

Formby Civic News

Formby Civic Society



Roundabout Advertising Opposed

February 2005

There are already too many badly placed and designed road signs and 'furniture' in this area and it was good to see that the need to reverse this trend was recently highlighted by the Civic Trust. As a Society we strongly opposed Sefton Council's recently proposed 'income generation' from 'sponsorship' of advertising on local roundabouts including Cross Green, Formby and our opposition has apparently succeeded. In Formby advertising was proposed on five roundabouts. We pointed out that advertising on highway is contrary to Section 132 of Highways Act 1980 and the proposed signs were

much too large and distracting. (Four signs on each roundabout each 1m high and 1m wide).

In Formby it would be particularly inappropriate at Cross Green 'roundabout' as this is one of the most historically significant sites in the whole of Formby. Cross Green was our village green; the Formby Fair and Market were held there from the 13th Century. Formerly also the site of the village stocks and lock-up it remained an important focal point for local events including 'strolling players' into the 18th Century when Nicholas Blundell made many references to activities there in his famous diaries. The Formby Times

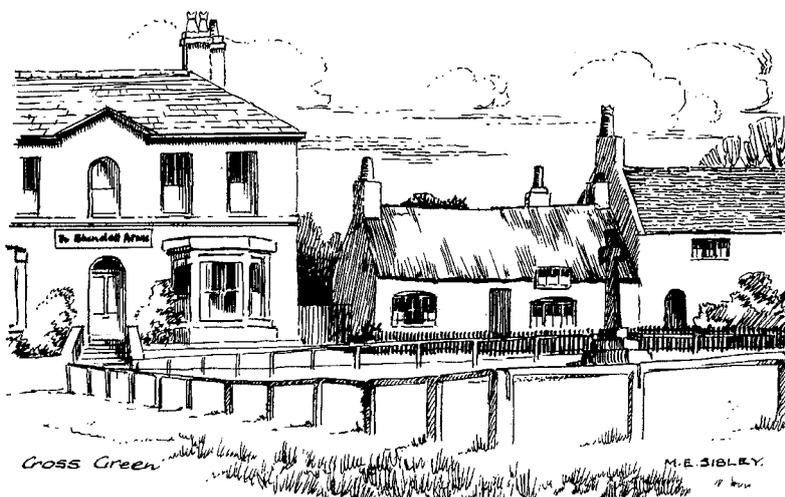
recently published an old press photograph of local people welcoming the Prince of Wales here in the 1930's.

The ancient Cross was replaced in the late 19th Century but is now officially considered a 'Listed Building'. We submit in turn that our Village Green should be treated as a Heritage Area.

It is good to report that our representations have been taken seriously by the Formby Area Committee, supported independently by the Formby Parish Council and the Police and now apparently Sefton are to spare us this indignity. Other areas of Sefton may not be so lucky!

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Cross Green in the late 19th Century;

This drawing by Muriel Sibley was made from a snap shot probably taken in 1878, The thatched cottages were reroofed with slate in 1909. The date of the building of the Cross House, formerly the Blundell Arms, is not known

Secretary's Notes by David Willis.

Are you mobile?

Your FCS Newsletter gets delivered to your door by a volunteer member of the Society, to keep down costs. However, we're always in need of new volunteers to fill in for holidays or illness and to replace those who 'retire'. Please let Elsie Winthorpe know if you would be willing to distribute a few Newsletters in your immediate neighbourhood.

Promoting the Society

You may have noticed in the Library some new leaflets about the Society. We have recently revised and updated a 2-fold leaflet that gives some basic information about the Society, its origins and programmes. It is aimed at 'spreading our name' and gaining new members. We'd be grateful for any help in getting the leaflets displayed more widely; for example, could you persuade a local shopkeeper to have a small leaflet holder on a shelf? We'll provide the holder and a 'top up' service. The copy leaflet enclosed for your infor-

mation will need to be updated soon for next year's programme. If you have any suggestions for improvements we'd like to hear from you.

What other help do we need?

Well, there's something as simple as the tea rota for monthly meetings. Not very exciting, for sure, nor very demanding but it all helps to keep the 'tea ceremony' alive. We'll provide full 'instructions' and all the equipment and supplies.

FCS on the World Wide Web.

Many members now have access to a computer and the Internet but perhaps not all will be aware that we have a Society website: www.formbycivicsociety.org.uk. It's worth a look if you want to recall some of our history and the culture of the area. Most recently we have added a summary list of the collection of local drawings and prints done by local artist and member, the late Muriel Sibley. We can provide both colour and B/W copies of any of the

sketches – perhaps of your own house or a nearby scene. Contact Alan Burton for details or follow the procedure on the web site. Anyone with an interest in computers and able to help keep the website up to date would be warmly welcomed.

Opportunities to help?

As an example of the help that's always gratefully received, we were recently approached by a local 6th form student for access to our historical archives for school geography (A-level project). He became fascinated by the 1845 Tithe Map. This interest proved to be of two-way benefit as the student has offered to start transferring the information from old-style index cards to a computer database. We anticipate this information may eventually be freely accessible on our website. We are also exploring the possibility of other voluntary help on this and similar projects, and would be pleased to hear from any member with an interest in the history of the area and a bit of spare time.

Planning Matters.



Post offices; Old and New. Is this progress? The old Post Office, erected in the early 1930's was an excellent building and the Society now feels it should be 'Listed' as an example of good civic architecture.

Heritage Open Days 8-11 September 2005 2005.



Left; The large 18th Century Dovecote at Formby Hall. This is the only surviving example in Sefton.

We will this autumn enjoy Formby's first opportunity to participate in a popular annual event. Heritage Open Days celebrate England's fantastic architecture and culture by offering free access to properties that are usually closed to the public or normally charge for admission. Every year on four days in September, buildings of every age, style and function throw open their doors, ranging from castles to factories, town halls to tithe barns, parish churches to Buddhist temples. It is a once-a-year chance to discover hidden architectural treasures which

“We will this autumn enjoy Formby's first opportunity to participate in a popular annual event:”-

bring to life local history and culture.

Co-ordinated nationally by the [Civic Trust](#) in partnership with [English Heritage](#), this event thrives on the enthusiasm and expertise of local people. This year for the first time thanks to the kind cooperation of Mr and Mrs Mike McComb, the Society

is to arrange an opportunity to visit the ancient but recently renovated **Dovecote** at Formby Hall.

The Dovecote a large brick structure is a grade 2 Listed building and was erected in the early 18th Century by the Formby family, who had resided there since the Hall was built, possibly on the site of an earlier building in the 15th Century.

This will also be an opportunity to see something of the exterior of the refurbished and restored Formby Hall and its environs.

Society Showcase

Sefton Library Services Formby Library have very kindly provided the opportunity for the Society to mount a small exhibition illustrating the history, activities and work of the Society. This will be on display in a glass case near the Issue Desk for one month from March 1st. This is in addition to our permanent display in the cases situated in the Reference Library.

Since we started in 1953, the Society has done much in the pursuit of our constitutional objectives but has also enjoyed a large number of social activities and visits to places of interest. The range of interests covered was originally much wider than today and included things like gardening, literature, music, natural history and photography. It even included a 'Cercle Francais' for a period.

Social events have regularly in the past not only included a Dinner, weekends away, A 'Garden Safari', Garden Parties, a dancing group, entertainments and many other activities. It functioned as a Civic Society even before the Civic Trust was itself created. We are now asking members to look back and lend us photographs or memorabilia they may have of some of these events so that we may copy them for this new display.

Art Group

Since our last Newsletter the group has been on an interesting visit to the Chambre Hardman Exhibition and to the newly opened Gallery in Parbold Mill; been included in a coach trip to Ilkley Exhibition with John Gray's group from Southport and also held its annual get-together at Lydiate Hall Farm. As only a few people were available to go to the excellent gallery in Parbold, we are going there again in February. It is some time since we visited The Tate as a Group so I have put this on the programme in April.

I am grateful to those members who volunteered to form a committee to

run the Annual Art Exhibition so that the bulk of the arrangements are no longer the responsibility of the Art Group Secretary. This means that the Exhibition which has taken place for about 50 years will take place on the last Saturday in June this year as usual.

We still need someone to come forward to take over from me when I stand down as Art group Secretary at the AGM and to arrange a programme each month for this small, friendly, group. Please contact me if you are interested. I will of course give you all the help I can

Programme.

Wednesday, 23rd February; Visit to Parbold Gallery. Please contact Art Group Secretary, (873920), regarding time.

Saturday 12th March; Meeting of Art Exhibition Volunteers; 10am Lydiate Hall Farm. If you are interested in assisting – please join us.

Friday 8th April; Visit to Tate Gallery, Liverpool.

Please phone Art Group Secretary for details.

History Group Report; by Barbara Yorke

The Group have enjoyed four interesting and well attended meetings since the start of the present season. These were all on local topics ranging from our ancient Formby Burying Ground to Bootle in the South and films on Martin Mere and the Ribble in the North. Unfortunately our speaker on the 6th January was unable to attend due to sudden illness and so instead I gave a slide presentation on Old Formby. This must have been interesting as I have now been asked to present it to another local group. We do however hope to invite Judge Martin Grundy back to give his talk on 'Punchinello' on another occasion.

A fair amount of thought is going into the best ways of making the Society archives more useful and accessible. We are hoping to find out whether this could be helped by Grants through Sefton CVS. The Society has not had financial help in any form from the Local Authority since the publication of Viking Village in 1973. Alternatively it may be possible to obtain voluntary assistance but it is disappointing to report that there has been no offer of help from members following an appeal in the last issue of the Newsletter. We are look-

ing to an organisation called REACH but even if the volunteer time is given we will have to be prepared to pay for expenses and improved storage facilities.

“We are now looking for possible contributors to our Member's Evening on 7th April. Do any members have a short contribution to offer?”

Recent possible threats to two local listed buildings and the poor state of two others have drawn our attention to the need to review these. We hope in the next few months to undertake a preliminary survey of all these. We also need to establish whether there are new candidates for listing. The Browns Lane Post Office, (now Sorting Office), is a possible candidate as is 95 Freshfield Road, the one-time residence of the 'founder' of Freshfield, Thomas Fresh.

We are now looking for possible contributors to our Member's Evening on 7th April. Do any members have a short contribution to offer?

Archive Project– Help needed!

In our last Newsletter we asked whether there might be anyone out there who might be interested in helping sort our archives. Unfortunately no offers of help have so far arrived.. This being the case we are now looking to get either voluntary help from outside the Society, or alternatively obtain funding to pay for assistance.

This should be perfectly possible. We are now looking towards obtaining Grant Funding. We are determined that our historical archives must be properly preserved. Only this week we have been grateful for the arrival of a further acquisition. This consists of a packet of letters and other documents kept by members of the Formby family and now passed onto us by Geof. Wright, a historian of Southport and district.

This generosity is not unusual. We are delighted to add items like this to our collection. It does however underline our anxiety to get our archives properly organised and accessible.

St Luke's Church by Barbara Yorke



Formby has eight churches, providing for four denominations, each playing an active role in the life of the community. The oldest church, St. Peter's, in Green Lane, was built in 1746 to replace the old Formby Chapel, which had stood for many centuries at Formby Point. This old chapel became inundated by sand and abandoned as a place of worship, leaving only the burial ground in use. The sundial and bell from the old chapel were transferred to the new church which was built far away from any danger of further sand storms. In order to help pay for the new church a levy was collected throughout the country which raised 11s 4d. I wonder how much that would be worth today? St. Peter's remained, for more than a century, the only Anglican Church for the whole of Formby and Ainsdale.

With the coming of the railway in 1848 the population of Formby began to increase, (it was only 1594 in 1851). As more houses were built in the area round Formby station it was felt that a second Anglican Church was needed. Mary Formby of Formby Hall gave the money, and her brother Doctor Richard Formby, the land for the new church to be built adjoining the graveyard of the old chapel. The

new church dedicated to St Luke was opened in 1855. At its consecration the Bishop of Chester remarked; 'because of the excellent sea shore for bathing a great increase of population is expected to take place especially if proper church accommodation be afforded'.

St Lukes Church is celebrating its 150th Anniversary in May. The Society offers its congratulations and best wishes for the future.

The presence of a church did not in fact at first attract much building and as late as 1895 the annual vestry meeting was most concerned about the absence of a parish school. Land had been given for a school in Jubilee Road but the vicar wanted it nearer the church. He stated that the church was the centre of a parish though it might not be the geographical centre and that was where the school should be. He hoped one day to see houses between the church and the shore, he pitied the parish "if it was always to be rabbit warrens and rat holes" but even today there is nothing between the church and the shore and that is now the way we like it - at the Gateway to one of the most important and

attractive stretches of dune coast to be found in this country.

Within the church is the original mediaeval stone font, said to be "Norman if not Saxon" from the pre-existing ancient chapel abandoned in the early 18th century. On the floor of the entrance porch is a memorial stone bought from York Minster, This stone was damaged by a fire in York Minster in 1829 but it is still possible to read the inscription 'Here lies Richard Formby, formerly Armour Bearer of our Lord and King (Henry IV) who died on 22nd September 1407. St. Luke's Church also has a beautiful rose window which includes some of the wild flowers found on the Formby sand-hills. Also of great historical interest in the ancient graveyard are the Godstone, the old village stocks and the base of the original village cross; the latter being transferred from Cross Green in 1879.

In his New Year Message for 1892 printed in the first ever copy of St Luke's Parish Magazine, the then vicar, Robert Minnitt referred to his "little sea-side, sand-girt Church" and complained "It is at present impossible to have evening service on Sundays in the Church, for the want of a system of lighting the edifice; the roads leading to the Church are also very dark during long portions of the winter months". Where he to come back today he would be pleased at the physical improvements to the church since his day but probably extremely surprised to find the Church surrounded by trees. As is obvious from a photograph reproduced from one taken in the 1860's, there were no plantations here until the 1890's. This church now has the unique distinction of not only being the only church in Sefton within the boundary of the recently designated Mersey Forest but also standing at one of the key Gateways to the Sefton Coast, one of the most magnificent dune coastlines in Britain.

The 'Godstone' by Chris Dawson.



This stone, which is about three feet tall, is to be found in the back left hand corner of St Luke's churchyard at Formby, close to the Lancashire coast. On the stone is carved a rebus, a message in symbols, which is interpreted as "The way" (steps) "to heaven" (circle) "is through the cross of Christ" (cross). It has been suggested that it may have been carved by the missionaries who Christianised the Danish settlers who settled along this area of the Lancashire coast early in the tenth century. It has also been suggested that the symbol is similar to one used by the ancient Egyptians. The present church stands close to the site of the ancient Formby Chapel which was destroyed in a heavy sand and wind storm in 1739. Formby Chapel is shown on all the old maps, eg. John Speed's map of 1610 but the chapel is believed to date from before the Norman Conquest. In the 13th century mention is made in the deeds of Cockersand Abbey of "Robert, the chaplain of Raven Meols." In 1510 in a marriage settlement document, Richard Formby referred to his 'Manor and Chapel of Formby', whilst in 1597 Robert Halsall, vicar of Walton bequeathed a small legacy to "Formby Chapel". In 1650 Cromwell's Commonwealth surveyors described "Formby Chapel" as ancient and worthy of parochial status. An ancient font with 23 sides,

thought to be of Norman or Saxon origin, was dug up in the church yard towards the end of the 19th century. It is believed that Formby Chapel was part of a medieval settlement that was eventually lost to the sea and sands. Old maps show Formby Chapel standing slightly to the north of the River Alt and a few hundred yards from the sea. Reference is also made to there having been a port at Formby at one time, but the changing coast line and encroaching sea and sand seem to have obliterated all evidence of both the port and ancient settlement.

There are various theories about the origin and purpose of the Godstone. Legend has it that the corpse was carried three times round the stone in the direction of the sun to prevent the departed from haunting loved ones. In her book "The Real Lancashire" Kathleen Eyres records being told by a gentleman that he had noticed a coffin being carried three times round the churchyard in Holland prior to internment, suggesting that the old superstition was not quite dead. She also suggests that the stone is a pagan relic that Christian missionaries made respectable by having the Calvary cross and circle carved upon it. Some of the old gravestones bear the same symbol.

"An ancient font with 23 sides, thought to be of Norman or Saxon origin, was dug up in the church yard towards the end of the 19th Century"

It has also been suggested that the coffin had to be carried three times round the stone in a certain direction to ensure that the soul of the departed went to heaven, otherwise if the coffin was carried round in the wrong direction the spirit of the departed would go to hell.

In "Lancashire Folk Lore" it is recorded that the Celts had names for moving round in a certain direction to

ensure good fortune. In the Western Isles it was the custom to carry fire around objects or people from east to west (in the direction of the sun) and fishermen would row their boat about first sun-wise to ensure a lucky voyage. On the other hand the Highland *Widersinnis* (from which the Lancashire *Wither-shins* is derived) was from left to right or west to east, or opposed to the course of the sun, a course used in magical ceremonies, and said to be the of salutation given by witches and warlocks to the devil.

This article is reprinted with permission from The Lancastrian; the magazine of The Friends of Real Lancashire January 2005.

Notelets

by Alan Burton

As mentioned in the last newsletter we are planning to produce a series of note-cards using the drawings of Formby by Muriel Sibley who kindly bequeathed her collection to the Society.

Work has been going on for some time and we hope to place an order with a printer shortly. We plan to have eight cards in a cellophane envelope with four each of two designs. They will be single folded with the drawing on the front and the back will carry information about the subject and the artist. The inside will be blank for the sender's message.

Initially we have chosen drawings showing the Village and the entrance to the pinewoods on Victoria Road both as seen in 1976.

Our target is to have them available in April for sale to members and also via a number of local retailers who have been very supportive of the plan

Future events

Annual Dinner, Saturday 26th February 2005.

This informal annual event, revived some years ago is in many ways the highlight of the year. Held at the splendid venue of Formby Hall Golf Club, it is an excellent opportunity to celebrate our recent progress. At the same time it gives us the opportunity to honour a special guest. This year our Guest of Honour is to be Stephen Langtree, Chairman of the Civic Trust NW. Invitation forms and Menu choices have been sent out

Please let us have your application and cheque, (£16 per person) as soon as possible as numbers will be limited to 60. Dress informal. Complimentary glass of sparkling wine on arrival.

Special Science Week Meeting; Friday 18th March

This is a Special Meeting, to be held under the auspices of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, National Science Week.

Titled "*Its a Sticky Business; Environmental Forensics and the Prehistory of Formby*". Dr Ann Worsley; Edge Hill University College, University of Lancashire will be talking about recent research on the silts and sediments underlying our coastline, which contain much valuable information on the prehistory of this area ***NB This meeting is to be held at the Sixth Form College, Formby High School, Freshfield Road, Formby at 8 pm. Visitors welcome.***

An Asparagus weekend; 'Fresher than Fresh':- Friday 20th May/Saturday 21st May 2005.

This event to be organized in conjunction with the National Trust is intended to launch the proposed Asparagus Project. Basically it is hoped that there will be an evening event at the Freshfield Hotel, consisting of a presentation followed by an 'Asparagus Supper'.

*The following day; Saturday 21st May there will be an 'Asparagus Field Day' This will consist of a programme of informal talks on aspects of Asparagus natural history, cultivation and local history, with guided walks around selected former asparagus cultivation areas, possibly together with some field-study opportunities. **Further details to be announced.***

After many years at the present level, to safeguard the Society's future, the Committee feels it is necessary to raise subscriptions for 2005. The new rates are:

£15 -- Family (couple and any children under 18)

£10 -- Individual Member

£2 -- Individual Member under 18.

Printing and insurance costs continue to rise, and subscriptions remain the key part of the Society's income. It is intended to maintain these rates for a number of years.

A renewal form is attached for use by those members who pay by cheque or cash. However, the use of a Bank Standing Order is very helpful and forms for this purpose are available from the Treasurer, Michael Belshaw (tel.874940).

Will members already paying by Standing Order please contact their Bank to change the amount paid to the new rate.

The Society has benefited by reclaiming tax paid by members who are taxpayers under the **GIFT AID SCHEME**. At the present level of 28p in the £ this means a benefit to the Society of **£4.20 for a family subscription and £2.80 for a single**. Members to whom this is applicable, ie, taxpayers, who have not previously completed a Gift Aid Declaration, are urged to use this facility to enable the Society to recover this money. If you are unsure whether you have completed a Gift Aid Declaration and wish to do so please telephone the Treasurer (874940) who will check his records and supply the necessary form.

Formby Civic Society

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FORMBY CIVIC SOCIETY CONSTITUTION.

The Constitution of the Society, first approved by the Charity Commission in 1954, states that the Society was founded to

(i) Stimulate public interest in the area. (ii) Promote high standards of planning and architecture in the area; (iii) Secure the preservation, protection, development and improvement of features of historic or public interest in the area and safeguard its natural amenities. (iv) Encourage study of the Local History of the area by arranging meetings and keeping relevant publications, books, maps, archives, historical artefacts, photographs and pictures accessible for study and research by members, authorised students and scholars and (by special arrangement), members of the public.

Our 'Mission Statement', (not now included specifically in our constitution) is; "to foster and preserve the identity of Formby as a separate community, to safeguard its natural amenities and to assist with the development of its cultural activities".

www.formbycivicsociety.org.uk

Friday 25th February - General Meeting; '*The Leverhulme Story*'; Gavin Hunter

Thursday 3rd March - History Group; *The 'Formby Tapestry' revisited*; Barbara Yorke

Friday 18th March - Special National Science Week Meeting. "*Its a Sticky Business; Environmental Forensics and the Prehistory of Formby*". Dr Ann Worsley; Edge Hill University College, University of Lancashire. NB **This meeting is to be held at the Sixth Form College, Formby High School, Freshfield Road, Formby at 8 pm.**

Thursday 7th April - History Group; *Members' Evening*; Members' own Presentations

Friday 22nd April General Meeting; '*The Formby Oilfield*'; Dr Richard Worden, University of Liverpool. To be followed by *Annual General Meeting*

Summer Programme;

Details will be announced at the AGM on 22nd April but we hope will include a Day Outing to a place of interest, (suggestions welcomed); an Evening Outing and in addition we hope to revive the Afternoon Garden Party, always a feature of the Summer Programme in former years.