



**Alan Brack Reports**

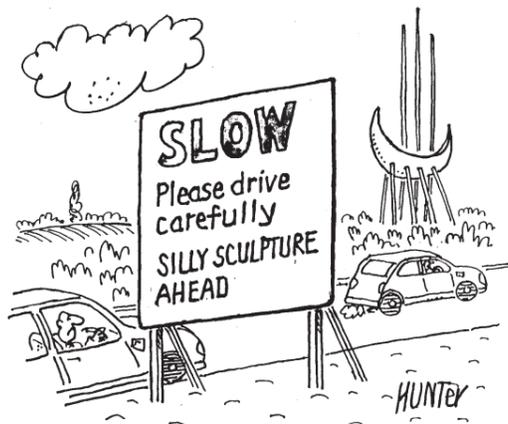
**Who's for the boat?**

We've all heard by now about 'The Magic Boat', the feature which Wirral Council proposes should be erected on a traffic roundabout on the A41 and which for various reasons has come in for a lot of stick.

What's its purpose? Will it be such an eye-bulging feature that travel companies will organise tours for people to see it at first hand? Are people attracted to Blackpool (or even Paris) by its tower? Do people travel up to Northumbria just to see The Angel of the North? Or, for that matter, to the iron birds at Hoyle?

Moreover, why is the Council so bent on honouring an invasion by hostile forces? As we all know, the Wirral Peninsula, down the centuries, has had to put up with invasions by hordes of wild Welshmen, savage Saxons, ruthless Romans, noxious Normans and villainous Vikings, all of whom have left their mark upon the place in one way or another.

The Council, however, has chosen to commemorate the intrusions by the Vikings, a race with a terrible reputation. They invaded Wirral after being kicked out of Ireland and were nothing less than



illegal immigrants. In describing them, past historians have used words like 'ravaging' and 'laying waste' and 'ransacking,' but modern historians tend to take a different view. They claim the Vikings were just the opposite – a clever and compassionate people who brought nothing but good to the Peninsula – so perhaps an excuse can be found for marking their long stay here.

The chosen design is for a banana-shaped Viking boat perched on four tall stilts. There is, it seems, a similar commemorative feature in a seaside resort in County Kerry.

It is smaller than the Wirral one will be and another difference is that the Irish boat is carrying four sitting figures, said to be monks.

That, of course, would be equally appropriate for Wirral, since it was the monks of Birkenhead Priory who founded the Mersey ferry service 900 years ago and opened a main gate. And what an opportunity that provides!

If the feature is approved and constructed, a competition could be organised on the lines of 'Get Me out of Here ...I'm a Celebrity'. The subtle difference would be that Wirral people would vote for the four distinguished Wirralians they would like to see as the boat's crew - a sort of 'Get Me into There ...I'm A Wirral Celebrity!'.

There's plenty of scope. From Emma Hamilton to Daniel Craig there is a long list of Wirral folk who have earned recognition in one way or another – the likes of William Hesketh Lever, William Laird and his son John, Dixie Dean, Frank Field, F.E. Smith (Lord Birkenhead), Rod Tann, Sir Ian Botham, Lottie Dodd, June Lancelyn Green, Thomas Brassey, Selwyn Lloyd, Rafael Benitez, Glenda Jackson, Nathaniel Hawthorn ... to name but a few.

**Petitions, Petitions, Petitions**

Are petitions ever 'fit for purpose'? Do they ever achieve what the organisers hope for? Small changes may be granted here and there as a result of reams of scrawled protesting signatures but a complete volte face is rare. For all that, petitioning remains a popular outlet for protesting and generally letting off steam at some outrageous plan. And at the time of writing there are nine (at least) petitions underway in the Wirral Peninsula for one reason or another. Chief among them is in New Brighton which has been almost in a constant state of petition for years as one regeneration plan after the other has been fiercely argued and split the populace. Now their famous domed Roman Catholic church of SS Peter and Paul is under threat and has given cause for another opposing petition.

In Eastham, a petition has been mounted against a plan for the building of integrated waste treatment and power generating plant in Hooton Park on the very edge of the Eastham Village Conservation Area on a greenfield site close to the Green Belt.

The long campaign to have the Mersey Tunnel tolls abolished has met with no success. But now that the Scottish Assembly has scrapped tolls on the Clyde Bridge and the Skye Bridge and has promised that the tolls on the Forth and Tay bridges will also be abolished the situation has changed. A petition has been raised.

But, at long last, a ray of hope peeps through the clouds of doubt and futility. Just after Christmas, the Government issued a consultation paper which proposes that local authorities should be forced to respond to any petition signed by one percent of the electorate or 250 names.

There was no mention of what the Government should do with petitions presented to Downing Street.

+++++



# WIRRAL MATTERS

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

President: Professor John Tam OBE DL FRIBA FRSA FRHistS FSA

**'Georgian Liverpool'**

*an illustrated talk by David Brazendale.*

David took us on a fascinating tour, based on the very first Liverpool guidebook of 1795, inherited from his grandfather.

The Liverpool of the late eighteenth century was a bustling place, full of new developments including the first commercial wet dock in the world, needed for the bigger ocean-going ships. Trade was booming. The Tower of Liverpool, where keen traders picked up signals by semaphore via Bidston Hill, is still remembered, as the current Tower Buildings occupy the same site. Go searching on Bidston Hill and you might spot the socket holes for the signal equipment in the rock.

Building upheavals were on the go, not unlike the current reshaping pangs of Liverpool. As today, there were rural coast walks and views to enjoy and Bootle was recommended for sea bathing. Near the top of Duke Street you could look down into a quarry 'The Delph' and there was a windmill where LIPA stands nowadays. A natural spring was bottled and deemed to be good for eye complaints.

During the 1775 sailors riot the cry went up 'Shoot the goose!' as cannon were fired at the Liverbird weathervane on the Town Hall.

David introduced us to characters of the day. Philanthropist Brian Blundell was owner-captain of the Mulberry - his journal is kept in the Lancashire Records Office in Preston. Felicia Hemans, a popular novelist and poet was considered by some to be better than Dickens. John Bellingham, after being under arrest in Archangel, Russia, later came to Liverpool. He is infamous now for shooting the Prime Minister, Spencer Perceval.

You might have wanted to steer clear of the bottom of Parliament Street where the Oil House produced a strong smell of melting whale blubber. Certainly you would avoid a certain local parrot, so good at imitations that he lured an unwary horse into the dock. The

**CONTENTS**

- 1 Georgian Liverpool; Unexpected Green Spaces
- 2 A whole page of Wirralness - Tree Wardens; 'The Swan' Hunter Cartoon; Fair; Contacts
- 3 Green Belt Success - The Chairman Writes; CPRE; MBE; The Puzzle Box
- 4 Alan Brack Reports

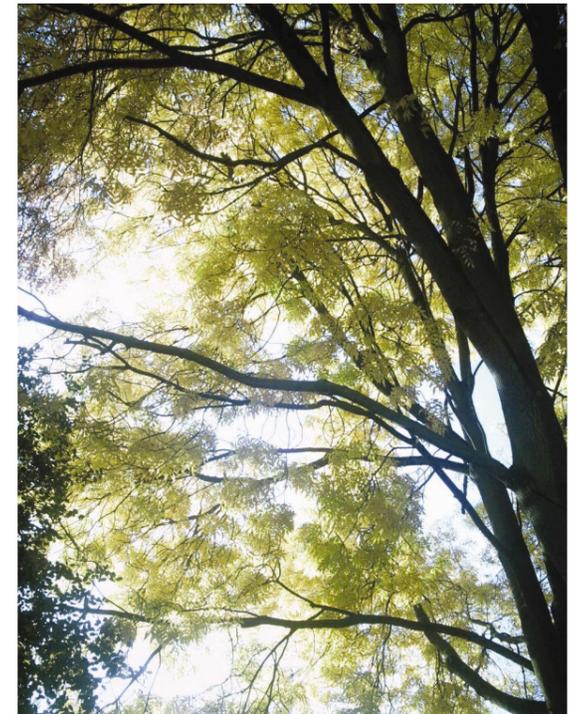
sailors' church, 'St. Nicks', had its share of tragedy. After 50 years of structural reports, but no action, the bell tower collapsed in 1810, killing 25 children.

Take a walk round the *Capital of Culture* using David's new book - **'Georgian Liverpool', published by Palatine Books at £7.95**

**Unexpected Green Spaces by ND**

On the corner of Balls Road and Oxton Road, Birkenhead, diagonally opposite the ruined church, buildings have been demolished and a wealth of wild flowers, grasses and the inevitable buddleia have made a wonderful temporary meadow.

A short suburban footpath in Bebington, The Highcroft, from Heath Road to Highcroft Avenue is bordered by many mature trees and old gardens including the green space of the Disabled Centre. If you peep through the hedge here you can see contemporary sculptures of birds and flowers. Along the path I spotted birch, fir, rowan, eucalyptus, ash, poplar, willow, guelder-rose and hazel.



*A small stand of ash trees by Heath Road/Abbots Drive, Bebington show all the autumn colours from purples to acid yellow.*

### ANNUAL FEE REMINDER FOR MEMBERS

£7 is due on January 1st each year.  
Please send the enclosed form to the  
Membership Secretary. The new **WIRRAL  
SOCIETY** leaflet is enclosed for you to use  
or pass on to anyone who is interested.

### Conflict in New Brighton



Recently, model boat users have disputed territory with over thirty adult swans who find the boating lake to their taste. Maybe the introduction of a remote controlled model swan last year was not a good idea.

### Wirral History and Heritage Fair

Saturday, March 8th

at Wirral Museum, Birkenhead Town Hall  
Hamilton Square  
10am - 4pm

Stalls and displays by Historical and Amenity  
Societies, Postcards, Ephemera and  
Memorabilia

**THE WIRRAL SOCIETY** will be there

### Friends of Bidston Hill

[www.friendsofbidstonhill.com](http://www.friendsofbidstonhill.com)

produce a good newsletter with varied and interesting  
content and plenty of evocative photos.

### Parkgate Walks and Information

The Parkgate Society has produced an attractive  
leaflet to introduce the visitor to various walks and key  
points of interest around this saltmarsh-fringed  
township.

### Cheshire Community Pride Competition

Congratulations to Neston, who came second to  
Frodsham. Neston library is celebrating its own  
centenary and has recently unveiled a new mosaic.

### Wirral Tree Wardens Christmas Meet

is a good time to catch up with those who work hard  
on planting, education and organising; this time in a  
more relaxed mode with shared edibles.

On show, Janet Thorning's images of trees in  
Burnham Beeches (old woods near Slough),  
Gwersyllt Rynys (near Betws y Coed) and locally in  
Royden Park; Mary Hartley's prints of her paintings  
of specific Wirral trees in their surrounding and  
Judith Railton's photos and videos of Bebington  
trees over 4 seasons of one year. As well as future  
projects and plantings, conversations turned to  
composting, global warming and buzzards returning  
to Bidston.

A good book to look for - 'Great British Trees' from,  
The Tree Council, 51 Catherine Place, London  
SW1E 6DY

**Like to get involved?**

Contact: [jan@wirraltreewardens.co.uk](mailto:jan@wirraltreewardens.co.uk)

Apple Tree, Manor Road

by Mary Hartley

*THE WIRRAL SOCIETY has a wide ranging brief to  
help protect and enhance both the rural and urban  
aspects of the Peninsula, especially the Green Belt.  
Members watch and fight planning applications,  
liaising with the two local councils and other agencies  
on improvements. They circulate a regular newsletter  
and enjoy varied, expert talks.*

*Small grants are available for suitable community  
projects. Contact the Secretary with your group's  
proposals. News snippets to the Editor.*

Editor: Judith Railton, 22 Bracken Lane, Bebington,  
CH63 2LZ

TEL: 0151-608-4498

Hon. Secretary: David Casement, 5 Cornwall Drive,  
Prenton, CH43 0RW TEL/FAX 0151-608-3039

Membership: Mrs. Audrey Platt, 21 Latchford Road,  
Gayton, CH60 3RN TEL: 0151-342-5522

[www.wirralsociety.net](http://www.wirralsociety.net)

*Printed by D.B. Print, The Print House, Carr Lane, Hoylake.  
Photos- Ash trees by Judith Railton, Alan Brack by Edith Brack,  
Bill Bryson by Cheshire CPRE.*

*Personal views expressed in WIRRAL MATTERS are not  
necessarily the views of the Wirral Society or the Editor.*

### GREEN BELT SUCCESS

#### The Chairman Writes

The work of environmental pressure groups such  
as ours can so often be dispiriting and  
disappointing. Decisions and actions are taken by  
various Authorities which, whilst usually being  
technically correct, can sometimes seem to lack  
good judgement. Doubtless the pressures on local  
decision makers, such as staff time and  
government financial penalties, should a decision  
be challenged at Planning Appeal, understandably  
make Authorities err on the side of caution.

It was, therefore, with a great sense of relief and  
pleasure, that objectors heard the robust  
arguments put forward by so many Planning  
Committee members against releasing Green Belt  
at Thingwall for a Medical Centre. The application  
to build was turned down by councillors. This was  
especially heartening as previously

- despite the large number of objections received and  
- the case made by the Applicants seeming little  
different from a similar Application turned down 3  
years ago, the Report to Planning Committee  
members recommended the Application's approval.

It was also especially gratifying to **THE WIRRAL  
SOCIETY** that one elected member quoted  
verbatim, from the last edition of **WIRRAL  
MATTERS**, the Society's comments on the history  
and establishment of the Wirral Green Belt.

The next potential incursion into the Wirral Green  
Belt will be the application to construct the massive  
'Magic Boat Gateway Feature' by the A41/M53 at  
Eastham. Whilst the Society supports the principle  
of Public Art, regrettably, the economic case for  
breaching the Green Belt does not appear to have  
been made in this instance and thus ought to be  
rejected.

**Rod Tann**

### June Lancelyn Green, MBE

Good wishes to June for her recent honour, which  
recognises her many services to the community.  
June has been a member of **THE WIRRAL  
SOCIETY** for many years. She and her husband  
Roger before her have always tried to keep the  
Manor of Poulton Lancelyn as green as possible.  
The family motto 'Virtus Semper Viridis'  
appropriately translates as 'Virtue is Evergreen'.  
June opens her interesting garden to the public  
under the National Garden Scheme on Sunday  
afternoon, April 13th.

[www.poultonhall.co.uk](http://www.poultonhall.co.uk)

~~~~~  
**As part of THE WIRRAL SOCIETY'S  
80th Birthday celebrations it is planned to run  
a Conference on  
Wirral Conservation Areas later in the year.**

### Bill Bryson heads up the CPRE



Bill has been involved with various projects, including  
Autumn visits to Cheshire, since becoming the high  
profile figurehead of CPRE.

Check out the website: [www.cprecheshire.org.uk](http://www.cprecheshire.org.uk)  
**THE WIRRAL SOCIETY** hosted the January meeting  
of the Cheshire CPRE branch in the Lady Lever  
Gallery.

### In the Mayor's Parlour

The current Mayor, Councillor Phil Gilchrist, made the  
first Mayoral invitation, ever, to the **THE WIRRAL  
SOCIETY** committee to meet with him and his wife,  
Chris, in the Mayor's Parlour of Wallasey Town Hall.  
One wall of the Parlour displays the annual, creatively  
presented, pine cone rents of Tam O'Shanter Urban  
Farm.

The Mayor's old scrapbooks from the 1960s onwards  
make fascinating reading. Headlines include - 'Fight to  
Protect Wirral', 'Eastham Detour Plan Approved', 'Start  
Likely Soon on Birkenhead Modern Precinct'.

### APPLY FOR THE KEITH DAVIDSON AWARD

Nominations are sought from societies,  
corporate organisations or individuals who  
have made an outstanding contribution to the  
preservation or improvement of Wirral's  
environment.

Forms from Doreen Grey, 0151.336.6109  
**DEADLINE - 11th March**

### THE PUZZLE BOX COMPETITION

**How many place names in Wirral  
can you list that end in 'ton'?**  
Answers to the Editor by March 30th.  
**£10 voucher to the winner**

*Congratulations to the winners of the  
'Anagrams from WIRRAL MATTERS'  
competition*

Vouchers go to Diane Barton who found 1022  
words from 'aal' to 'writs' and Judith Holroyd,  
who went from 'aerial' to 'writer' in 122 steps.