



# ITPAS

## NEWSLETTER

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# MARKET FORCES

## Irby's Market Under Threat

Many of you may have been enjoying the monthly Farmers' Market held in Irby Village Hall. The Market has increased in popularity and is looked forward to by many residents. There is a good range of local produce available from farmers and small businesses from around the locality. Now however, we hear that the private enterprise of Birkenhead Market has got wind of this little venture and decided that it is a threat to their business! So much so that they intend to invoke an alleged charter through court action which



'protects' the large town market by banning any other market within a six and two-third mile radius of Birkenhead. This Royal Charter was set up in 1877 with the then new Birkenhead Corporation which has not existed since 1974. It sought to secure a market for the people for ever. However the present Birkenhead Market is a Private Limited Company and is not 'for the people' but has profits for the Directors. Wirral Borough Council in 2003 probably didn't have the right to award a lease of 125 years to a private market especially as the original charter would have become defunct in 1974.

Irby Village Hall has been holding markets, food fayres and festivals since 1938 without interference and now we are told by a private company that we can't have any anymore and they have backed it up with solicitor's letters.

We have to question just how much of a threat Irby Farmers' Market is to Birkenhead. The seventeen stalls are held once a month for four hours only and sell local goods at prices higher than those



in the big town market. Just how they will suffer because we sell local honey, cakes and jam I don't know.



**ITPAS** contacted Birkenhead Market and were told that they were open to discussion and an agreement but Mike Ireland of the Village Hall was more sceptical. He felt that the heavy tones of the solicitor's letter indicated that they meant business.

**We think that there could well be a groundswell of opinion about this heavy-handed approach and those voices should be made known via ITPAS, the Village Hall and to the local press.**

# BIRDS OF WIRRAL

Many people may not think of themselves as bird watchers, but they still enjoy their 'own' familiar garden species like the Robin, Blue and Great Tit and Blackbird. We are very fortunate that Wirral has a variety of different natural habitats in a relatively small area, making it possible to see an impressive range of birds at any time of year, and sometimes in huge numbers.

In the Autumn, the Dee Estuary is one of the UK's premier locations for wetland and wading birds. In October 14,000 Shelduck will be on the estuary, particularly between Thurstaston and Heswall. Cormorants are present all year round but peak in the autumn with up to 700 birds. One of the best times to see them is at low tide roosting on the sand banks off Hoylake. On the water, flocks of Pintail, Teal and Wigeon, each 5,000 strong, can occur regularly. The Dee Estuary is the most important site in the country for Pintail. It is also home to the largest number of little egrets in the entire North of England and, believe it or not, they all roost in one small group of trees near to



Burton Mere Wetlands.

By December huge flocks of wading birds feed at Leasowe at low tide, moving to Hoylake to roost over the high tide, including up to 30,000 Dunlin and a remarkable 50,000 Knot. Periodically, a hunting Peregrine Falcon will spook them into the air *en masse*, and they can be seen twisting and turning in ever-changing 'smoke cloud' formations over the shore-line.



But birding activity is not confined to the shore. Redwings and Fieldfares, winter thrushes from Scandinavia, can be seen in hedgerows feeding off hawthorn berries. In really harsh weather they will even come into gardens looking for windfall apples or pyracantha berries. Numbers of the familiar Robin are augmented by European birds that over winter here to escape the harsh continental weather. Every few years, there are Waxwing irruptions into the UK, when their food supply fails in Scandinavia. Then wonderful flocks of these charismatic birds can be seen feeding on berry bushes in gardens and even in supermarket car parks!



It is not all good news unfortunately. Starlings also form large winter flocks especially when they congregate to roost in the evenings on bridges or in reed beds. However their numbers have been falling in recent years for reasons that are not totally understood. In 1979, the average number of starlings seen in UK gardens was 15; this year, an average of just 3 was seen per garden (RSPB NEWS).

Amongst all these regular bird species, the avid bird 'twitcher' always hopes that a rare bird may turn up, and in June, a major rarity - a little swift - graced New Brighton for several days. This bird's normal range is sub-Saharan

Africa, and it has only been seen in Britain on 23 previous occasions. What might drop in next?

Whether it is the first Swallow of spring, a cloud of massed waders over the sands, or a lost waif on migration, bird watching can bring joy and amazement to anyone.

If you want to learn more about local bird watching, you can find information at <http://www.wirralbirdclub.com/> or contact Wirral Bird Club on (0151) 632 4451.

**Bill Wonderley ITPAS member**

## BARN OWLS

Barn Owls are still a scarce bird on the Wirral peninsula, but back in 1999 when Wirral Barn Owl Trust first started there was a real danger that they were about to become locally extinct: only one pair was known about (at Royden Park) in those days but things have improved since then!



"2012 started really well, with early indications of a really good breeding season to come. The mild weather in March created perfect conditions for early breeding and by the beginning of May, when many Barn Owls are usually only starting to lay eggs, we were finding large broods of chicks! 7 chicks were ringed at Saughall on 5th May, followed by several broods of six, five and four owlets and we thought we might be looking at a record-breaking year. Then came the rain - and how. Barn Owls rely on their excellent hearing to locate their prey and have uncoiled feathers to allow silent flight; the downside is that they can't hunt in the rain and many owls this year have simply starved to death. Other losses have included 3 young that appear to have died of secondary rodenticide poisoning (at Thurstaston) and others were predated by a stoat or polecat. But many young Barn Owls have fledged successfully and we can only hope that the brief spells of dry weather between rainy periods will allow them to get enough food to survive - good luck to them!

In statistical terms the breeding season to date looks really quite good:

Sites with pulli present - 36      Barn Owl Pulli ringed - 119

"Re-visiting sites to see how many young fledged successfully and checking for second broods is still on-going so we will not know for several weeks yet what the final picture looks like but we have twice recorded Barn Owl chicks in nests at Christmas so you never really know! Sadly, it is not uncommon to lose 2/3rds of our Barn Owl population during the winter months so the situation remains precarious, but continued conservation work will ensure these beautiful birds survive for our children and grandchildren to enjoy. If you are interested in our work and would like to know more or get involved, please go to our website ([www.wirralbarnowltrust.org](http://www.wirralbarnowltrust.org)), send an email to [wirralbarnowltrust@sky.com](mailto:wirralbarnowltrust@sky.com) or visit our permanent display area at Wirral Country Park Visitor Centre, Station Road, Thurstaston.

**Steve Harris - ITPAS member**

# Area Snippets

Santa will switch on the Christmas lights at the "Santa comes to Irby" festive event on Friday, 7<sup>th</sup> December.

At 5.00, local schoolchildren will sing Christmas songs and carols while many shops and businesses will remain open. Food and hot drinks will be available prior to Santa's arrival at 6.p.m. for the countdown and lighting switch on. Thereafter there will be festivities and a live band in the Shippons Inn.

ITPAS is just one of a number of voluntary organisations who collaborate on the switch-on event, including representatives from The Shippons Inn, The Shippons Bikers, Irby Village Hall, The Irby Club, Irby Evangelical Church and Irby Community Police.

The cost of providing the lights is met through the generous support of the Irby traders, and other organisations. (The lighting clusters are owned by ITPAS and stored throughout the summer by ITPAS member Steve Ledsham at Church Farm)

## BEACH CLEAN UP



Following on from our earlier successes we are holding a repeat 'Beach Clean-Up' very soon. Come down to the Dee Sailing Club at 10.0 am on Sunday September 16<sup>th</sup> and join in.

Contact Jim McCormac on 0151-604-0376 for more details.

At last our new noticeboard is ready and should be installed, by the time you read this, between the bus-stop and McColls in Irby village. A grant was awarded from 'Funds for You' which is a Wirral Borough Council Community Engagement initiative. Groups/charities wishing to advertise should ring Roy Fisher on 648-7671



The flower beds at Irby Library have been neglected in recent times, however, two of our members, Steve and Linda Cottrill, made a very generous offer to improve the flower beds. Steve has his own Landscape Gardening business at Newhall Nurseries and the photos show Steve and



Linda, at the end of August, working hard to enhance the village.

Now the initial work has been completed we need to set up a rota of volunteers to maintain the beds, this will involve weeding the beds and pruning shrubs as and when needed. We NEED volunteers, if we can get enough support each person may only need to take their turn a few times a year. So don't just sit there – ring any of the ITPAS committee now and help us keep Irby looking good.



Prior to the work starting Friends of Irby Library were consulted and their approval was given. They also felt it would be a good idea if a member of ITPAS could join their committee to act as a link between the two societies. We are now looking for an ITPAS member to take on this role, if you feel you could help please contact any of the ITPAS committee members listed on the back page of the newsletter.

## ITPAS Lights up Irby



Many people have commented that last year's Irby Christmas lights were the best they've been for a number of years.

Once again, ITPAS has undertaken to manage the installation, maintenance and dismantling of the 2012 Christmas lights.

We hope this will instill a seasonal feel good factor to the village from early December to early January.

**ITPAS** is currently applying for charitable status although the process has been protracted by the need to satisfy the Charity Commissioners that our published purposes (conservation of our area) and how we achieve them meet their very strict criteria. For instance in our latest letter we responded to a requirement to prove, by providing evidence from experts, that our area is worth preserving. The ITPAS area covers roughly our three villages and the land between them and the shore from the Dee Sailing Club to the edge of Heswall. I described this area as one of fields, footpaths, ponds, woods, heathland and shoreline which was certainly considered worth conserving by the National Trust, Wirral Borough Council and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds amongst others. Briefly, the evidence I supplied came from

- **the National Trust, who testified as to the importance of Thurstaston Common both as a sanctuary for wildlife and as an area of recreation for the general public. The National Trust also owns and maintains Harrock Wood, an ancient beech wood, and Heswall Field, a coastal meadow, both important for similar environmental reasons**
- **the RSPB who regard the intertidal salt marshes on our side of the Dee Estuary as of international importance as feeding areas for migrating wading birds.**
- **The European Union whose Article 4.2 of EEC Directive 70/409/EEC lists the Dee Estuary as a wetland on international importance, regularly supporting at least 20,000 waterfowl and, over winter, supporting more than 130,000 individual birds.**
- **Wirral Borough Council on the importance to wildlife and the leisure of the general public of the Wirral Country Park, a 12 mile walk/cycletrack/bridleway.**
- **BBC Coast programme on the significance of the cliffs at Thurstaston shore, a terminal moraine (snout of an extinct glacier) of geological importance. The cliffs and the Dee Estuary are also listed as Sites of Special Scientific Interest.**
- **Alan Bowden, a geologist who is the recently retired Head of Earth & Physical Sciences at Liverpool World Museum, on the mid-Triassic fossil records at the Dungeon and Harrock Wood.**
- **English Heritage who have listed 3 properties in our area as Grade II, Irby Hall, early 17th century, Thurstaston Hall, the origins of which can be traced back to about 1070, Benty Heath Farmhouse which was built in 1732 and Irby Farmhouse which dates from 1612.**

Obviously our activities are entirely charitable but we need to prove in our written submissions that we can match our purposes and activities to the narrow confines prescribed by Charity Law - we'll keep trying!



## Wirral Fossils

For any who don't know it, the Dungeon is a small wooded ravine accessible from the Wirral Country Park, signposted a 10 minute walk from Thurstaston Visitor Centre. It is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest. As I mentioned above, I was fortunate to be able to talk to Alan Bowden of the World Museum in Liverpool, who has been investigating fossil remains at the Dungeon. During the mid-Triassic period (about 228 - 242 million years ago) the Wirral was further south and much warmer and drier than it is now, hence the desert sediments which form our local sandstone. Fossil remains however indicate that there were wetter periods and the Dungeon represents a slice of geological time, a moister interlude of only a few thousand years, during which plants and small reptiles thrived. An equivalent context today would perhaps be seen in the river valleys of the Atacama Desert in Northern Chile which support a variety of horsetails and conifers. The plants there are adapted to high groundwater salinity which may inform interpretation of the coastal fossils at the Dungeon.

The stream at the Dungeon reveals parallel rippled bedding which suggests deposition in a marine inter-tidal environment with crests which indicate sediment transport towards the north-west, roughly in the direction of the Dee Estuary today. At the time however the River Dee didn't exist and the area was just part of a braided river and coastal system. Alan and his colleagues are currently trying to reconstruct the plants that thrived in the area from numerous tiny fossil fragments. It is difficult work but there is evidence of ferns and plants similar to today's horsetails as well as shrubby conifers. Storeton Quarry, before it was filled in with spoil from the building of the Queensway Tunnel in the 1920s, yielded fossil prints of an extinct reptile named ***Chirotherium stortonese*** and you can see similar footprints on sandstone built into the porch wall of Christ Church, Kings Road, Higher Bebington. This creature was probably related to the ancestors of crocodiles and belonged to a group of pseudosuchians, which were large carnivores with erect gaits. Further fossil evidence of the creature has recently been found on Hilbre Island. The work at the Dungeon, and those parts of Storeton Quarry which are still accessible, continues to reveal new and interesting evidence of life here 242 million years ago.

**Lukman Sinclair**



# PLANNING MATTERS

## The ITPAS Planning Officer's case book

This page is a quick update on just a few of the applications we have considered in the Irby/Thingwall, Thurstaston and Pensby areas during the past few months:



In past newsletters there have been details of an application for the building of two houses on land off Mill Road Thingwall which eventually went to an appeal to the Planning Inspectorate in Bristol. In July the inspector said that the appeal should fail and planning permission should be refused due to the loss of outlook and loss of sunlight to adjacent residents. Given the number of objections to this application it was good to see a positive outcome.

There has been an application for the retention of a stable and hardstanding at The Paddocks, Irby Farm. This related to work that had been carried out without the necessary planning permission. We have raised an objection as we felt that this was an inappropriate development within the greenbelt and a number of other objections have been lodged and we are now awaiting the council's decision on this case.



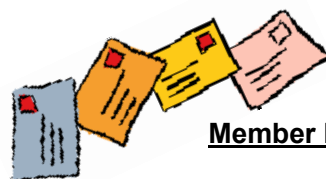
White's Farm, Thurstaston applied to open a café to run alongside the farm shop and the committee felt that the application impinged upon the surrounding Greenbelt which is designated an area of special landscape value. We were also concerned about the potential for additional traffic along Station Road. Disappointingly, the council approved the application although certain conditions will restrict the café opening hours and there is also restriction on the range of produce that can be sold in the farm shop.



A householder in Mill Lane has applied for a certificate of lawfulness which is a retrospective application for buildings or structures that have not had planning permission. This is a long running case which has been brought about by the Planning Department's failure to enforce planning regulations within the statutory time scale. ITPAS and a number of local residents have objected to the application and we are awaiting a final outcome.



The application for the re-routing of the footpath which runs next to Hill Farm on Thurstaston Road will shortly be up for approval and it is our intention to oppose this change as we do not wish to see a traditional and ancient right of way re-routed without good reason.



### Member Records



When you received this Newsletter, did you check the mailing label to ensure we have your correct details. We need every bit of information to be accurate to comply with the law in respect of holding personal details about people, so please tell us if its incorrect, even if its just your initial or title, please check and let us know.

Phone **648 2444**

**ITPAS Committee 2012 -13**



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**DIARY**



All talks are 7.00 for 7.30 pm start in Irby Village Hall unless otherwise stated. Free for members.

**Autumn Talk**

Wednesday, September 26<sup>th</sup>

**‘Wirral Before It’s Too Late’**

**By Glynn Parry**

A glance back at things we tend not to notice



**Winter Talk - Wednesday, January 23<sup>rd</sup>**

**at 2.15 pm**

**\*note afternoon start\***



**“Meet the Owl Family”**

**By the Moonshine Owl Sanctuary**

**Return by popular demand - see and touch the owls**

Spring Talk - March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2013

**PROF. STEPHEN HARDING**  
**VIKING WEST WIRRAL**  
**&**  
**HARALD THE FAIRHAIR LONGSHIP**

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