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Gateacre Society Newsletter

April 1993

Registered with the Civic Trust

Next Meeting

LANDLIFE

By Richard Scott

Landlife Wildlife Charity has its headquarters at the Old Police Station in Lark Lane, that centre for interesting enterprises.

Because of Landlife's work, in June 1992 Knowsley was christened

"The Wild Flower Borough"

by a special motion in the House of Commons.

Come and hear why!

(Members will recall that we had hoped to have Richard Scott in January, this is his second chance.)

**Tuesday 4th May 1993
at 8pm**

**Gateacre Institute, Grange Lane Gateacre.
Visitors Welcome 25p**

**Dates
for
your
diary**

HOUSE OF COMMONS VISIT 8TH JUNE 1993

The Wavertree Society is organising a trip to the House of Commons on Tuesday 8th June, cost £32 per head, including train fare and guided tour. David Alton MP will meet the visitors. Contact Lynn Winterburn on 733 5878 as soon as possible - only a few tickets left.

6th July: Croxteth Hall by Mrs. Frankla Corris.

HISTORY OF THE MERSEY FERRIES.

On 16th March one of the Out Reach Team of Ferryboat Captains, Captain David Langton came to talk to us with some excellent slides. He started with a brief history of the ferries across the Mersey with the first set up by the Benedictine Monks of Birkenhead Priory - founded c.1150 and now a tourist attraction - established at Woodside in 1282 by Edward I to carry people and goods to Liverpool market and ratified in 1330 by Edward III with the right to charge tolls. The old sailing boats could take a day to cross between Wirral and Liverpool in inclement weather - small ships but they carried horses too.

Sail gave way to steam with cross river steam boats in 1817. We were shown slides of people and places at either side of the Mersey and were reminded that there have been seven Wirral terminals, New Brighton, Egremont Seacombe, Woodside, Rock Ferry, New Ferry

and Eastham in flourishing days.

A turning point came in 1934 when the Mersey Tunnel was opened and Luggage Boat traffic went by road, but there were still passengers in plenty walking round the upper deck when Capt. Langton was a new apprentice 19 years ago who may still be wondering how their ordered array of attache cases on certain seats came to be in a different order on the other shore.

Now Mersey Ferries turn to leisure orientated aspects with some success as the shore lines are regenerated. The new aquarium at Seacombe has exhibits from our cleaner river, as well as a Restaurant, and sight seeing cruises include commentaries aboard the refurbished Mountwood and Woodchurch.

We hope that Capt. Langton enjoyed coming to talk to us as much as we enjoyed having him.

T.L.

Some Recent Planning Applications.

Black Bull: scheme for signs and floodlighting has been modified - following a meeting requested by Mrs. Lewis - and will be much less obtrusive on the Listed building.

Woolton Park / Woolton Hill Road. (formerly The Gables) detailed application for a detached house - second version.

Current Works

St. Stephens School, Halewood Road: we are pleased to see that work has started on the conversion to six self-contained flats. The main external fabric (built 1878) will be retained, lying as it does within the conservation area.

Former Pet Shop, Halewood Road, we understand is planned to be converted back to residential accommodation, one less empty property in the village.

UNPAID SUBSCRIPTIONS

Will all members who have outstanding subscriptions please contact Beryl Plent - 428 5379. As a small amenity society we are dependant on Members Subscriptions to pay our day to day administration costs and to budget for any future expenditure that may be required to help conserve and develop Gateacre for the benefit of all its inhabitants

SYLVIA M. LEWIS J.P. Dip. Loc. Hist.

It is with great sorrow that we have to record the death of Mrs. Lewis who passed away peacefully on Friday 26th March 1993.

Sylvia had not been really well for some years, had a 'slight' stroke last March from which she made a good recovery, but by the summer was having trouble with her eyes. She carried on so valiantly that few knew of her problems.

Since Christmas her sight deteriorated so much that she resigned from our committee on 7th February, ending her letter to Tony McCann "I am sorry that I cannot continue, I would have liked to have completed 20 years! (23.10.1974 - 1994) but I send the Society, through you, my very best wishes for the continuance of the work of the Society for the care of Gateacre's heritage for the next 20 years."

Sylvia was born in Aigburth in 1917, only child of James Coulton who was associated with the formation of the Playhouse and a member of its first Board of Directors. Her first school was Camelot in Marmion Road, she went on to Aigburth Vale High School and in the later 30s drove a typewriter in offices in Water Street.

She had lost her father when she was nine, met the young production engineer Peter Lewis, married him in 1940 and they had two children. In 1959 with Micheal and Sara getting bigger they left their flat in Aigburth Vale and came to Grange Lodge. In 1962 Sylvia became a Magistrate for Liverpool, and in 1974 was among the group of 4 or 5 who founded The Gateacre Society.

But before that she had engaged in voluntary work and come to know many people who were interested in local politics, both liberal but especially labour, including Ethel Wormald. Discussing their approach to the problems of our City laid a secure foundation for dealings with the City authorities

when issues in Gateacre arose.

Sylvia's innate good taste and appreciation of architecture ancient and modern, owing not a little to her father's old friend Professor Reilly who wrote so well about Liverpool buildings and inspired the Merseyside Civic Society, led to a passion for care for our more significant buildings - "we must get them listed!"

The Gateacre Village Conservation Area was designated in 1969 and very soon afterwards was threatened by a proposal to demolish York Cottages (built before 1846). Sylvia's campaign, started single handed, resulted in most of the cottages finding a new Housing Association owner, being rehabilitated to as exactly a high standard as befits Listed Buildings in the Conservation Area, and now they are cherished homes. This was the forerunner of the work of our Society; space does not allow a full history here.

Striving towards an understanding of Gateacre / Little Woolton and how the area came to be as it is (so different from Much Woolton) while also wrestling with the history of significant buildings, led into so many by-ways with glimpses of unexplained incidents, that Sylvia came to feel that she must bring a wider view to her study of local history. In 1983 she began a part time course in local history at Liverpool University, completing it with a dissertation on "17th Century Dissent in Little Woolton." She gained her Diploma in Local History at the end of 1985. Her collection of material for the History she was hoping to write is formidable, but only fragments of the story are written. The realisation of this task together with the continuing work of our Society are her legacy to us.

J.B.G.

Miss Janet Smith
Archivist, City Library
William Brown Street
LIVERPOOL 3

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CHAIRMAN	Tony McCann	Hedgefield Rd.
	051 487 9301	
HON. SEC.	Mrs. Joan Gadd, 59 Hunts Cross Ave.	
	051 428 8884	
MEMBERSHIP SEC	Mrs. Beryl Plent 27 Grange Lane	
	Gateacre	
	051 428 5379	