

Up for Grabs

What's to be done with the old Town Hall?
It's useless but we just can't hog it;
It's a listed gem we can't take down,
So all we can do is flog it!

It would make a nice block of flats
Or a care home for cats,
A gentlemen's club
Or a very posh pub

Its splendid auditorium
Would make a fish and chip emporium,
Or a department store
That would overawe ...

But wait!
A thought that's most compelling!
Any M.P. want a
second dwelling?



What Friends are for

A few weeks ago came the splendid news that the 200-and-something years-old windmill on Bidston Hill had been restored and made safe. Now on the first Saturday in the month (from 10am to Noon) it is open to public view.

The local authority and local press are very fond of using the word 'iconic' to describe any building that is simple big. But the tag 'iconic' needs to be earned through age, history and veneration and the Old Mill on the Hill certainly merits the word. As the Liver Birds betoken the City of Liverpool, so does Bidston Windmill speak for Wirral.

The mill was forced to close to the public several years ago following a survey by Health and Safety officers who declared it to be unsafe, largely because

of its deteriorating roof. After a long wait Wirral Council eventually found the resources for its restoration.

The Chairman of The Friends of Bidston Hill, Professor Derek Knottenbelt, writing in the Friends' newsletter, most generously gives the credit to Wirral Council for their fine effort in ultimately getting the repairs done and even suggests that members should write to the Council expressing their gratitude.

The Council certainly deserves a pat on the back for a job well done but the Professor is being too modest. The restoration came about after many years of constant prodding by the Friends who also augmented the available funding by successfully seeking and obtaining grants from a number of sources.

Bidston Hill is also half-way through a five-year restoration plan, drawn up by Hilary Ash of Cheshire Wildlife. Now a vast area of heath and gorse – equal in size to six football pitches which had been devastated by wilfully-started fires last year – has been cleared and heather seeds have scattered to boost the native heather.

This has been achieved with months of hard, often laborious, work by the hill's enthusiastic Ranger, Nic Harding, with help from a group of dedicated volunteers whom he calls his 'Friday Group.' They, too, are real 'friends.'

Explained Nic: 'They are a wonderful lot, all ages, who have simply turned up and asked if they could help in any way. They enjoy the work, the companionship, the fun and the banter – and, of course, if anyone else would care to join us we would be very pleased to see them.'

To join the happy gang pop into the café at Tam O'Shanter Urban Farm - another of Bidston Hill's many attractions – and pick up a simple application form. 'You will be most welcome,' says Nic.

www.wirralsociety.net

Look at the Website (by Nick Lauro) for up-to-date news and views

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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

KEITH DAVIDSON AWARD

to an individual or group making a big contribution to the environment

Paint Man wins with a pioneering approach to left-over paint



Jim O'Neil has a long history of initiating environmental work on Wirral. He has worked tirelessly for many local projects – including Wirral Environmental Network and adult learner organisation, Wirral 3Ls. He restored Greasby's village pump and has written ten local history books.

He wins the 2009 award for his work in setting up and running the Wirral branch of the national Community RePaint scheme.

Community RePaint is unique in Britain and in Europe. People and organisations are asked to donate all their left over paint which is then made available to those who want it, for a small sum.

Over a quarter of paint bought every year, enough to fill 50 Olympic-sized swimming pools, is not used – it's kept in sheds or thrown into landfill.

Community RePaint Wirral has been running for nearly three years - saving a pile of 5-litre paint cans four times the height of Blackpool Tower. Over 100 community groups and many individuals have benefited.

Community RePaint is open Mon/Wed/Fridays from 1pm to 5pm . Other times by appointment..

Full details are on the website www.la21.net (go to Projects then Repaint) or contact Jim on 639.2121, email jim@la21.net

SUMMER OUTING

Chorlton Hall and Backford Church



This imposing and interesting family home is hidden away in the lanes on the southern border of Wirral. Historian George Ormerod rode out from here in the early 1800s to all the townships to collect detailed information for his definitive book on Cheshire.

The current owner, John Hess, has written a history of the Hall (sold in aid of Backford Hospice) - he shared his research with us on a welcoming and informative tour, which included a visit to nearby Backford Church. Among the many fascinating aspects of Chorlton Hall – two small details: the family have uncovered and framed two remains of wallpapers in what is now the library - scraps from a forgotten nursery and a billiard room.



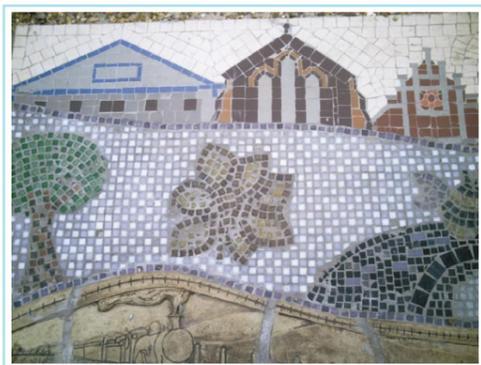
Elephants walk across the current nursery walls



"I think it stands for 'NOT IN MY BOATYARD', dear"

Hunter reminds us of the controversial plans for West Kirby, which include a hotel and new sailing club

What's going on in Neston?



Mosaic outside the library

The car park has been enjoying an archaeological dig - revealing evidence of mediaeval Neston. Soon, a new Sainsbury's store will cover up the now well documented past

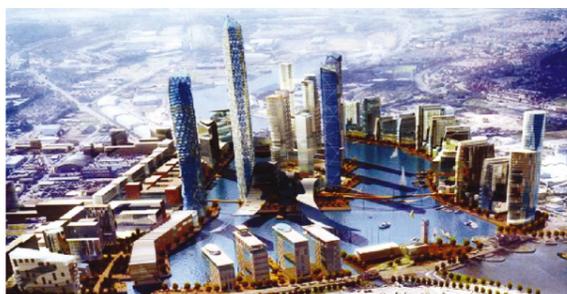


Neston Colliery

Anthony Annakin-Smith, a local historian and member of the Neston and Burton Historical Society, is asking for memorabilia and memories of Neston Coal Mines. The mines opened in 1759 and closed in 1927, so this year marks the 250th anniversary of their opening. Working conditions in these mines must have been horrendous, with the coal seams going under the River Dee. The earliest mine had underground canals, using barges to move the coal, powered by leggers (men lying on their backs), and it was the first place in Wirral to have steam engines. If you walk along the marshes from Parkgate to Burton you can still see evidence of these mines, stopping en route at The Harp Inn for refreshment, where there are memorabilia and photographs of the last shift to leave Neston Colliery. During this anniversary year the Historical Society is planning a series of events to include an exhibition in Neston Library, guided colliery walks, and a colliery trail.

More details www.neston.org.uk

In Brief - some current issues we are looking at



A vision of Wirral Waters from Peel Holdings website

The drive by some to create a super surgery at The Warrens, Thingwall persists, despite planning being refused previously. It is a matter of principle - The Wirral Society will fight for Green Belt land.

'Wirral Waters' is a proposal for a large development which aims to regenerate areas of Birkenhead Docks with retail, business and domestic buildings which the Society supports in principle. Plans and artists' impressions for this show vast skyscrapers. The public need to be able to see a master plan for the development of this area. Is this a sustainable way to live? In other areas of Wirral tower blocks have been knocked down and low rise housing with individual gardens have replaced them. Have we forgotten the failed social experiments of 'streets in the sky' - broken lifts, no sense of personal space? Corbusier had a flawed dream which influenced architects after World War II. Development must take into account the whole needs of a community and the environment. The value of successful buildings is not how high you can build, but how happy people are to use them. The Hoylake Golf Resort continues to be

promoted as a good tourist draw - this must be balanced with environmental concerns.

Several historic buildings are under threat - including Bidston Observatory and Birkenhead Town Hall. Funding is always an issue - many enthusiastic volunteers do not make up for serious input from council, central government or European coffers.

Wirral is running out of space for domestic waste. Choosing new landfill sites is always going to be controversial - those locations coming under the spotlight are at Prenton and Moreton.

On the positive side - Mathilde Baker-Schommer, for Wirral Wildlife, has completed a valuable, detailed biological survey of The Beacons, in Heswall. We support council pressure being applied to repair St. Peter and Paul's church in New Brighton. We also support the Wirral Coastal Partnership in flagging up coastal issues and we are sharing discussions with Civic Trusts.

Welcome to new Membership Secretary

"Hello. My name is Avril Wilmshurst and I have offered to help Audrey, with the aim of taking over as membership secretary. I have been a non-active member of the Society for some years now, originally joining in order to learn more about the Wirral and its history and because I support the Society's aim to protect the area. Having attended a few committee meetings, I am amazed at the amount of work and effort some people are putting in to this organisation.

I live in Great Sutton and work part time in a data-processing capacity. I enjoy reading, playing cards (Canasta, Bolivia and very basic Bridge), eating out (any excuse to get out of cooking) and going to the theatre."

Proposed Golf Resort in the Upper Birkett Valley

Members from the West Kirby Working Group have continued to meet council officers and councillors to discuss the regeneration plans. Data is being collated on animals and birds on the Carrs. The next meeting for everyone interested will be in September and notice will go out when it is arranged. If a formal group is put together to protect this important area, nominations will be sought for a Chair, Secretary and Treasurer.

-information from Sue Craggs

News from the Tree Wardens

We are looking for homes for trees this year so do you know of any sites suitable for a little bit of prettifying? Currently trees are kept in Irby, Hoylake and Wallasey but we can transport them anywhere on the Wirral.

Next meeting is on the 8th of September at Wirral Environmental Centre, Falkland Rd, Wallasey, CH44 8ER

The new coordinator is Genevieve Woodland

Details - jan@wirraltreewardens.co.uk, 0151-639 2121

We're talking 'bout good renovations

Former Congregational Church at the top of Balls Rd Birkenhead has been well restored - against all the odds - by the Wirral Christian Centre.



There's lots of evidence to be found, on the ground

Roving photo journalist - Arthur John Picton has been walking over to Hilbre Island looking at small details of the seascape



Irene Sydonia McKenzie 1914 -2008

Sydonia was a most interesting lady who was always first to apply for tickets to our events. A keen local historian and President of Bromborough Society, she co-edited a rewrite of *The History of Bromborough*. She was a member of a number of local societies including the Birkenhead History Society and was for many years a volunteer at Liverpool Museums.

Born and brought up in Bebington she was a Councillor until 1974 when she declined a senior post in the newly formed WMBC. During the war she refused to be evacuated and served as a volunteer observer during air raids. She also set up and ran the WVS Luncheon Club in New Ferry for over 20 years and later helped to run the teashop at Clatterbridge Hospital. She also served as a school Governor and was known to take the homeless and distressed into her home. In the 1950's Sydonia joined the TA and trained to drive 10 ton trucks and in her mid 70's she passed the Advanced Driving Test.

Latterly, she moved to Priory Wharf and worshipped at the Priory chapel until her death. Indeed as her funeral cortege approached the Priory, workers on an adjacent site removed their hard hats and stood to attention. A fitting mark of respect!

by Lilian Potter

More signs have been appearing on Wirral roads - for a test period, to see if accidents and injury can be avoided



"The new sign freaked her out, Sarge."