



Alan Brack Reports

Black Beauty

A few months ago I drew attention to a strip of tarmacadamized 'pavement' running alongside Birkenhead Sixth Form College in Claughton Village. For anyone interested in the science of potholery this was probably the best example of the genre in Wirral and well worthy of close study – until now..

Alas, after Claughton folk had long developed a sort of hop-scotch walk to navigate the stretch safely, its special character was completely ruined by a gang of vandal workmen who gave the stretch a completely new shiny black bituminous surface. To add to this scandal the adjoining rusty safety railings were also replaced with new.

The new shiny black funereal surface has, of course, proved to be a great challenge to the students of the college who soon began to liven it up with a contemporary polka-dot pattern of spent chewing-gum.

The new surface also proved to be a source of irritation to the utility companies and within a fortnight one of them had dug a hole in it and left a patch of differing shade. Now a second utility company (or maybe the Council?) has excavated a foot-wide channel along half the length of the stretch and that, too, has been similarly patched.

Coincidentally, by way of a little compensation, Claughton Village has acquired new, even bigger stretches of the black stuff. With the building of a new Tesco store on the site of a former petrol-station the opportunity has been grabbed to remove the paving slabs which formerly surrounded the site and slap down tarmac in their place.

Additionally, a few weeks ago the entire length of paving slabs on both sides of Lingdale Road North, opposite the new shop, was similarly honoured. The entire paving on both sides of the road were 'harvested' for (we presume) the Council's Conservation Area stockpile.

As a reward, Lingdale Road North was skilfully resurfaced in as fine a display of tarmacadamising skill to be seen anywhere in the borough.

Initialspeak

Have you seen a VCAW in your area lately? It has been reported one has been seen in Bebington, Heswall, West Kirby and Wallasey. What about an ESOL or an EDOL? No? Then it's time to ACT.

These strange creatures are to be found in great flocks in the world of education and local authority (WOEALA) and they proliferate in Government circles (GC).

But they can breed anywhere and everywhere. Global warming (GW) is not a problem. Every single day new specimens (NS) are discovered. They have proliferated in the business world, too. Whereas at one time there were only GWR, LNER, LMS, BBC and AA/RAC today they can be seen in great flocks everywhere you look.

We're talking, of course, about that irritating, maddening, blight of the age – the use of initials and the use of initials which can be twisted into shapes which can be pronounced, like Defra and LINK.

This craze for initialising everything is, of course, due entirely to the proliferation of emailing and the sending of text messages in severely butchered English. But whilst such an august company like Halifax is now operating as HBOS (and, would you believe, a speaker on Newsnight referred to it as 'Aitch-bos') it is refreshing to see that Gordon Brown's government has some departments with such unwieldy titles they defy initialising.

What a joy it is to see such snappy titles as Department for Children, Schools and Families, Communities and Local Government for one and Office of the Leader of the House of Lords and Lord President of the Council for another.

Whilst someone can dream up such initial-defying titles like that all is not lost.

*If your curiosity has been aroused you might like to know that VCAW stands for *Voluntary and Community Action Wirral*. ESOL refers to *English for Speakers of Other Languages*. EDOL (among several other things) is short for *European Digital Older Learners*. DEFRA is *The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs*. ACT stands for *Adult Community Training* whilst LINK is *Local Involvement Network*.

A University of Wirral?

It was interesting to read that Wirral Councillors have been discussing the possibility of establishing a university in the borough following the Government's announcement that they have put aside £150 million towards increasing the number nationwide.

If anything comes of it we would like to remind the Council that suitable starter premises are standing ready and available on Bidston Hill.

The famous Observatory building and the adjoining Proudman Laboratory have both been vacated and are said to be in very good condition.

Their continuing empty existence is proving to be an embarrassing problem.

This could be a chance to solve it.

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Interesting websites about Wirral

www.mikekemble.com www.wirral.gov.uk
www.allertonoak.com/merseythemes



WIRRAL MATTERS

NEWS 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

Butterfly Man wins this year's Keith Davidson Award

Paul Loughnane has been Secretary of both the Wirral Countryside Volunteers and The New Ferry Butterfly Park for 15 years. His dedicated work has included all aspects of their organisation. From skilled, hands-on work in the countryside to fundraising, training, events and communication. Paul has introduced hundreds of school children to ideas of local wildlife and conservation and has enjoyed watching his initiatives of land management slowly come to fruition. Paul regularly works with teams coppicing hazel used for hedge laying. See their work - in Gilroy Nature Reserve, West Kirby, along the Wirral Way at Boathouse Lane and at the Butterfly Park.



The types of butterflies shown have all been seen in the Park. These are spares from Liverpool Museum, collected in the 1920s.

New Ferry Butterfly Park is an urban nature reserve developed on a former railway goods yard, coal yard and water softening plant at Bebington Station. It is a Site of Biological Importance.

Open - May to August on Sundays, 2 – 4, courtesy of a strong volunteer band. Travel by train or bus – both stop right by it.

See some of the work Paul is involved in on www.wirralwildlife.co.uk

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Victor Smith Lectures

Members and friends have been treated to two very different speakers this year, both with great expertise in their fields.

Andrew Quirk has worked as a ranger in Birkenhead Park for two years, with a special interest bats and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. He used old documents and images, along with his own evocative photos to share his great enthusiasm with us.

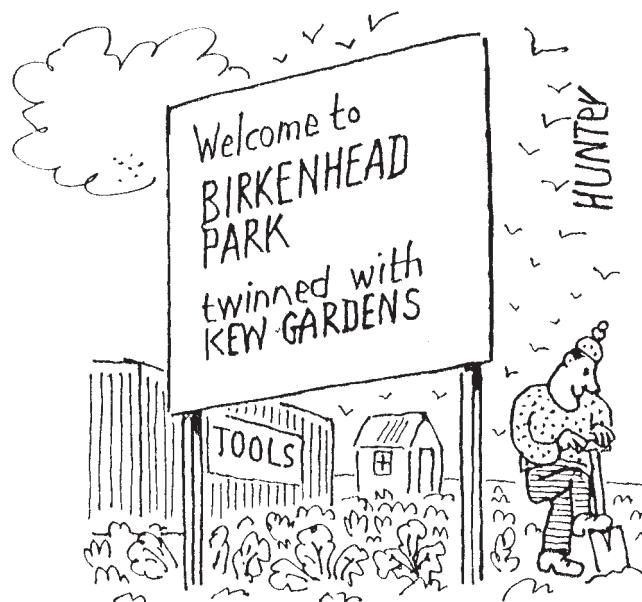
Jenny Whalley is a landscape archaeologist who showed us what must be just the tip of the iceberg of ancient carved stones on Wirral; images of bears and interwoven Celtic knots abound. One Viking stone was found recently in the rockery of a private garden; an earlier Saxon stone of a man with crossed keys is believed to have fallen from its bridge over the river Fender near Landican. **Where is it now?** Thurstaston Common is a good place to search for many individual carvings, including a Celtic stone head, revealed as a carpet of heather and peat was peeled back. Local folklore has named Thor's Stone 'Fair Maiden's Hall' – a reference to Norse goddess Freyja. In recent years local children have taken part in an enactment of the ancient spring festival of 'The Marriage of the Man and the Maiden' after beheading the ceremonial Hawthorn (or Green Man) at the Stone.



Two carvings on Thor's Stone

.....Write in with your 21st century May Day ceremonies.....

Allotments returning to Birkenhead Park? – the debate rages



SUMMER MEETING

Saturday 19th July

Meet at Port Sunlight station

2pm

A guided tour by Elizabeth Davey
for about one and a half hours

Followed by optional visits to Lady Lever Gallery, Port Sunlight Vision Visitors Centre, Green Hand Garden Centre

Springtime in Wirral by ND

A sunny day in late April – summer dresses and shirtsleeves parade in the precinct in Birkenhead – café culture spills out onto the square, where trees are rich with pale pink blossom.

Elsewhere on verges to main roads, a thick edging of the small white flowers of scurvy grass thrives in the salt flung up from winter gritting. These are normally seaside plants and have found a new inland opportunity.

At this time of year the eye is assaulted by colour – verges of brilliant dandelion suns, purple honesty and bluebells. Sharp scents of wild garlic fill the air in woodland carpets of white stars in Capenhurst. Crushing leaves of Jack-by-the-hedge there is a similar, milder aroma.

At Ness Gardens a rare flower blooms briefly – the metallic blue Puya Alpestris.

Parkgate and Neston What's that seat?



This seat in Station Road, Parkgate is dedicated to Geoffrey Place who was born in Sussex and graduated from Oxford. He taught at Mostyn House School from 1963 until retirement and wrote a history book – 'This is Parkgate'.

Ladies Day Parade in Neston On the first Thursday of every June

Brightly dressed women and girls, carrying staves bound with flowers and ribbons, wind in a long procession down the High Street to the Parish Church. A band leads them out under a banner – 'Bear Ye one Another's Burdens'. They are celebrating the formation of the, now unique, Neston Female Friendly Society, formed in 1814. Regular subscriptions meant that members could claim assistance if they needed it.

You can read interesting articles, by Geoffrey Place, about Neston on www.aboutmyarea.co.uk/cheshire/neston/CH64/Villages. Also look on www.youtube for a short video – 'Neston, Ladies Day Chaos'

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.

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website recently revamped by Nick Lauro

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The Chairman Writes

In the last 2 editions of Wirral Matters, I have written in my 'Chairman Writes' column about a particular threat to the Wirral Green Belt; the proposed building of a 'Super-Surgery' on the edge of Arrowe Park. I also latterly referred to the proposed 'Magic Boat', now thankfully scuppered before its launch!

In preparing the 'News & Views' update for the Society's Website, it occurred to me what a constant problem it is to maintain the integrity of this most important planning tool – the Green Belt.

In Wirral Council area, there still remains, commendably, a 'Restraint' Policy restricting most new residential and other similar developments in much of the Borough. We wait to see, in the light of the recently published Draft Regional Spatial Strategy, how long this can remain.

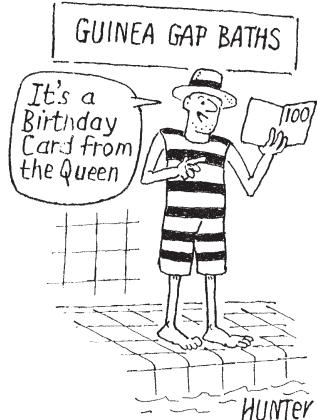
However, despite this constraint in Wirral Borough, we still have current demands for that 'super-surgery' at Thingwall, a 'Signature' Golf Resort, at Hoylake, 'affordable' bungalows at Parkgate, Marquees at Thornton Manor, a crematorium at Hooton, and disturbingly, an unauthorised and continually expanding agri-business at Lea 'Farm', Thurstanston.

To keep track of and respond to these, and similar proposals, needs constant involvement from Societies such as ours. We are therefore particularly fortunate in Wirral, to have the support of an 'umbrella' organisation - the Wirral Green Belt Council – whose dedicated aim is to focus and act in cases which threaten the integrity of the Peninsula's Green Belt. This Society, along with many other organisations, subscribes to this and each nominate a representative to attend its meetings.

Sadly however, the success of the WGBC, like all voluntary organisations depends upon the dedication of key individuals who give time and energy to making things happen. To continue its work, the WGBC is now in need of extra help in several key positions – especially someone who would be prepared to monitor planning applications in South Wirral.

Would you, or someone you know, be interested in helping the WGBC continue its important work? Previous experience isn't necessary. Do contact our Secretary if you are interested.

Rod Tann



Wirral's Mayor, Councillor Phil Gilchrist, celebrated the 100th birthday of Guinea Gap Baths in an Edwardian costume made by The Silver Threaders

THE PUZZLE BOX COMPETITION

Name the public parks and open spaces in Wirral

.....entries to the Editor by July 30th

£10 voucher to the winner

Last issue's competition invited you to list places in Wirral which ended in 'ton' – Anglo-Saxon for 'fenced homestead'. It set me on a journey of discovery – travelling the maps, web sites, history books and lanes of Wirral. Exploring its southern borders, as defined by Norman Ellison – "Nomad" of radio in the mid 20th century - in his excellent book – 'The Wirral Peninsula', I drove along the leafy lanes of the Vale of Broxton, pausing at Croughton to look down on the Shropshire Union Canal.



Congratulations to winner, Bill Wonderley who narrowly pipped Carolyn Foster to the post

Barnston, Bebington, Bidston, Burton, Childer Thornton, Chorlton, Claughton, Croughton, Gayton, Great Sutton, Higher Bebington, Hinderton, Hooton, Larton, Little Neston, Little Storeton, Little Sutton, Mollington, Moreton, Neston, Newton, New Brighton, Oxton, Poulton x2, Prenton, Puddington, Storeton, Thurstanston, Upton x2, Willaston

sunset on New Year's Day at Thurstanston

