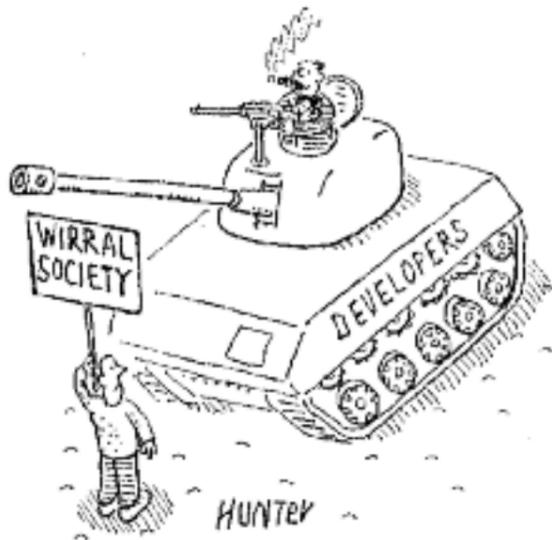


On the one hand, developers think they can ride roughshod, on the other hand fungi are tremendously powerful.
It's been a good season for both



From Glyn Evans



Your article on the P H Holt Charitable Trust rang a few bells with me. Every year of my Birkenhead boyhood during the 1950s an event took place in the Evans' household somewhat akin to the Cratchit family seeing Bob turn up with the Christmas goose. This was the arrival by post of a cheque from Holt's Mutual Benefit Society and, although only for a sum of around four or five pounds, it was a cause for great celebration. At that time it would have paid the school dinner money for myself and my three sisters for six weeks. Alternatively, and perhaps more likely, it would have kept Mum and Dad supplied for quite some time with packets of Players Navy Cut cigarettes (and I wondered why I missed three weeks from Cole Street Primary School each winter with bronchitis!) The most remarkable thing about the HMBS shares (value unknown) of which Mum only held two, was that the dividend payout was so generous.

The vessels of the Alfred Holt Shipping Company were well known to me as I spent much of my childhood in, on or around the Birkenhead dock system. My grandfather's smithy was near the Birkenhead Dock entrance to the Mersey Tunnel, where he was kept busy shoeing the many horses that hauled carts along the dock road loaded with export cargoes destined for the Far East via a Blue Flue ship. Always referred to as Blue Flues rather than Blue Funnels, the ships took their names from the Greek gods of Homer's Odyssey and indeed, the Company's engineering facility in Birkenhead was named Odyssey Works.

EMAIL ADDRESSES WANTED – to use Wirral Society funds more effectively

Send a message, including your name, to Wirral Society .and we can send you information on forthcoming events as quickly as possible - as well as reducing postage, printing costs etc. and saving the rain forests! wrlsoc@yahoo.co.uk
We assure Members that personal information will not be passed to anyone else .If you can't use the internet all information will continue to be sent by post.

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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 (Jan to Dec)

Newsletter printed by D.B. Print, Hoylake.

1500 copies go to members, libraries, community centres and all Wirral Peninsula councillors and MPs
All images by Judith Railton except if otherwise named.

winter 2012 - 2013

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



Grade 2 listed Burton Manor remains unused, since its funding was cut, and Virginia creeper grows swiftly across the windows. The Wirral Society continues to pursue this issue. The Friends of Burton Manor organised an Apple Weekend, based in the manor grounds, the recently renovated Edwardian greenhouses and the walled garden. There are facilities here for daytime meetings, talks and classes

W. Victor Smith Lecture – by Gavin Hunter
Gavin entertained and informed in his admirable world premiere presentation of 'The Lost Halls of Wirral'

We heard of Mud Hall, Puddle Hall, Sod Hall and Zig-Zag Hall, Claughton, Tranmere and Dawpool. Important in their day, they now may leave just a trace through a road name or be seen on an old map. Some halls remain - Arrowe, Shotwick, Inglewood, Brimstage, Storeton and Thurstaston. Black and white timbered Irby Hall can be seen from Irby Road, along with its remnant of moat. Ashfield Hall had its top sliced off, its flooring ripped up and has for many years been used as a grain barn.

Hedges – Cheshire CPRE make awards for good hedgerows – rich in species and well maintained. At a recent Wirral Society meeting presentations were made by Andrew Needham, CPRE Cheshire chair, to Wirral hedge-keepers, Jim Hollinshead of The Cowfold, Neston; Andy Woolley, Neston Cricket Club; Marla Johnson, Thornton Hough Village Green. Also to Cheshire hedges of note at Reaseheath College, Tarvin Community Woodland, and the British Association for Shooting and Conservation.



Yvonne Sanné, Wirral Society's CPRE representative accepts a Hedgerow and Tree award

Chalara fraxinea - the disease that is affecting ASH TREES is spreading. You are asked to report any young or coppiced ashes that look in bad shape. More details on www.forestry.gov.uk
If you are interested in reading a recent article - 'Ash Disease, the present state of Knowledge or Ignorance' by Oliver Rackham, an eminent woodland ecologist, contact the Editor.

VINEYARD FARM , Bebington – the specialist renovations of this rare and recently uncovered mediaeval domestic building are progressing



MERSEYRAIL SERVICES

I have been asked to represent Wirral Society on the Merseyrail Forum. If any members have issues – complaints, suggestions etc – regarding buses, trains or ferries, please let me know and I will take it up with them on your behalf. They seem very willing help where possible.

Audrey Platt Tel: 0151 342 5522

From Matthew Crook, Wirral's Conservation Officer 'Thank you very much for the positive coverage of the restoration of Vineyard Farm, presently underway, in the latest edition of Wirral Matters. To get a mention in a publication with a wide and well-educated readership is gratifying, and the good PR will hopefully persuade the Council as a whole to show ongoing commitment to conservation projects. I think in this instance the influence of your society, together with the interest from English Heritage was critical. The work is going well, and we were very fortunate with the contractor, who is both conscientious and considerate. The proximity to the farm shop and the continued interest of your society members who shop there has been a help.

A range of traditional artisan materials and techniques are being used - recycling of the old daub in the new panels, with new hazel withies, chestnut spars and lime render. New limewash with pigs blood to follow.

I remain cautious about the prospects for the listed cruck barn opposite the farmhouse, for which the same techniques would be employed, hopefully in the next couple of years. I will continue to make the case for its conservation to Persimmons.'

- Green Belt Matters –

The great debate on the “need” for housing to restart the economy and the threat to the Green Belt rumbles on in the local and national press. It seems that you can get a “soundbite” from a politician to support any argument for or against development.

One inescapable issue is that food prices are rising and will continue to do so as nations get richer and so compete for world food supplies. The new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) talks of sustainable development being at its core, that surely must mean preserving land for farming. We cannot eat houses.

In the south of the Wirral, Cheshire West and Chester Council (CW&C) are running a reassessment of the Green Belt around Chester. We have written in support of CPRE Chester pointing out that there are already housing developments in the area and in the depths of a major recession it is difficult to assess the “need” let alone the possible demand in 5 years time. What is fact is that the old housing forecasts, pre recession, are out of date. If you live near Chester you should find out what CW&C Council is planning for your local fields.

Any further information on the Green Belt in the Wirral please email:- neil.parry@lineone.net

Chairman's Comment

It had been hoped that by now, Wirral Council could have been able to bring a prosecution against the perpetrators who, several months ago, felled a small Noctorum woodland, comprising a significant number of mature trees with protection orders on them, As this hasn't progressed as quickly as had been anticipated (see below), we hope to bring more positive news in the next issue.

It would be timely then, to use this opportunity to comment on the recent depressing government pronouncements on planning and related issues, which, if implemented. stand to profoundly affect Wirral, along with other parts of England. The main concern is that the Coalition seems to be in a permanent state of panic. It continues to make sweeping pronouncements, which have neither been properly thought through, nor appear likely to be subjected to proper public consultation; thus bringing the whole 'Localism' agenda into question. Since CPRE, and others organisations, successfully persuaded the Government a year ago, to modify its Draft National Planning Policy Framework, it had been hoped that sensible ground rules might result, which could be uniformly applied and thus return some stability to the planning system. Sadly, this appears not to be the case, as recent Government proposals on –

- such detailed matters as the 'free-for-all' on planning permissions for house extensions, and the aim to reduce Building Regulations and, more crucially,
- the determination to significantly reduce the Planning Guidance rulebook, which underpins the whole planning system, together with
- giving a basic presumption in favour of building in open countryside – which might still include the Green Belt land - and
- the threat to remove planning powers from some Local Councils - but
- retain outdated 5 year Housing Targets and further extend them makes us genuinely fearful for the future.

It is apparent that the Government and others seem to be 'hiding behind' the planning laws as a distraction., given there are some 400,000 plots currently approved for development, and not being developed. This suggests that the above proposals are just a distraction from the real issue of a stalled economy.

Using CPRE material, we have written to our MP's that serve the peninsula, asking them to recognise and follow up these concerns. We will include a summary of responses in the next Wirral Matters.

Some Current Society Casework

Wirral Borough:

Pipistrelle Rise, Noctorum, Birkenhead: As referred to in the Chairman's Comment, above, which featured in the last Wirral Matters, we learned recently that the Council's investigations had been hampered by a lack of information. However, we are pleased to report that the Council has now been provided with some useful evidence which we hope will be productive.

Former Champion Factory site at Upton: We continue to be concerned at the lack of progress in reducing unauthorised advertising. We also recommend improving the visual quality of this corner site by restoring trees recently removed. The Society would also like to see any major revision of plans put out for consideration before being sent for approval.

Retrospective Planning Applications

We have voiced our concern to the Council at the large number of Applications being made after development has begun. The Council had already identified this is a serious issue and is considering its strategy for dealing with the problem.

Cheshire West & Chester Borough :

Proposed Green Belt development at Blacon: We have been working with Chester District CPRE to oppose a major Outline Application to erect a student village on Green Belt agricultural land which would include accommodation for some 2,300 Chester University Students

Proposed wind turbines at Leahurst, Willaston: Following submissions made by many individuals and organisations opposing this development, we were pleased to note the Application has been withdrawn. However, we are fearful it might be re-submitted before the present level of subsidy to 'on-shore' turbines is reduced.