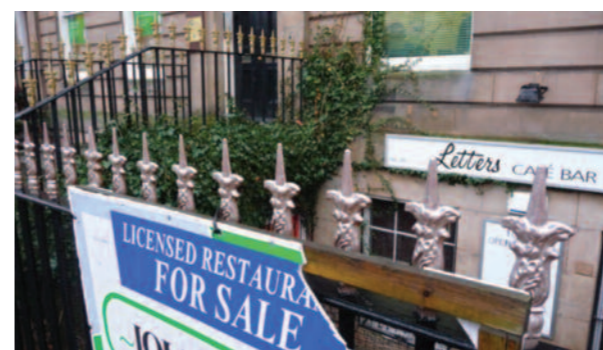
Finding alternative uses for redundant buildings is often a challenge. To give them a viable future needs investment, so, if we do not think the building needs saving as part of our heritage there needs to be a commercial reason for making use of them.

Listed buildings have a greater problem. The options for conversion are limited. A case in point is the old Birkenhead Town Hall, struggling to be a viable Wirral Museum for two decades. The contents – great. Upkeep and being a vital attraction – impossible to fund. Now we hope that a strong bid to use the building as an Arts Centre will be successful.

Much EEC money went into making 'The Hamilton Quarter' a thriving, vibrant centre for a few years, but nowadays many businesses have moved or failed and buildings are empty and often uncared for around the Square.

In the last few years we have seen successful conversions of old farm buildings to domestic housing. Recently there has been a moratorium on new housing in west and central Wirral so there is a bigger task to give idle buildings a new use.

Wirral Society Committee is liaising with Matthew Crook, Wirral's Conservation Officer to look at various buildings under threat which we will highlight in Wirral Matters.



Hamilton Square - 'For Sale' or 'To Let' with ivy taking a hold

We'd like to hear from you – any building you think should be listed? Or good conversions of old buildings? Contact our Hon. Secretary, (details on page 4)



magnificent old sandstone barn wall at Thurstaston - now part of domestic conversions

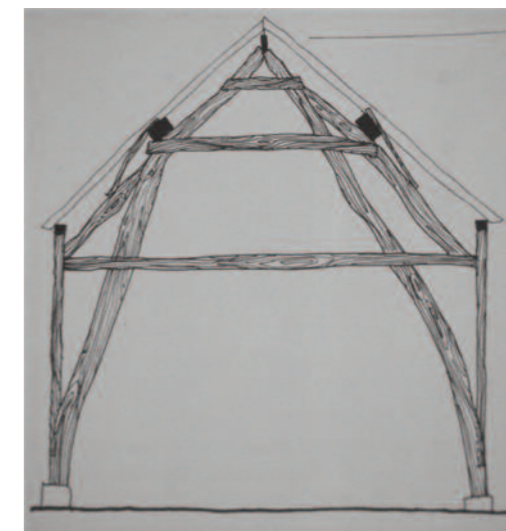
Cruck barn, Vineyard Farm, Bebington

by Elizabeth Davey

Timber framed buildings are a distinctive feature of the Cheshire countryside – a survival of the days before people built in brick. One early example is the cruck-framed barn at Vineyard Farm, constructed from naturally curving timbers, split down the middle and erected in pairs. Though Grade II listed, the barn, a rare example of its type, seems increasingly at risk through lack of proper conservation.



Photo-credit:Elizabeth Davey



Drawing from Elizabeth's collection

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Copies of Wirral Matters will continue to be posted to all Members.

The dedicated address is for communications regarding lectures, hotpot supper etc. only and all other enquiries should be made through the Wirral Society web site as usual.