

# CAW Newsletter

## December 2022

Bringing you news and views from  
Wirral Council's 26 unique Conservation Areas





# Celebrating Joseph Paxton at Birkenhead Park

**Birkenhead Park is celebrating its 175<sup>th</sup> year anniversary this year, having been formally opened on the 5th April 1847.**

**As part of the celebrations a tree was planted on the same day this year to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee by the Lord Lieutenant of Merseyside, a Deputy Lieutenant and the High Sheriff. A further tree was planted by the Lord Lieutenant as part of the Green Canopy initiated by the late Queen in October.**



On the 10<sup>th</sup> November 2022 the Duke of Devonshire presented and planted Chinese Tulip Trees in Princes Park, Liverpool (celebrating its 180th Anniversary) and Birkenhead Park. It was a commemoration of the role of Sir Joseph Paxton, the 6th Duke's head gardener, in designing the two parks. The Duke will also plant the same species outside the main entrance to Chatsworth House.



A blue plaque to Sir Joseph was also unveiled on the same date by the Mayor of Wirral on the Park's Visitor Centre, alongside that of Edward Kemp (*initiated by CAW*) some years ago. Edward Kemp was a close associate of Paxton and Birkenhead Park's first superintendent. His name also lives on in the Edward Kemp Community Garden and Growing Area (EKCG&GA) which inspires locals to grow fruit and vegetables, eat healthily, become more active and seek solace in nature.

**Wirral Council has also, with assistance from The Friends of Birkenhead Park, submitted an application for the Park to be included on the UK's Tentative List for World Heritage Site Inscription in July.**

**It is hoped that the UK government will be making announcements in the New Year. The basis of the application is that the Park is the world's first municipally funded public park and a pioneer for public parks across the world. It is argued that it meets three criteria for inscription: -**

- 1) to represent a masterpiece of human creative genius.
- 2) to exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design.
- 3) to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates a significant stage in human history.

Paxton is considered to be that "**human genius**" and inclusion in the Tentative List would be a great accolade for the Park in its 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary year.



Joseph Paxton



# Eastham's 'death defying' roller coaster

In 1899 the enterprising managers of Eastham Zoological Gardens added a brand-new attraction to go with the Bear Pit, the rather rickety Water Splash and the Elevated Railway that already wooed the crowds from Liverpool that streamed off the hourly ferries.

This new contraption was a French invention - La Loupe de Loupe, possibly a first cousin to Madame La Guillotine!

Anyone wishing to risk their lives had first to climb a metal staircase to a platform area covered with a corrugated tin roof which provided some shelter. Here you were seated in a small railway truck that held four people. This was then hauled up a steep railway incline to the top of a tall tower. It is not recorded if you were strapped in, or you simply had to clutch the sides of the truck. At the summit of the incline you looked down on a dizzyly terrifying descent that ended with the truck careering around a vertical circle of track; it, and its passengers, held in place only by gravitational force. It was here that you wondered, and indeed hoped, that Isaac Newton had got his theory right!

The truck was unhooked from its tow rope and your carriage hurtled down the steep descent and around the loop at a speed of up to 90mph hopefully being braked before it hit the buffer stops. If you survived the ordeal, you were awarded a certificate.

The 'attraction' closed after a couple of years!

*Who would have thought that the lovely, quiet Conservation Area of Eastham had such a riotous past!*



**EASTHAM.**

**"TOPSY-TURVY" ACCIDENT.**

A Swedish seaman named Carl Olsen, went for a ride on the "Topsy-turvy Railway" in the Ferry grounds, along with some friends, on Thursday evening. Not being content to make the trip in the customary fashion, he met with an accident, and was very fortunate to escape with his life. Whilst the carriage which contained the party was travelling at a good speed, Olsen stood up. He lost his hold and was thrown to the ground from a height of about twenty feet. He dislocated his shoulder and sustained other injuries. He was conveyed to the Birkenhead Borough Hospital, where he was attended by the house surgeon. It seems that Olsen was warned not to stand up. The



La Loupe — derelict



# Some good news!

## Council delays application for development due to the *“poor quality of the design”*

The largest new development site in Oxton Conservation Area is delayed due to the *“poor design quality of the proposed new housing”*.

The scheme, in Oxton, is the proposed redevelopment of the NHS Ashton House site in Village Rd.

The main part of the site has now been released for development and an application has been submitted by a developer. The approach by the Council planners to the development of the site is of general interest to **all** Conservation Areas and others, especially with regard to the design quality of the new housing (see below).



In anticipation of this significant application, the OXTON Society drew up a list of criteria in advance which we used to evaluate it. We judged that the application met most of our criteria. We supported the approach adopted in terms of site layout, landscaping and access and welcomed the retention of the Victorian Ashton House, most of the mature trees and the boundary wall.

We were disappointed, however, that the proposals were not designed to be carbon neutral at handover, or optimised the use of passive energy by design.

The application would see the conversion of Ashton House itself into 11 apartments, the demolition of two other NHS buildings and the building of 5 new dwellings.

**However, a decision on granting planning permission has been delayed!**

The Society has been told that the Council are concerned about the design of the five new houses. Apparently they do not consider them:

*“to be of sufficient quality to make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area.”*

Consequently, the architects have been asked to produce an improved design.

In the words of the Council’s Conservation and Urban Design consultant

*“The new houses are considered to be ‘pastiche’ (i.e. standard developer spec housing with a rather clunky nod to the conservation area bolted on) and we should be expecting higher standards of design and architectural detailing, whether this is contemporary or traditional in appearance.”*

**This represents a distinct change in emphasis regarding the importance of design in influencing the quality and character of the development and we look forward to this approach being applied across all 26 Conservation Areas in the Wirral.**

# The Sandstone Wall battle continues .....

## The Heswall Society complains to the Ombudsman

When the Heswall Society reviewed the initial planning application for the redevelopment of the Cherry Tree cottage site no objections were raised BUT the Society submitted a request to the case officer to impose a condition **requiring restoration of the boundary stone wall** as the cottage is located on a prominent position on Wall Rake within the Lower Heswall Conservation Area.

**This condition formed part of the subsequent planning approval.**

Once the development started, however, it was clear that the agreed plans were not being followed and a number of serious concerns were raised with the Council including loss of a significant part of the front wall.

The builder then submitted retrospective planning applications for these serious deviations and the Council passed them on every occasion.

The final straw for the Society was when the planning officer (who had no conservation background ) approved the facing of the wall around a new parking bay in the Cottage with **concrete tiles** and **not** the previously agreed sandstone.



Sandstone walls are a key part of the character and heritage of the Wirral, particularly in the Conservation Areas.

So the Society raised a formal complaint with the Council and completed the Council's two stage complaints process.

However the Council's tardy responses left the Society with no option and sadly the Heswall Society have now formally complained to the Ombudsman about the Council's disregard of Conservation Area values and their apparent maladministration of this development.

## Living in a Conservation area

**There are many benefits but restrictions include needing Planning permission for various activities including extensions of any kind, exterior cladding, erection of satellite dishes and solar panels, pruning or felling of trees and of course demolition of walls.**

**Sandstone walls are particularly protected and should not be removed.**

# Mountwood CA Society celebrate success

**Years of meetings, lengthy discussions and negotiations, since 2017, have culminated in a thoroughly successful outcome.**

The Mountwood Society Committee is delighted to advise that Senior Management at United Utilities have honoured their request for compensation, following the horrendous destruction of part of Mountwood's ancient woodland within the Water Tower site.

They have also agreed that the "Pressure Pump Kiosk" base and foundations installed in Mountwood Road are to be removed. Preparations for a building, due to be constructed, to the size of a single garage, on the site, are now not going to take place. The daffodil bulbs and greenery are to be reinstated.

Following the Society's suggestion for further investigations to take place, they have now been reliably informed that the "Pump Kiosk", if required in the future, will be constructed within the Water Tower site.

Yet to be finally negotiated, is the removal of the "toxic" boxes and their component parts on site and their repositioning inside the future, empty, decommissioned Water Tower, together with the restoration of a substantial amount of greenery!

The huge input of financial support from United Utilities means that the Society is now in a position to be able to donate some long overdue TLC to the War Memorials' Site together with, hopefully, signage for the Conservation Area.

## **HOT OFF THE PRESS!**

### **Head of Enforcement apologises**

**Prenton Golf Club may have been somewhat economical with the truth within their recent Application when they sought permission from Wirral Council for radical pruning of trees growing within residents' gardens — which lay within the Mountwood Conservation Area.**

The trees concerned did not belong to Prenton Golf Club! Had the Society known of the application, they would have objected to the Club's request. The Society has subsequently received a profound apology from the Head of Enforcement/Planning at Wirral Borough Council, assuring them that a mistake, such as this, will never happen again.

**THERE'S NEVER A DULL MOMENT** here in **MOUNTWOOD** as The Society continue to try and prevent erosion of their unique area of the Wirral.

Sympathetic restoration of tired properties is welcomed as is judicious pruning of trees. However, radical surgery will destroy the setting of the Conservation Area so regeneration of the woodland is of paramount importance and always encouraged. We now know that trees are crucial for our health & well being as well as contributing to "climate control". Sadly, it would appear that there are failures within the 'system' which are letting us down with regard to tree management within the Conservation Area. We require the Council's full support in order to produce best practice in Mountwood.



Prenton Water Tower — as work began to occlude the facade of this iconic structure.



# Wirral's Heritage "At Risk"

## Historic England's "Heritage at Risk 2022" Report highlights Wirral's 'At Risk' Conservation Areas

The Report says:

*"Change in conservation areas can be negative either through poor quality new development, neglect or even deliberate damage. Negative change can have a real effect upon the way the community feels about their area, affecting confidence, reducing investment and leading to a cycle of decline. When conservation areas become 'at risk', this can signify or contribute to an area's social or economic decline."*

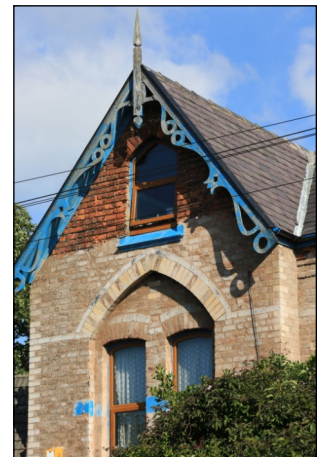
### Hamilton Square Conservation Area

**Condition: Very bad**  
**Vulnerability: Medium**  
**Trend: Deteriorating**



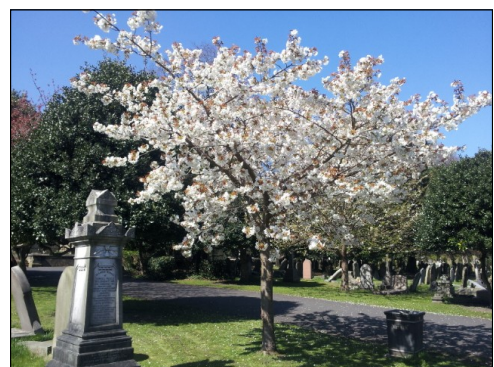
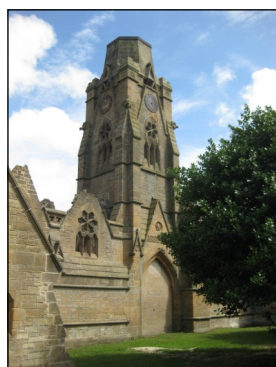
### Clifton Park Conservation Area

**Condition: Poor**  
**Vulnerability: High**  
**Trend: Deteriorating**



### Flaybrick Cemetery Conservation Area

**Condition: Very bad**  
**Vulnerability: Low**  
**Trend: No significant change**



# Meols Drive disappointment

*“Arts & Crafts” houses on Meols Drive  
increasingly at risk*

**The well loved and typical arts and crafts influences which characterise the two designated areas at Kings Gap and Meols Drive continue to be vulnerable to development pressures.**

Developers see good profits in demolition of individual properties in their distinctive large plots which help define the areas in favour of ‘out of character’, new build, 3 and 4 bedroom luxury apartment blocks. Although there are limited protection measures in the categorisation of buildings within the appraisals from 2000 and 2004 respectively they are not sufficient to deter such applications. Regrettably, there are no Management Plans in place to guide owners, developers and planners to achieve the required balance between protection of the built environment, its landscape and property enhancement.

The Meols Drive Conservation Association is fighting its corner as well as it can and is trying to encourage the Planning Department to review and update the Appraisals to allow more informed applications and consistent decision making.

**“We are seeking earlier and better consultation between all parties.”**  
(Meols Drive CA Society)

Recently, the Planning Inspectorate twice rejected appeals against refusal of large scale flat developments at Wirral Point but the Council **has** approved demolition of two perfectly viable individual properties and their **historic outbuildings** at the West Kirby end of Meols Drive.

**The Victorian outhouse and conservatory due for demolition on Meols Drive**



The next challenge is a further application to demolish a Cat B property next to the Royal Liverpool Club-house in favour of 9 luxury apartments over three storeys with underground parking for 18 cars. Approval would fly in the face of conservation principles, the submitted draft Local Plan and key parts of the NPPF.

**Nevertheless, we continue to do our best to protect this distinctive area of the Wirral which is part of our fine history - and its importance for the future.**



# The history of “The Dips”

## Where did the waste from building the Mersey Tunnel go?

**Around 1936, constructors used the waste from the excavation of the Kingsway Mersey Tunnel to reclaim the Wallasey foreshore, on which they then built Kings Parade Promenade.**



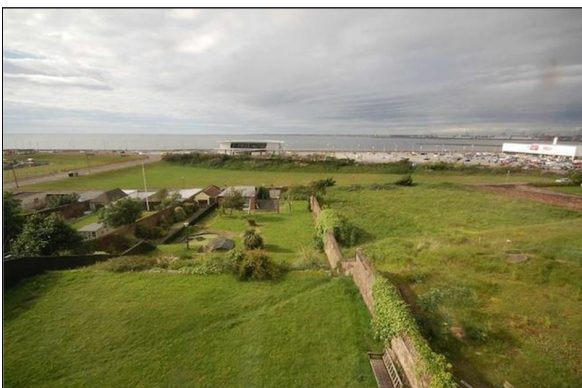
On the landward side of that promenade, the council created five sunken dips. Four of the dips were designated to be gardens/green leisure areas and the fifth was used as a vehicle park for the “New Brighton Bathing Pool”. It is suggested that the dips were intended as sinks, in the event of tidal flooding, to retain flooded sea water. However these greens were purposed to provide an appropriate replacement for the sandy beaches on which visitors had previously taken their leisure.

Over the years some of the area surrounding the ‘Dips’ has been developed for housing. That said, the Wellington Road Conservation Area Advisory Committee has played a pivotal role in preserving the four Dips as the green leisure spaces which benefit from the view into the listed buildings, for which, in turn, they provide the setting.

Recently, an ambiguity resulting from the fact that the Pilots Way Dip (the first of the four dips) and its three sister dips, lay in different council wards, meant that Pilots Way was slowly becoming separated from its siblings. The construction of Marine Point meant that Pilots Way was in danger of becoming a temporary HGV and bus park, and subsequently a motor caravan site. Not only was this unsightly but it discouraged residents and visitors alike from benefiting from the Dip and its surrounding Conservation Area. **Sadly, the green had been left derelict and overgrown.**

## But now for some good news!

Lobbying by the Wellington Road Conservation Area and CAW, together with intervention and cooperation from permanent and elected council officers (*especially Cllr Tony Jones as the local authority’s appointee to the Wellington Road Conservation Area*) has resulted in a re-think by the local authority. Restrictions to prevent HGV and PSV parking have been imposed as well as preventing overnight camping or simply as a space for owners to garage their vehicles. Trees have just been planted and the Local Authority has confirmed its intention to reintroduce a mowing regime. This will allow the Pilots Way Dip to return from an overgrown and derelict wilderness to be an open green space that provides for open air healthy leisure, which adds so much to the setting and purpose of the Wellington Road Conservation Area.



# And now more good news!

## No 42 Clifton Road

has had a chequered history.

Originally built in the 1840's, possibly for Captain Sharp himself, the owner and developer of Clifton Park when it was still a "*sylvan valley with a trickling stream running through it...*"

before the gas works and tannery ruined the country air.

The gothic inspired design, probably by Walter Scott, the Birkenhead architect who also lived in the Park, is quite unique. At one time F E Smith, later to become Lord Birkenhead, lived in the house with his parents.

In recent years it had been badly divided into flats, left empty and subject to significant vandalism.

However, in 2020 a couple of local residents bought the house and are now living in it, working to restore it to a comfortable family home again which is great news.

2018



2022

