

# Formby Civic News

Formby Civic Society



August 2005

## Do we need a new Community Centre?



*Left :-Holy Trinity School:  
- In the centre of Formby  
and now empty.*

“*Blueprint for a Community Centre*” was the title of an article written by the then Editor of the *Formby Times*, J. M. O’Neill as long ago as May 1964. Formby then already had many active organisations but badly needed better meetings facilities. This need was again raised in 1971, when a purpose-built extension to the former Council Offices was proposed by the then Formby Urban District Council but unfortunately dropped when Formby UDC was disbanded in 1974.

Since then the size of the Formby population has considerably increased and the need for adequate

leisure facilities has become even more pressing.

Formby has many active community groups and organisations not including Sports and Church organizations. We have a number of recognised meetings places but most are over 100 years old, mainly built as Church Halls. These have, (and still do), provide basic facilities but only one, (The Gild Hall - built to celebrate Queen Victoria’s Jubilee), has been modernised. The cost of this modernisation is now being passed on to the users. This means that the use of this facility is quite expensive.

*The Ravenmeols Community Centre*, established when Ravenmeols County Primary School was disbanded houses principally the Sefton Professional Development Centre. Two small former class-rooms plus the ‘discretionary’ use of a Hall and a small ‘kitchen’ and storage area are all that is available to local organisations.. None of this available is particularly ‘user-friendly’ and no audio-visual equipment is provided apart from screens. This means that all such equipment has to be brought in for every meeting and taken away again afterwards. Seating has always to be set out prior to meet-

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## a new Community Centre? (Continued).....

meetings and returned to its correct storage positions afterwards.

In October 2000 the FCS carried out a survey of the views of other community organisations regarding the adequacy and suitability of presently available meeting places. At least half the respondents were dissatisfied with their present facilities. Some organisations like the National Trust and U3A can not find anywhere in Formby suitable for large meetings. Thus despite the need, well expressed over forty years ago, we still do not have a good modern Community Centre here in Formby. As was reported in the last newsletter, We

had hoped that the new Swimming Pool at present under construction might include a community facility but any such provision is now to be very modest. Here it should be noted that the new Crosby Pool has in fact provided meetings and functions facilities, even though Crosby already possesses a very adequate Civic Centre.

Holy Trinity School has now ceased to use its modern building in Lonsdale Road. We feel that a feasibility study now needs to be done to establish whether this building could provide the basis of a new Community Centre for the Formby community.

This idea which has received support from our Member of Parliament, Claire Curtis-Thomas, has also been discussed with representatives of the Formby Parish Council.

*We are trying to discover the current position with regard to any existing proposals for the future use or disposal of site and building and raising this issue with Formby MBC Councillors via submission to Formby Area Committee. A public meeting may be held in September at which Claire Curtis-Thomas has agreed to speak. In the meantime please write and let us know your views.*

## 'Blueprint for a Community Centre' - in 1964

*"If the health and vitality of community life can be measured by the number of clubs, groups, organisations and societies that thrive there; then Formby is a robust community indeed. At a first rough count there are no fewer than 100 formally constituted organisations, each with its own administration, each pursuing its own aspect of communal activity.....But, increasingly, there is a desire for one large, new and centrally located building capable of catering for meetings of all and various sizes, open to all sections of the community and adaptable for many different purposes. It is being referred to as "Community Centre" and Formby's Councillors have already placed on record their pious hope that one day they shall provide such a place....In this Community Centre there would be at least one very large assembly room — big enough for rallies and for important social functions. Several smaller rooms would cater for committees and discussion groups and the more specialised lectures. It would have comprehensive cooking - and toilet facilities, as well as the latest. and handiest lighting and power....."*

From the Formby Times, May 15th 1964.

## Society Notelets; by Alan Burton

Since we introduced our packs of notelets early in May this year they have proved to be very popular with our selected retailers and their customers in Formby. Sales so far are well over 200 packs in the first ten weeks which is very encouraging. Currently they are being stocked by the following retailers; Derbyshires, Formby Post Office, Freshfield News, Kippax Newsagents,

Pritchards, Select, Send a Card and Southport Tourist Information. Each pack contains two each of four different designs with local scenes in the 1970's as drawn by Muriel Sibley and reproduced on high quality card with a short note describing the subject. They are plain on the inside so that they can be used for any type of message and come complete with envelopes. Typi-

cally they can be used as greetings cards, thank you notes, or short letters and they make very handy presents. During the coming winter programme we hope to have a table at each meeting whenever possible to sell them to members at the reduced price of £3-50 per pack or £4-00 to non members. The income generated by the sale of the notelets will be used to further the aims of the Society.

## Planning Matters; by Ray Derricott.

### *Wicks Lane Path*

The path was closed in July 2004 to enable changes to be made on supplying main services to the new development at Larkhill Farm. The path was opened in June 2005 after the erection of fencing to separate the footpath and bridle path from the entrance to the house and the farm. Concern had been expressed that an entrance onto the north of the path from Larkhill Fields (National Trust property) would be barred. However this access has been maintained. The fencing appeared to have been erected following an agreed plan but in measuring the width at the access

to the path from Larkhill Lane it was found to be less than three metres which is the recommended width of dual purpose paths. As this access to the path is used regularly by schoolchildren from St Jerome's School it was thought to represent a potential danger. A letter on this topic has been sent to the Sefton Footpaths Officer. The path is now open but it seems that this has not yet been made official.

### *Telephone Mast appeal*

02 UK Ltd. has appealed against the turning down of the erection of two masts on the Embassy Building

Green Lane. The case is being considered by the Government Inspector. The Society agrees with the decision of Sefton that that as Green Lane has been designated as one of Formby's areas of character and as a Conservation Area that the design of the masts 'would fail to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and is thereby contrary to Policy EN V.26 of the adopted UDP and Policy XHC1 of the revised deposit UPD'. (Apologies for the official jargon. Three copies of the Society's view have been sent to the Inspector in Bristol.

## Conservation Awareness; by David Willis.

### **The North West Association of Civic Trust Societies has announced that it is to receive a grant of £2,500 from English Heritage.**

Every civic society will recognise the definition of conservation areas as 'areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance' - but do we all know exactly how many such areas there are in our locality, when they were last reviewed and why they were designated as such in the first place? After establishing that

'Development Control in Conservation Areas' was the number one campaign topic for civic societies across the region, **nw.acts** is delighted to announce that a grant of £2,500 from English Heritage will enable us to make a start. Poor development control is very often due to a combination of factors - lack of appropriate resources in local authorities, insufficient evidence with which to defend a refusal of permission or an appeal, and a general unwillingness to take enforcement action against unsympathetic alterations. It doesn't help that

only 20 per cent of the conservation areas in this region have a character appraisal, and it should be no consolation to discover that this is only six per cent below the national average. We cannot, and should not, do the local authorities' job for them, but we can help. Several civic societies are already collaborating with council officers to collect data for appraisals, give advice on locally important buildings and review conservation area boundaries.

**The North West Association** is compiling a register of all 808 conservation areas in the North West. It will show which have got current appraisals and which are in the purview of local civic societies. They are also producing a leaflet to promote the whole issue of 'Conservation Area Awareness'. With this, and future phases of the project, we want to make a difference! If you would like to get involved in Conservation in Formby please let us know!



*Left; Green Lane is Formby's only Conservation Area, - designated in the early 80's at the instigation of the Formby Society.*

# What should a Civic Society Do? by Stephen Appleby\*

## Who do we think we are?

This question is how Steohen Appleby titled his talk to the annual meeting of Civic Societies in the North West. His views are very condensed in this short summary; FCS members are encouraged to read the full report in the latest edition of the Civic Society Newsletter (we receive this regularly and members are welcome to have it on loan).

Who do we think we are when we call ourselves a "Civic Society"? A 'society of citizens', "a group of dwellers in a township or city, having common interests in the well being of that place or having concerns about it - mutual concerns and aspirations shared"? Our aspirations embody our vision of possibilities for enhancing our environment with interest or character that sit comfortably with our good taste. This taste, whilst subjective, has been developed over time by our aesthetic or social education. Its implications may be far-reaching, affecting both the environment and the character of the society that lives within it. Quite a responsibility!

How then do we operate within a local democracy and local community? Apart from our internal discussions amongst like-minded people or supporters, our most effective line of influence is to work with local government officers. What are the factors, which make us influential amongst both local government officers and our fellow citizens, and what are the credentials that matter? I suggest there are three:

**1. Qualifications** - technical or of taste. Civic societies must have on their committees people who know what they are talking about, be it geology, strength of structures, history of architecture, social needs in town planning, etc. We should also embrace members whose ideas show sensitivity of taste, be they artists, craftsmen, exhibition-goers, or merely people who have beautiful homes, i.e. those who are able to criticise in a properly informed and preferably positive way.

**2. Passion for the place.** If you want to convince the general populace you must become known as an enthusiast for

what you see as the only acceptable outcome, and thus gain people's respect.

3. Money. If you have a little you can often do a lot with it. So get some!

**How Should a Civic Society operate?** It is always necessary to give if you wish to ensure that you get. If you are the informed group I suggested, you **can** give - dispense interesting information through talks, through guided walks and through enthusing with your friends - preferably influential ones! You can show your passion for interesting surroundings and for the desirable improvements within your town that are within reasonable hope of attainment. These steps will! enable you to increase your membership, thereby your subscription funds.

**What Do We Do?** Ask questions: What are we passionate about? What do we value in our local environment? What makes it a pleasant place to live in - and what doesn't? What would make it more pleasant? What could it be like? What is the essential character of the place, that which we wish to preserve?

*"The process of improving the quality of the place inevitably improves the*

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***"There is much more we do. All in all, we are working in key partnerships within our community"***

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*quality of life, and thereby the character, of those who live there".*

The influence of a civic society can be subtle, pervasive and enduring. For maximum effect it soon becomes apparent that what we are really talking about is 'partnership' - with fellow members and enthusiasts, with council officers and elected representatives, with other societies, with funding bodies and, finally, with the media and the general public.

In Kendal, the Civic Society started by buying up some old buildings due for demolition, refurbishing them and selling them for further use as dwellings. We have, over the years, erected some fifty plaques around the town, which

briefly inform visitors and residents alike about the past of the building or its famous residents. We publish a map of these and also a guidebook with photographs and further details in the form of a loose-leaf box.

We are advising on the listing of the Town Hall's collection of pictures and have held several exhibitions of these. We make representation and have influenced the delineation of the town conservation area, understanding its social and industrial history that led to its growth in its unique way. Members have published books on such topics. We have catalogued and recorded notable buildings and those designed by eminent local architects of the past. Members have written and published books through the society on a number of topics such as bee boles, summerhouses, the canal development, past industry etc. We co-operate with the local district council on features of conservation e.g. traditional shop-fronts, the "Kendal in Bloom" and similar events. We are involved with the forthcoming canal restoration and work with numerous other antiquarian and archaeological societies e.g. to preserve town artefacts and land areas.

There is much more we do. All in all, we are working in key partnerships within our community, as our constitution states, to *"Preserve the best of the past and to promote the best of the new"*.

*Having read this review of how another Civic Society works in its community, are there issues here that we in Formby should pursue? Please let the Editor know what you think!*

*\*This is an edited version of a talk given by Stephen Appleby of the Kendal Civic Society to the Annual Meeting of North west Civic Societies in 2004.*

## Altcar Rifle Range visit; by Lucy Cuss.



On Thursday 16th June, a party of about twenty of us spent a most delightful evening at Altcar Rifle Range at the invitation of Major Doug Farrington. He kindly took us on a guided tour helped by our own Phil Smith and Steve Cross. The main items of interest were the orchids and a Grade II listed barn. The weather was cold but fine.

The Rifle Range is basically large areas of grass with some woodland and ditches behind the sand dunes. Some of the grass, which is flooded in winter, is carefully managed to produce an abundance of wild flowers, including seas of ragged robin. These areas of grass are not cut until 15th July to enable seed to set and drop.

The orchids we saw included

Pyramidal, Southern and Northern Marsh, Common Spotted, Early March, Twayblade and the remains of bee orchid and green winged orchid. We also saw a willow unique to the Rifle Range and, in a ditch, some celery-leaved buttercup. A big thrill was finding a leveret (baby hare) sitting motionless in the grass.

This was probably a rare sight for all of us but surprisingly so for Phil for whom this was a lifetime 'first'!

The Barn was built, of bricks, about 1550 replacing the original Alt Grange leased by William Blundell in 1220 to the monks of Stanlow Abbey near Ellesmere Port. It remained in the ownership of the Church until the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII. He granted Alt Grange by letters patent to Thomas Holt in August 1543. It was bought shortly after by the Molyneux family and remained with them for two hundred years. It was used as a chapel in penal times. In 1900 when John Hesketh held the lease, a silver chalice was found and presented to the Church of Our Lady of Compassion in Formby. We were not able to go inside because owls were nesting and it is im-

portant that they are not disturbed. The building is one hundred feet long, thirty feet wide and between thirty and forty feet high with braced and tied cruck trusses and purlins consisting of rough hewn oak beams pegged together. The buttresses were added at a later date.



This was a most enjoyable evening and we were assured that we might visit again. So if you were not able to join us this time, try not to miss out next time round.

### Further reading:

*Altcar: The Story of a Rifle Range* by A.L.M Cook (1989) available from the Society's archive library.

*Altcar Rifle Range Its Wildlife and History.* Available from Sefton Libraries, price £2.00.

## General Meetings, 2005-6; by John Turner

A rich and varied selection of topics has been chosen for the 2005-6 Winter Programme. Speakers include our own Dr Phil Smith, who was unable to present his talk 'Alien Plants in the Sand Dunes' last year due to indisposition. His re-scheduled talk will now be on 23<sup>rd</sup> September, and Phil tells us that he aims to be controversial! Judge Martin Grundy, due to talk to the History Group last year, will instead talk to us on 28<sup>th</sup> October on 'Punchinello in England'. Punch

and Judy come into the story and he is bringing equipment with him! Mary Higham, who has been studying Lancashire place names will give an illustrated talk on 'Aspects of Place-name Surveys' on 25<sup>th</sup> November. After the Christmas – New Year break, Deanna Groom MIFA, working on England's Historic Seascapes Project, will talk to us about 'The Liverpool Bay Historical Seascape' study on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2006. Stephen Langtree, Chairman of Chester Civic

Trust, will talk about the 'North West Association of Civic Societies – The First Three Years. This will be on 24<sup>th</sup> February. Adrian Maddocks, of Seascope Energy Limited, will talk to us on 24<sup>th</sup> March, about the planned wind farm off the coast at Formby, 'Burbo Bank – Future Prospects'. The A.G.M. of the Civic Society will be held on 28<sup>th</sup> April, immediately following which Cllr Sean Brady will tell us about 'Formby Parish Council – The Story So Far'.

## Formby Asparagus Feast; by Reg Yorke



*Asparagus growing at Larkhill Farm..*

*Photo; Reg Yorke*

Held on Friday 20th May at the Freshfield Hotel, this was the first ever such event to be held in Formby; an evening of “Asparagus enjoyment” – both as an edible delicacy but also to enjoy an opportunity to hear and talk about asparagus. We sampled two simple asparagus dishes and enjoyed some related folk-lore, history and poems, to the accompaniment of some ‘asparagus-friendly’ music provided by Jill Fielding and her band.

The evening consisted of:-a Glass of wine or soft drink on arrival followed by a an introduction to the Formby Asparagus story. We then had a two course asparagus meal consisting of an “asparagus ‘au naturel’ starter and

then the main dish, freshly prepared asparagus quiche. This was followed by a selection of ‘Asparagus readings’ and a specially written Formby Asparagus poem written by a Formby resident read by actress Rebecca Bridle. Other readers included Andrew Brockbank, and Ruth and Richard Woodward, During the evening we enjoyed a musical entertainment provided by Jill Fielding and her band.

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***“an opportunity to hear and talk about asparagus”***

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Tickets £10 per head, (sold in advance) -were limited to 75. This provided a full house but there were many more applicants for tickets. A profit of £100 was made and subsequently donated to Enterprise Neptune.

*I was particularly grateful for help from;- Pritchards Bookshop for presentation of a £10 Book token as a prize for an Asparagus Poem (and also selling ticket);also to Select, Church Road, The Freshfield Hotel and The Formby Times who published the event and in particular the Poem Competition. We were also grateful to Larkhill Farm for their excellent asparagus and to Priory Kitchens for preparing and delivering eight delicious freshly cooked asparagus quiches. To Jill Fielding and her musical colleagues. To Radio Merseyside for their interest, and finally particularly to the Readers, (listed above) and members of the Committee, Alan Burton, Ray Derri-cott and David Willis for their help on the night. Subsequent feed-back was good and the event resulted in favourable publicity for both Larkhill Farm as well as the Society. There have been quite a number of enquiries as to whether we are going to hold it again next year*

## Open Air Art Exhibition by Barbara Mossop.

This year’s Exhibition was held on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> June. Whilst the sun did not shine, it was a dry, still and warm day and a lot of people stopped to look. We had 110 exhibits, from paintings to painted irons. The printing of a large number of catalogues so that viewers could go round the exhibition at leisure without having to ask members for details proved popular. I think they were pleasantly surprised to see how reasonably priced the pictures were and conse-

quently, 26 found new homes by the end of the day. Members were on duty all day from 8am to 4 pm and it was helpful having a separate table and other members dealing specifically with Civic Society matters, membership applications and selling Society notelets. The Art group Members worked well as a team, before and during the Exhibition. My thanks go to all of them. It was the most successful show we have had for several years – helped considera-

bly by the fine weather!

*Photo; Paula Maxfield*



## History Group Programme; by Barbara Yorke

The History Group Programme for the next year is now completed and we have brought back some good previous speakers to bring us up to date on several important subjects of local interest, on which they have been personally actively involved. Since she last spoke on Martin Mere, Dr. Audrey Coney has now, (together with Professor Bill Hales), produced an attractive and well researched book, published by Liverpool University Press. This is the first time the detailed history of Lancashire's once largest lake has been fully described and this will be a fascinating evening.

David Brazendale has recently

brought out a revised new edition of his book on Lancashire's historic halls. He has spoken to us in the past about the Blundell's of Ince Blundell and Little Crosby, but on this occasion he will give an equally authoritative account of many of the other old and interesting 'stately homes' and manor houses of the County. Harry Foster is another old friend, still busily researching and publishing books on the origins and history of the golf clubs along the Sefton Coast. Alan Waplington, the historian of St Lukes Church is working on a book on the history of Formby's St Lukes Church and School, soon to be published as part of the Church's 150th Anniver-

sary celebration. We heard last year, from Jennifer Lewis, about the history of St Luke's 'Old Burying Ground', Alan is bringing the story of this charming 'church in the dunes' and its school up to date. The Botanic Gardens Museum is Sefton's only museum apart from our own little museum in the Formby Library. Despite this, not many people know much about its history. This will be a chance to hear from the Curator, Miss Jo Jones, about its origins and collections and what they say about life, in North Meols in former times. The 'Mexico' disaster, with the loss of two local lifeboats is just one of the many stories it has to tell.

## Summer Outing to Cheshire ; by Davis Willis



In Wednesday 20th July TWENTY-SEVEN members made it to Anderton to start our tour of Northwich and its surroundings. After the obligatory hot coffee, to get us warmed up for what turned out to be a rather blustery and overcast day, we made the short trip on the River Weaver to Northwich and back. On the way we learned some of the history of salt and canals, as our introduction to the Anderton Boat Lift, the world's first hydraulic barge lift. This recently restored machine hoisted us in our (converted) barge up to the Trent & Mersey canal. After viewing the various exhibitions and taking lunch locally we set off for the Lion Salt Works to visit this semi-finalist in last year's BBC "Restoration" TV

series about threatened historical buildings. This is where Murphy's Law stepped in to divide our party into 2 groups. Half of the party made it on time, whilst the rest of us, finding our road blocked by a road accident, had to navigate our way into and out of Northwich before arriving ½ hour late. Nevertheless we all enjoyed an excellent description from the project's director of the history of the site from its construction by the Thompson family in 1856, to receive pumped brine from naturally occurring underground chambers for evaporation into white salt. Thompson's continued to produce white salt at the Lion Salt Works using traditional Victorian methods until the works closed in 1986. It is hoped the saltpans will be restored with the aid of a £7½ million grant from the Lot-

tery Fund. Our final visit, to 'complete' our knowledge of the salt industry, was to Northwich's excellent Salt Museum. The museum, established in 1889 by Thomas Ward & John Brunner, two local salt proprietors, now finds itself in the former Northwich Union Workhouse opened in 1837. Our work was limited to looking and listening before heading home, after a busy and varied day, during most of which the weather had held up well, and which everyone seemed to have enjoyed.

*Left; On the canal barge; Photo David Willis.. Below; The Anderton Boat Lift; Photo John Turner.*



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## Formby Civic Society

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## Heritage Open Days 2005

Unfortunately we are not going to be able to organize a Heritage Open Day at Formby Hall this September. We will now plan to do this next year but - don't forget that you'll still be able to experience England's largest voluntary cultural event. Heritage Open Days celebrates 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 and enjoy a wide range of tours, events and activities which bring to life local history and culture. Free of charge and literally on people's doorstep, Heritage Open Days is an event for everyone, whatever their background, age and ability. This year's event will run from Thursday 8th to Sunday 11th September. You can find out more at [www.heritageopendays.org](http://www.heritageopendays.org)

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## Future Programme

### General Meetings

Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> Sep 2005 “*Alien Plants in the Sand Dunes*”; Dr Philip H. Smith

Friday 28<sup>th</sup> Oct 2005 “*Punchinello in England*”; Judge Martin Grundy

Friday 25<sup>th</sup> Nov 2005 “*Aspects of Placename Surveys*”; Mary C. Higham

### History Group Meetings.

Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> October “*Martin Mere Revisited*”; Dr. Audrey Coney

Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> November “*Historic Halls of Lancashire*”; David Brazendale

Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> December “*Golf Courses in Sefton*”; Harry Foster

Art Group; 10th November Trip to Art and Craft Exhibition at Birmingham; Cost £17,. Names to Barbara Mossop on 873920. Also phone for further information on Art Group Programme after September.

Please Note; The Garden Party on 20th August at Briardale has been cancelled.

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