

Neston Civic Society Newsletter



Cherry blossom in Stanney Fields Park

Number 109

May 2025

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Talks

Meetings are usually in the United Reformed Church Community Hall, Moorside Lane, NESTON CH64 6UZ, at 7.30 p.m. on the third Thursday of January, March, May, July, September, and November (the AGM). We usually have a talk, followed by complimentary tea, coffee, and biscuits.

May 15th Nick Lightfoot, Curator of Ness Botanic Gardens will talk about **What makes Ness Gardens Special**.

July 17th Jennifer Watson from Sealand will talk on *Deva and the Dee*: the nautical history and the creation of the ports along the river Dee.

September 18th Paul Lunn, Head of the Veterinary School at Liverpool University, will talk about **Ideas for the Future of Leahurst**.

November 20th There will be a talk after the AGM. Details will be confirmed later.

What can you do?

Suggest topics or speakers.

Distribute paper copies of the Town Trail and our new membership leaflet.

Tell us about any matters of concern for the Neston area.

Help with Gardening or Litter-picking, tell Janet Griffiths treasurer@nestoncivicsociety.uk

If you would like to receive monthly updates, email publicity@nestoncivicsociety.uk

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From Mud to Meres

Notes on a talk by Dan Trotman, Visitor Operations Manager for the RSPB Dee Estuary Reserve, on 21st November 2024.

Despite snow, hail and rain, a large audience attended the brief AGM, and heard a fascinating talk by Dan, who has been at Burton Mere Wetlands for 14 years.

The Dee estuary is visited by 160,000 birds, and is internationally important to 13 species, and nationally important to another 13. The estuary is the 4th most important in the UK, after The Wash, Morecambe Bay, and the Ribble. Over 70 species of bird breed here, as well as 23 mammals and 34 butterflies. It is protected by being an SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest), SPA (Internationally designated Special Protection Area) and RAMSAR (site designated under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance). The site is over 6,000 hectares, the 5th largest in UK.

The Dee estuary is unusual in not being owned by the Crown. When the river was canalised, the estuary became the property of the merchants who paid for the canalisation. Later British Steel owned a large part, and now the RSPB owns much of it.

Dan referred to the pond near Parkgate as the Donkey Stand Flash. For many years the RSPB have held events at Parkgate during high tides, to show members of the public the wealth of wildlife in the estuary.

We saw a beautiful photograph of a hen harrier, a bird that has been persecuted. Large flocks of pink-footed geese appeared in another picture: the number of these winter visitors have increased dramatically. Reed buntings breed in the reed beds, but they are on the Red List of endangered species.

The Point of Ayr is another important part of the estuary. Much of the marsh there is owned by Eni Ltd, who own the gas terminal. Black-tailed godwits live there. Voluntary wardens fence off areas of the beach during the nesting season, to help protect ground-nesting birds, including ringed plover and oystercatchers. The rare little tern has also bred at Gronant.

At Burton, in 1980 the RSPB bought Inner Marsh Farm from Cheshire County Council. In 1992 it was opened to members only, with no advertising and limited car parking. They dug out three lagoons, and pintail and black-tailed godwits came. It was an SSSI. Lapwings bred there. Avocets came in 2000's. Badgers and foxes are predators to chicks and eggs, and Dan showed us a photograph of a badger wading through deep water. Little egrets, which were once a rarity, now number 300 – 400.

In 2006, the RSPB bought Burton Marsh farm with grazing rights on the marsh as far as Parkgate. They reduced the number of sheep, to allow vegetation to thrive and provide better habitat for wildlife, including the redshank, which is on the Amber List.

The RSPB also bought Burton Mere Fisheries. In 2008 – 10 they dug shallow scrapes, and dug lagoons, using spare soil to reduce the depth of existing ponds. The wetlands are sited over an aquifer, which provides fresh water. With the aid of volunteers, they planted 13,000 reed plants, which are now thriving.

A blaze, started deliberately, destroyed 10 hectares of the reedbed off Parkgate in March 2022. The water level is controlled by simple means including boards. Electric fences keep out badgers etc. The visitor centre gives close access to lagoons, and is heated by a wood stove. In March up to 30 herons come, and we saw a photograph of this unusual event.

A walk through the Wetlands leads to Burton Point. There was a quarry, here, which supplied sandstone to build Flint Castle. On the top is the site of an Iron Age fort, with splendid views of the estuary.

The original Inner Marsh Farm hide was replaced with a new Border hide in 2020, using funds from Wirral RSPB and two families. Avocets have bred here, and the little egret has been joined by great egrets (two of which have bred) and cattle egrets.

A new arrival was a marsh harrier, and the elusive bittern came in 2021 and have bred. As well as birds, the site has common lizard (which are not common). There is now a badger hide for two or three people.

A recent improvement was the installation of a cafe, prefabricated in five sections. It has views over the lagoons, and excellent coffee and light meals; one of the volunteers is our Secretary Lindsey Hinks.

Dan finished by mentioning how the RSPB was started, in Manchester in 1889, by ladies who were concerned at the slaughter of birds to provide feathers for ladies' hats.

Lots of questions came, including:

Might the RSPB buy land? Dan said that they might buy more of the estuary north of Parkgate, which is owned by Wirral Borough Council.

Was there opposition by wildfowlers when the marsh was protected? Dan said there was, but they now have another area of the marsh where they can shoot.

Could the RSPB create floating islands? Dan said he had not thought about that and would take the idea back.

Did the arrival of the little egret reduce food supply for herons? Dan said they do eat the same food, but both are thriving, so there must be plenty of food.



(L to R) Lindsey Hinks, Janet Griffiths, Brenda Marple, Michelle Johnson, Dan Trotman, Rob Ward, and Derek Hogg.

During coffee time after the meeting, Dan was asked many more questions, and recruited two new members to the RSPB.

The Planning System and Neston.

Notes on a talk by Samantha Dixon, MP for Chester North & Neston on January 17th

Sam said that fees for planning applications would rise, after a long period with no increase, so that councils could employ more planners and speed up the process. She praised the Society for commenting on planning matters, and encouraged us to comment on the new local plan.

Sam began by saying it was an honour to represent Neston. Highlights so far had included participating in the Neston Female Society Ladies Day Parade, opening the newest section of the King Charles III Coastal Path and meeting community groups. She had organised the 5th Summit of the Dee event to tackle sewage dumping in the Dee, a housing surgery, and a Fairtrade Coffee morning with the Neston Fairtrade group.

As a former Leader of Cheshire West and Chester Council and a former member of the Planning Committee, she recognised the importance of the planning system. The Government were going to reform the planning system, which had failed to deliver the housing targets for decades. The target of building 1.5 million new houses by the end of this Parliament would boost social and affordable housing, unlock clean energy, and restore growth. The failure to replace council houses sold under right-to-buy had kicked the problem down the road.

The planning system had three objectives:.

- economic – to help build a strong economy
- social – to support healthy communities
- environmental – to protect and enhance our environment

One contentious element of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was the idea of the “grey-belt”, which aims to dispel the notion that all the green belt is “green and pleasant”. The main purpose of the Green Belt was to prevent urban sprawl with towns such as Neston and Heswall merging.

Sam praised Ness Botanical Gardens and Chester Zoo for their work to maintain and improve biodiversity locally. The NPPF would devolve power to local Councils, who will review the green belt in their area when forming a local plan.

The fees for householder planning permission will rise from £258 to £528, to increase the funding of local planning authorities, allowing the employment of more planning officers.

Planning authorities will have to prepare design guides that reflect local character and design preferences, to help shape the future aesthetic of our towns and villages. The NPPF set out the need for conserving and enhancing the historic environment. We have three conservation areas: Neston, Ness and Parkgate.

Our local settlements are close to the waterways that once delivered prosperity. Now, Sam frequently receives calls from residents whose properties are flooded. The NPPF says that development in areas at risk of flooding should be avoided.

Online shopping has harmed our towns. In Neston and Chester, we are fortunate to have high streets that remain vibrant. The new NPPF includes the need to “define a network and hierarchy of town centres and promote their long-term vitality – by allowing them to grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries, allows a suitable mix of uses (including housing) and reflects their distinctive characters.” Sam welcomed the push for more residential properties in the hearts of our towns and cities.

She highlighted the value placed on markets, with the NPPF stating the need to “retain and enhance existing markets and, where appropriate, re-introduce or create new ones”. Neston is blessed with the thriving Friday market, and Sam said its continued success was paramount.

One of the first things Sam organised following her election was the Summit of the Dee events, to reduce the dumping of sewage in the Dee. By bringing people with relevant expertise around the table she helped hold the water companies to account. Funding is now earmarked: this has resulted in Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems. She had recently held the first Summit of the Dee in Neston.

The mental health benefits of being around nature are well known and Sam thanked the Civic Society for investing in benches around the town. She said we have some amazing green spaces, from the Wirral Way to the King Charles III coastal pathway. The NPPF states: ‘The designation of land as Local Green Space through local and neighbourhood plans allows communities to identify and protect green areas of particular importance to them.’

We are encouraging the development of local and neighbourhood plans. We need Neston Civic Society and those around the country to continue to help. Too often when plans for housing are submitted, residents default to a hostile attitude, due to the strain on local services. To tackle these fears the NPPF states: “Weight should be placed on the importance of new, expanded or upgraded public service infrastructure when considering proposals for development.” Sam concluded by saying she would like to restore good faith between residents and the bodies making the decisions that shape their lives.

In a lively question time, Louise Gittins announced that Facebook reports of the imminent destruction of Neston Civic Hall were untrue, and Keith Millar said that the owner of empty premises in Brook Street was at last ready to sell.



L to R Rob Ward, Janet Griffiths, Samantha Dixon, Derek Hogg, Lindsey Hinks

Thirty Years Ago: 1995

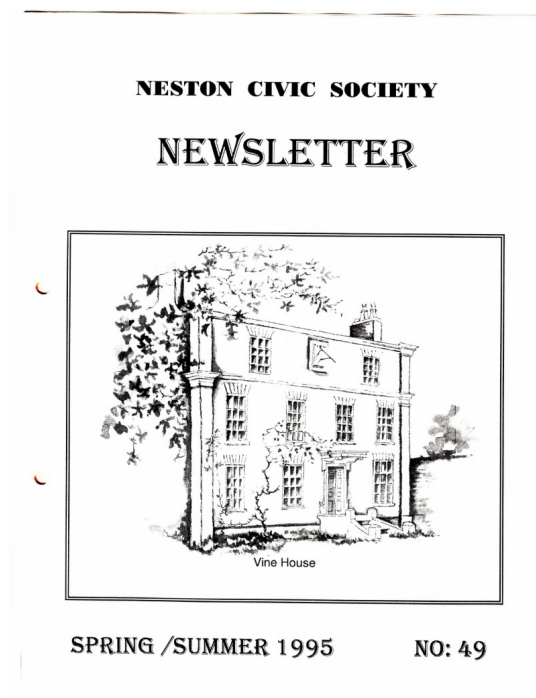
In 1995, **Newsletter 49** told us that Tom Marlow was Chairman, Celia Garvey Secretary, David Cross Membership Secretary, David Andrews Treasurer, and Linda Ireland Social Secretary. Other committee members were Malcolm Kermode, Roy Hetherington, John Myers, Harry Leech, and Phillip Christopher, a total of 10, compared with six in 2025.

The cover of the newsletter was a sketch of Vine House, a listed building and one of the stops on the Town Trail. The drawing was one of many produced by John Myers, an architect and skilled draughtsman. The back Cover was his sketch of the Bushell Fountain, Neston Cross.

Out and about, by Celia Garvey, reported the redevelopment of the C of E infant school in Liverpool Road; the Society had helped pay for CCTV in Neston; there were new planters at Bushell Fountain; Allister optician had moved into former Fosters, The Cross, and was looking smart.

Neston Library had improved access, and the Civic Society were going to meet there, instead of Civic Hall.

Stop Press, by Celia Garvey, reported a campaign to protect local shops: Leighton Court was being developed.



The cover of newsletter 50 was a sketch of Old Red Lion Inn, Willaston Green, by John Myers. The Back Cover was again his sketch of the Bushell Fountain.

In Out and about, we learned that Leighton Court houses were built; and the former Morganite factory site was to have 139 dwellings, which is now Millfield.

The Hospital at Denhall, a Local Ancient Monument, was described by David Andrews.

Roy Hetherington wrote about the development of the water tower in Quarry Road.

On March 20th Dr Mike Benbough-Jackson stood in at short notice to talk on Buggen Lane: A haunted history.

We were sorry that Anthony Annakin-Smith was not well enough to give the talk on The Making of the Wirral Landscape. We look forward to hearing his talk later.

Mike is a Neston resident, and teaches at Liverpool John Moores University. Being a Welsh speaker, he would be well aware of the name Buggen's link to the Welsh word for ghost. The name had been spelt Buggin, and Buggan, from the Middle English bugge. In older maps it had also been called Prospect Road and Whineray's Road.

Buggen Lane is close to where we hold our talks and is well known to most Neston residents. Mike talked about features that might have made it a likely site for stories of a ghost: there were stories of smugglers. It was the edge of town – a favourite haunt of boggarts. The old cockpit had been a Georgian past pleasure on Townfield, including a dramatisation of the 'red Barn Murder in 1827. It was once on the edge of the park, a restricted area with high walls, and has a bend, and in recent times was near Leighton Court, from where inebriated people emerged in the early hours of the morning.

In 1883 Journalist wrote that a body had been found in Buggen Lane in 1863. Quill Pen wrote in 1903 about the death of Lady Jane Reid at Elm Grove in 1844, one week after her husband, Sir John Reid, had died, and ten years after their marriage.

Mike quoted Quill Pen, writing in the Cheshire Observer in 1902, who investigated the stories. Ghosts had also been reported in other areas of Neston. In 1881 there was a ghost in 'a certain area of Neston'. In 1886 a ghost was reported in Liverpool Road, and in 1900 in Old Quay Fields or Old Quay House. In 1887 'Spring-heeled Jack' was seen in Little Neston with a black eye. In St Winefride's Church a ghost was associated with Teresa Higginson.

The ghost of Buggen Lane had assumed many forms. In 1900 it was a black phantom dog.. In 1902 there was an unaccountable noise. In 1903 it was a well dressed lady. In 1974 it was a Napoleonic Midshipman. It 2007 it was a disowned daughter, in 2018 a distraught mother, and in 2022 an unhappy serving maid.



Derek Hogg, Mike Benbough-Jackson, Janet Griffiths, Brenda Marple and Rob Ward

Neston Town Council Spring 2025, by Janet Griffiths

Finally the scaffolding has come down and the Town hall roof repairs are complete. The Chief Officer can now work at her desk without drips on her desk. The town hall is still a CWaC building and they paid for the repair. The Town Council continue to manage the building. The warm hub in the front office is still an open space for people to come and sit in whenever the town hall is open, but impractical to staff, or provide hot drinks. The hand rails on the market square have now been replaced and look much better.

We are very happy to welcome four new enthusiastic Town Councillors: David and Nicky Ruscoe, Geof Swaffer and Steve Adderley. It is good to have new ideas and perspectives on town council work.

The town council annually sets aside a regular amount from the Grants fund to support the main events of the year – The Village Fair, Ladies Day entertainments and traffic management, West Vale Fun Day in the Park, Neston Music Festival publicity leaflets and the Christmas Lights Event. The Town Council took over organising the whole of the Christmas Lights event, making it different from previous years. Father Christmas was in the Library and the Little Actors performed in the Parish Church. They all assembled at the Cross with the children and lanterns for the switching on of the lights. The Junior Councillors took part in the switch on. All went very well and the new scheme was well received. Unfortunately the strong winds over the winter damaged the tree on the donkey stand in Parkgate. We are currently looking into a satisfactory replacement.

The Marsh Working Group continue to monitor and publish reports for the public to use on the social media web site. The planned dredging works were not undertaken in the Autumn because the ground was too wet for the machines to go out onto the marsh. It is hoped that the work can be carried out over 2025. That very wet weather last year made life for the mosquitoes very pleasant and the numbers greatly increased.

The Town Council continue to pay for the floral displays around the Cross and town hall, beneath the Welcome to Neston signs, and in Ness, Little Neston, West Vale and in Parkgate. The hanging baskets were especially colourful last summer and members of the public made complimentary comments, which were passed on to PDQ, the contractors.

Councillor Brenda Marple has now set up a Friends of the Wirral Way group. The area covered is from Station Road near NCYC to the boundary of Parkgate. There was a good response of volunteers who now go out regularly and cut back undergrowth and renovate the sign posts, which indicate to walkers where they are in relation to Neston and Parkgate. They are currently planning repainting the Millennium bridge. The CWaC Greenspace Officer is very supportive and provides any necessary materials. The noticeboards have now been cleaned and new up to date notices put in.

The town council is also responsible for the allotments. The council officers and a contractor have been working hard to clear overgrown plots and reorganise the layout on Raby Park Road. The allotments on Marshlands road have now been connected to the mains water which will be available from March to October. The water will then be turned off to avoid

frozen pipes. The Parkgate plots have had problems with a water leak. This has now been discovered and as it was under the pathway outside, the water company have repaired it.

Councillor Louise Gittins asked the town council to take ownership of the decommissioned telephone boxes on the Green and Landseer road in Little Neston. Unfortunately they are in a bad condition and in order to preserve them, they will need a total overhaul which will cost £13,000 including haulage.

The Village Fair is supported with a grant which pays for the hire of toilets and tables and chairs etc. This year the TC has decided, with the help of the Junior Councillors, to upgrade their stall with bright games stalls which can then be used for other events. Let's hope this year's Fair will be blessed with better weather: last year it was too wet for the vintage cars to come onto the field.

The Transport Working group continue to monitor the bus and train issues and formulate recommendations. They liaise with with Neston Station Adopters and investigate particular problems.

Nicky McMahon, the Town Hall and Market officer, and James the Market supervisor continue to promote the Friday Markets, which unlike many others, continues to thrive. It is great at promoting Neston, and the stall holders regularly comment how happy they are to run their stalls here. There will be a special Easter Market on Good Friday with the usual market trail for the children. We will be running our usual second hand book stall for charity.

A Junior Council has been elected, with one young person from each primary school for the 24/25 school year, and been presented with Junior Council badges. They have taken part in various public events. They are currently planning activities for the Summer Fair. They had an introductory tea with Mayor, deputy Mayor, parents, and honorary guest Janet Griffiths. She was an original member of the town council, and they invited her to become an honorary member of the Junior Council.



Litter picking -The Great big Clean Up

As part of the Keep Britain Tidy Great British Spring Clean, the Society was involved in three Clean Ups. Volunteers took to the streets from the Market Square, to clean Sytchcroft Park, Raby Road residential area, and the cemetery.



The next task was the usual visit to Clayhill Industrial Estate, where there is a lot of litter. Volunteers included residents, councillors and Civic Society members.

The third effort was a site in Wirral Country Park, adjacent to the Wirral Way, with members of the Friends of the Wirral Way, and help from the Greenspace Officer, who took away all the rubbish at the end.



Over the two weeks, 20 volunteers had participated in the national campaign.

Out and About by Brenda Marple

Things don't stand still for long in Neston and there is regular movement of businesses in the town centre.



The Burger Laboratory closed for a while, and re-opened after some internal changes to the main bar area, still serving burgers from the kitchen, but renamed The Overdraught. The late night 1 a.m. licence has resulted in customers spilling out noisily onto The Cross on a few occasions. Although we welcome new investment in the town, I hope this isn't going to become a problem in the future.

In High Street, in place of Evoke Architecture, it is good to see a new business in the form of Global Travel and Cruise, an independent travel agency specialising in expedition cruises. This is the owner's second shop, the first being in West Kirby.

The Last Minute Nursing and Care Agency, next to Age UK charity shop, appears to have closed, although there are sometimes signs of activity.



Tower Building, on Parkgate Road is a unique Grade II listed building, and part of the red brick external decoration is where the Society adopted its logo. This retail commercial property is for sale at £150, 000, and is described as having an extensive programme of renovation works, including re-roofing the top of the tower, electrical re-wiring, re-pointing of the bricks and improved internal access to the upper floors.



The premises previously occupied by Autumn Sweets, on Parkgate Road, is still empty, advertised as a commercial unit with accommodation above.

Perfect Getaways travel agency, on The Cross, has invested in smart new signage.

The Turkish barbers, on Brook Street, has had an internal makeover, including a very colourful flashing LED column. It has changed its name to Sultan Barber and added large brightly-coloured external signage, which stands out at night.



The owners of Paisley Grey have moved their desserts and ice cream business, CeeCee's, from West Vale to their High Street premises, and installed new signage.



The introduction of more CCTV into the centre of town, on the corner of Brook Street, is welcome. Robert Clive's photo shows the new pole carrying the camera.

It has been suggested that this pole makes it more difficult for buses turning left from Brook Street into High Street. On many occasions, the bus driver has had to reverse to avoid the pedestrian refuge. The pole, however, is further from the kerb than the existing bollard.



Photo by Robert Clive

The Greenland Fishery has recently had another change of management. There has also been a change of ownership at The Brown Horse, which is advertising for new managers.

In Bridge Street, the bicycle repair shop Just Riding Along, has closed 'until further notice', and the bicycle shop in Parkgate has also closed.

Further afield, there has been a change of management at The Harp, and we understand that the new landlady is the sister of Annette, who runs Net's cafe, just along the Burton Marsh Greenway. In West Vale, Foxes Tearoom now offers a new place for morning coffee.

Friends of the Wirral Way (Neston and Parkgate) by Brenda Marple

After moving here in 1994, when walking along stretches of the Wirral Way, I would often see fallen and damaged trees and overgrown access paths, and the obscured signposts used to annoy me. After high winds, the paths were often strewn with branches and dead tree debris. I thought how good it would be to have a group of volunteers who could be called out to carry out essential work.

The opportunity arose to present this idea at a meeting between Cheshire West and Chester staff and Neston Town Council when discussing the 50th Anniversary of the opening of The Wirral Way. CWaC staff agreed to support a 'Friends' group through the Greenspace Officer for this area. Neston Town Council's Community and Environment Committee set it as one of their objectives for 2024/25. In July, the Town Council organised a meeting of residents and representatives from local groups and the Greenspace Officer to discuss forming Friends of The Wirral Way. A Facebook page was created and a WhatsApp group for communicating. Work tasks are agreed with the Greenspace Officer, who helps with the supply of materials. Neston Town Council gave a Start Up donation, and Neston Civic Society funded Personal Protection items. The area covered is from The Millennium Bridge Station Road, Neston, to the county border with Wirral.



Pruning trees in danger of falling



Painting signs



One of the larger items of litter

The first task was in October 2024 and there is now a core group of about nine, with 21 active volunteers. As well as being a practical working group, the aim is to promote the path as a source of health and well-being, undertake environmental surveys, provide historical and ecological information and engage with the local community. The group has collaborated with Neston Civic Society, the Parkgate Society, Friends of Hampstons Well, and Friends of

Flint Meadow. They have refurbished signposts, cleared overgrown access paths, cleared paths obstructed by fallen and damaged trees, and pruned trees in danger of falling. Working with the Friends of Flint Meadow, the group cleared mud and leaves from Church Lane, and cleared drains, as it links Flint Meadow and the Wirral Way. The group meets on Tuesday afternoons, and other days when necessary. Group contact through secretary.foww@gmail.com and the [Friends of the Wirral Way Facebook page](#).



Cutting back vegetation on the path from the Wirral Way to Old Quay Lane

Editorial

I'm putting this newsletter together in a hurry, so have not taken advantage of a kind offer from a member who helped with layout for the previous edition.

At the AGM, Brenda Marple was re-elected Chairman, but during the year she asked Derek Hogg whether he would be willing to take over: he said yes, and the committee agreed with acclamation! Brenda has continued to work hard in many ways, and I am grateful to her for articles and photos.

Brenda has set up a Facebook page for the Society - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/807914070946511/> It is a way of publicising our organisation to people who might not otherwise know about us.

I am grateful to speakers for allowing me to use their notes to produce the summaries of talks: I hope these are appreciated by members who have not been able to attend.

I normally send an email update each month to members who have given me their email addresses: if you don't receive them and would like to do so, please send your email address to publicity@nestoncivicsociety.uk/

Rob Ward

Printed by Mailings Direct, 18 Cornelius Drive, Pensby, WIRRAL CH61 9PR