

Great Trees of Wirral

Trees are in the news again. Remember the deadly impact of Dutch Elm Disease a few years ago? Well, it's back again. What's more the oak is also in danger. This glorious symbol of British pride is under threat from an affliction called Acute Oak Decline. This is something fairly new to the U.K. and mainly attacks trees which are 50 years old and, of course, a great many of them are.

Why am I telling you all this? It's not because there is an imminent threat to our peninsula's trees but just to report that, recently, there have been two arboreal initiatives which are of Society interest.

The first is a project entitled *Great Trees of Wirral*. This was recently established by the man whose every waking hour over the past twenty years has been concerned with the welfare of a cemetery. Not any cemetery but the oldest in Wirral which also has the distinction of being only one of five in Britain which have been accepted into membership of the prestigious Association of Significant Cemeteries in Europe. This, of course is Flaybrick Cemetery on the lower slopes of Bidston Hill and I speak of one, John Moffat, the worthy winner of our Keith Davidson Award in 2005.

Flaybrick Memorial Gardens, as it is now known, where 100,000 burials have taken place, also boasts a collection of trees of great distinction, second only to those in Ness Gardens.

Over the past six years John has given slide talks to many organisations on Flaybrick's special trees and this has now led to the recent launch of his Great Trees Project.

The project aim is to include on the Flaybrick website (www.flaybrick.com) details and photographs of the most distinctive of Wirral's trees and exactly where they are located. A start has been made with details – and splendid photographs by Marianthi Lainas - of three of the finest. Heading the list is the Stone Pine on West Kirby's Grange Hill. This is a tree which is mostly found in the Mediterranean region from Portugal to Asia Minor and this specimen must surely be Wirral's best-known tree. With its two-part trunk and generous umbrella-like foliage, standing plonk in the middle of the pavement, it is passed by hundreds of people every day. And, come to think, I wouldn't argue if was described as 'iconic.'

Next comes Flaybrick's Fern Leafed Beech. This fine example was probably planted when the cemetery was laid out in early Victorian times. It differs from the Common Beech which has smooth, oval leaves by having long, narrow, willow-like leaves, some with "teeth" and some without.

The other notable tree is the beautiful Mimosa in Eastham's Tea Gardens. This tree, with its great clusters of bright yellow flowers is, of course, at its glorious best in the Spring.

'The overall aim of the project', explained John, 'is to develop understanding of Wirral's trees and give people a sense of ownership of our splendid tree heritage.' He also hopes to underline the fact that Flaybrick has some of the best and that more people will come to see them and, to complement the website, Daphne Nock one of the Friends of Flaybrick, is preparing a guided walk of Flaybrick's trees.

This initiative has received Society support.

At its next meeting the Society Committee's attention will be drawn to a national project started by *The Conservation Foundation* which is particularly concerned with the Elm disease problem. They have instituted the *Great British Elm Experiment* in the hope that they can find an elm which might be disease-resistant. In their Bedfordshire nursery they are growing elm saplings which they send to schools (or any other body interested) for on-growing and regular inspection and report. But elms are slow-growing trees and this experiment will be equally long-lasting.

The Society will be considering whether there are any schools in Wirral willing to join in.



A view through the leaves of the purple leaved plum tree in Flaybrick Cemetery - planted by the Wirral Society, to celebrate their 75th Birthday in 2003. It replaces a hop-hornbeam that did not survive.



*Stone Pine - West Kirby
Photo by Marianthi Lainas*



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



PLENTY TO BE PLEASED ABOUT ON WIRRAL



*View to Wales, across the River Dee from Thurstaston Visitors Centre
Spearwort, *Ranunculus lingua*, in a Bebington pond
Sandstone carved oak tree detail, Thurstaston church*

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



Green Wedges
Number 2 – Greensward at New Ferry
Sit and watch the boats go by on the Mersey, or walk along the Esplanade (due to be renovated)



WHERE ARE THESE WIRRAL PINFOLDS?



10th century enclosure in Capenhurst village

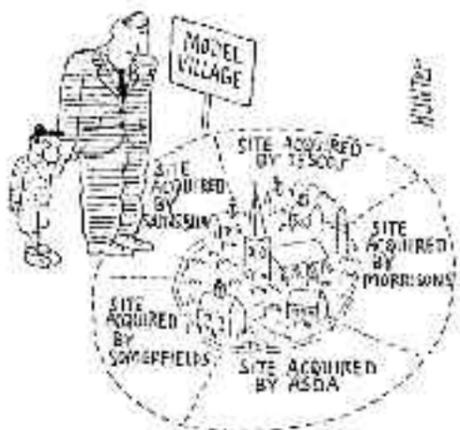


On Brimstage Road, near Spital Crossroads, Bebington.

Traditionally livestock found wandering were placed in these enclosures until claimed

Neston, Historic Market Town?

Who said "yes" to the new Sainsbury's supermarket being built in the heart of Neston? The building is huge and ugly, totally out of keeping with the old buildings, both in design and scale. Since work started stall holders on the historic weekly market and visitors have lost heart - stalls have diminished in number. Plans allow for the market to be sited on the first floor of the new car park but it is feared that the 'Historic Market Town' heritage sign, encouraging visitors to the only weekly outdoor market on Wirral, will have to be taken down.



KEITH DAVIDSON AWARD

The Keith Davidson Award is presented annually to the person or body deemed to have made an outstanding contribution to the preservation or improvement of the Wirral environment during the year. Keith Davidson was a former Chairman of the Society. Nominations from societies, clubs, corporate organisations or individuals can be made on a form obtainable from Award organiser, Doreen Grey, phone:0151.336 6109.

What have the Committee been doing?

- discussing issues at monthly committee meetings, sending letters, liaising with other groups, lobbying MPs, councillors and council meetings.

Recent topics inappropriate signs, historic buildings protection; Wirral Waters proposed developments on old dockland in Birkenhead; the 'Buy Local Food' initiatives; Chester Zoo plans; closure of Mostyn House school - a prime position on Parkgate front; effect of building Sainsbury's in Neston; The Warrens, Thingwall

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Members -

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BUILDINGS UNDER THREAT Going?



Corsaire pub, Bidston Village Road (victim of an arson attack after being boarded up)

ALSO discussed - The Coach and Horses, Moreton; The Plough, also in Moreton, once known as The Plough and Druid's Arms, goes back to the 1600s, although the present building dates from 1931 - WS have written to the present owner (Tesco) to ask if they could incorporate part of this old pub into their new Metro store.

Gone



If you know what this Ellesmere Port factory was, beside the M53, contact the editor.

Recently The Great Eastern Pub in New Ferry was demolished despite a campaign by local people

Still going strong



Tam O'Shanter's cottage, opposite Flaybrick Cemetery in Boundary Road, Bidston - restored and part of the thriving Urban Farm. Look out for the eco building there. The Farm is open every day of the year.

The Railway is a thriving pub on the edge of Port Sunlight, opposite a wildflower meadow near the Butterfly Park in New Ferry.



Future Lectures

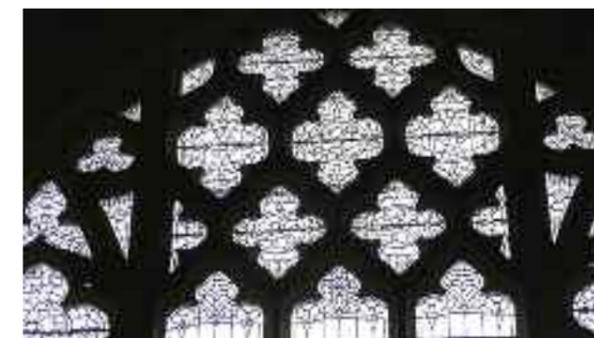
25th January - 'Transition Towns: a community response to climate change and peak oil'

Patrick Cleary, a professional economist, and Margaret Campbell, a retired doctor, are members of Transition Town West Kirby. This is a grassroots group, one of hundreds around the world, which promotes community resilience in the face of the challenges presented by climate change and diminishing oil and other natural resources.

8th March - 'Social Housing and some significant historic projects in Wirral'

John Tarn, the former Head of Liverpool University School of Architecture, whose expertise is invaluable to the Society, has for many years been involved with Riverside Housing Association.

Members enjoyed a summer guided tour



round a building once abandoned and vandalised, now wonderfully restored - The Wirral Christian Centre Church in Oxtan.