



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

A SMALL MATTER OF A GATE

Or how it pays to be alert and aware

This summer a gate was erected over a track below Storeton Woods, Bebington, requested by the tenants of Hillside Farm and by agreement with Leverhulme Estates. Trouble was - it crossed a Public Right of Way – Footpath 59 - which has been protected by a legal Deed of Covenant since 1997, thanks to experienced campaigners, Ken Buchanan, Barry Lello and others. Ken brought the gate to the attention of local councillors and MPs, the Public Rights of Way officer, local users, the emergency services and The Wirral Society. Result: - the council enforced the removal of the gate; walkers are no longer discouraged by this barrier. This is not just a local issue – footpaths are open for all to enjoy – 59 has extensive views over Wirral's Green Belt to the Welsh Mountains and access to Storeton Woods. 15th century sandstone stoops (gateposts) and stile stones are dotted along the route, revealing the ancient field and footpath system.



Volunteers clearing the footpath in 1997 – from a photo in Ken Buchanan's collection + Footpath 59 today

The Wirral Society has always supported the work of the long established Wirral Footpaths and Open Spaces Society in fighting to keep open public rights of way.
If you have concerns about any other footpath - contact Wirral's own Footpath Officer Robin Tutchings, Wirral Rights Of Way Officer, Wirral Council. Tel: 0151 606 2480



The Old and the New -Developments at New Brighton

Fine refurbishment of the elegant waterfront shelters and sailing lake seen against the new supermarket, hotel and, at the moment, empty retail spaces. Disappointment and controversy on the abandonment of the swimming pool plan and issues of access for wheelchairs. Landscaping of the new site looks promising and the improved promenade is well used by walkers, cyclists and skateboarders.



Right - Eastham church sundial. These older time machines are often found in churchyards. The one mentioned below at Bidston is no longer in place.
Left – It's good to see that these older milepost signs are still treasured as part of our heritage



A Curious Victorian Tale leads to an exploration of Bidston

'The Struggles and Adventures of Christopher Tadpole' - a popular Victorian novel (available on restricted access through Wirral Libraries, to read on the web and for sale on Amazon)

'It was a little, quiet, grey village – so very grey, indeed and venerable, and quaint, that no flaunting red brick had dared show itself and break the uniform tint of its gabled antiquity. The houses were grey, and the wall-fences were grey, and so was the church tower. So also was the pedestal of the sun-dial in the grave-yard, that mutely spoke its lesson on corroding time to all who cared to heed it. And the old grange, with its mullioned windows and ivy-covered gateway, was the greyest of them all: there was scarcely any surmising as to when it had been a green damp level young house. None could have given the information but the church tower.'
(thanks to Harry Nickson for information about this book)



St Oswald's Church stands high on a knoll. Above the door, a weathered date '1593' and 'Rebuilt 1856' Signs indicate part of the National Cycle Network.

There's an excellent booklet on the newly completed 'Wirral Circular Trail' to be picked up in various Wirral locations or online: www.visitwirral.com/wirralcirculartrail

As this issue of the newsletter is assembled, the November ground is carpeted with layers of fallen autumn leaves, acorns and berries.

Hawthorn fig wild rose beech red oak plane



Following my request for sites for beehives at the 'Transition Towns' talk on 25/1/11 we were pleased to receive offers of sites in members' gardens. We managed to place a hive in four gardens this year. The weather has been very unreliable this year and no beekeepers have had a very good year. However two of the hives have provided a surplus of honey and this evening we are hoping to extract 40 or 50 pounds of honey for sale at the New Ferry Farmers' market. As a result of our members' generosity our food miles are low and of course next year will exceed all expectations and new records will be set! Did I mention all beekeepers are born optimists? Because of the publicity and consequent interest generated in bees we now have a lot of beekeepers on the Wirral, most of them are members of the Wirral Branch of Cheshire Beekeepers established in 1961, which is affiliated to the British Beekeeping Association. A lot of information is available on the BBKA website. We would be very pleased to answer any queries.

Wirral Society members, Audrey Platt and Geoff Ingham each have a hive in their garden. Geoff is flooded with apples he is trying to give away. We cannot assume credit but maybe it was our bees' doing!

Contact John and Christine Hebron on jdgh1@btinternet.com 0151- 648 - 3744



Christine (left) and John Hebron
Photo credit – Sue Borrington



Sophie Toll (left) and Christine at
Claremont Food Fair, Bebington
Photo credit – Chris Toll

OUR ANNUAL HOT POT SUPPER

with a Talk about a

“ VICTORIAN ARCHITECT

EXTRAORDINAIRE” by Graham Fisher

The food, as always at The Heatherlands, is hearty and delicious. That, and the prospect of an interesting illustrated talk draws members and friends to a capacity that bulges at the seams.

The black and white Chester we see today is a fantasy – mediaeval underneath, but Victorian facades – a redevelopment on a huge scale, designed to the smallest detail of carving by architect John Douglas.

Black and white was just one element of his style; spires and turrets abounded; there's the twisted chimneys of Eccleston and Alford and the Ruabon red brick of Sandiway, where he was born.

That we see so many of Douglas' buildings today is the result of his fortune in finding rich patrons. He designed complex structures and the money was there to build them well.

My view of Birkenhead since childhood has been coloured by the familiar sight of his fairytale castle (once a bank) at Charing Cross. This remains an important building in a town that suffers too often from 'Great Box Syndrome'.

Go and view the latest one – Giant Asda at Charing Cross. To recover - I'm off to see the Douglas black and white timbered church at Altcar.



A Comment from the Chairman

In the last issue, I wrote of the serious concerns we, and many other organisations and individuals were having, over the Government's proposals to re-write and 'simplify' the Planning laws – as contained in the Draft National Planning Framework. It's a measure of the extent of that concern to learn that, by the time the Consultation period came to an end in mid-October, some 13,700 separate responses had been made to Government. The Society made a comprehensive response, in support of the major role CPRE has been taking in the campaign. We have also sent copies of our submission to Wirral's 5 Members of Parliament, asking them to take a critical line during the forthcoming House of Commons debates.

The ministers in charge of seeing the proposals through, were adamant at first that no significant changes would be considered. However, official statements more recently suggest that there may well be a willingness to recognise the need for key changes. Amongst these are those

- * requiring so-called 'Brownfield' sites (ie. previously developed sites) to be used before 'Greenfield' sites are allowed, but would include special protection to stop developers from 'garden-grabbing'.

- * providing an 18-month 'transition period' to give councils more time to draw up local development plans, which reflect local needs.

- * dropping the requirement that forces councils to plan for 5 years of house building.

These are encouraging indications of what we hope in due course, will be borne out in practice.

Notes of Meeting with Wirral Borough Council, to discuss Wirral Society concerns over its Planning Enforcement Responsibilities – Wallasey Town Hall – 14th Sept 2011

David Ball – Director of Strategic Housing and Regeneration; **Rod Tann** – Wirral Society Chairman

David Ball advised of current officer portfolios:

Kevin Adderley - Interim Director of Corporate Services; Under him – Ian Platt- Interim Director of Housing; David Ball – Enforcement.

David Ball said when he took over Planning responsibilities in January 11, he inherited a number of challenging issues; **Enforcement** (overseeing planning permissions and those that haven't been approved) is of

Enquiries, contacts, up to date news and views – see our website by Nick Lauro
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major concern. There was a significant backlog and new cases arise week by week.

He decided, after internal consultation, this strategy - **Category 1 - Backlog** of Unresolved cases

Category 2 - New Enforcement cases

Category 1 - to be reduced over a period of months, distributing the work between Enforcement Officers and Planning Officers . Many cases needed relatively little extra work to bring closure, and initial efforts were concentrated on them. Now the more complex cases are being worked upon, largely by Planning Officers – using a designated Enforcement Officer for the most difficult ones.

Category 2 cases – the aim is to turn them around quickly – at the same time.

Current progress - The number of cases had been significantly reduced and the plan is to further increase the rate of backlog reduction. This is being helped by a Planning Officer being moved to the Enforcement Section. David Ball indicated he and his staff were working on a proposal to revise the Council's Enforcement Policy – which needed to clarify what, realistically, can be done. **The Report will** – set out current position, present a series of options for the Committee to consider, and - advise that the backlog has been sorted & that new cases can be dealt with. **He intends** that those reporting possible breaches would be promised a progress report within a specified period, (which will vary according to the nature of the procedure to be followed), and also when the case had been finalised.

Rod Tann said he felt sure this information would be much welcomed by the Wirral Society's Committee



Some Current Wirral Society Casework

- * **Burton Manor** – we have received assurances from Liverpool City Council, that its fabric is being well cared for, whilst the building is offered for sale.

- * **Fly-tipping** on Birkenhead Park railway embankment - we are pleased that in response to our complaint, we have been advised the debris has been cleared. The Society is seeking action to try and ensure that further tipping does not continue.

- * **Cross Hill, Thingwall** – following an Application to remove a significant quantity of soil from the top of this hill, a letter has been sent to Wirral Council, reminding it that the site is registered as being of archaeological importance as the likely location of Viking 'Thing' (Parliament).

- * **Buildings and bridges at Wallasey Docks** – we have been disappointed that English Heritage has turned down an application for Listing, which was made by the Merseyside Industrial Heritage Society, (which was supported by the Wirral Society).