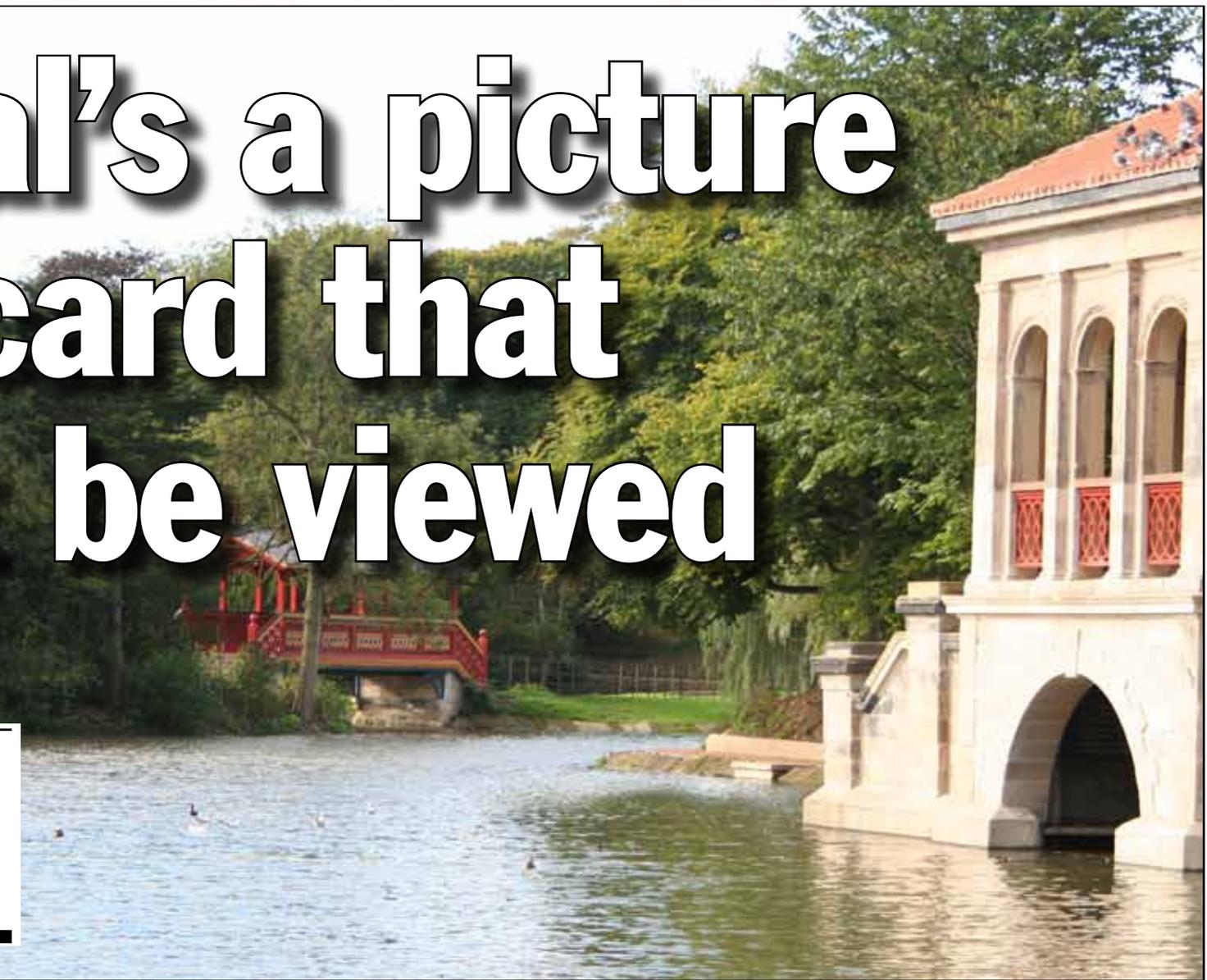


Gazette GETAWAYS



Wirral's a picture postcard that must be viewed

STAG and hen parties often make Liverpool a destination for their partying and the North-West city has long been a draw for Beatles-obsessed tourists, but what do we know about the rest of Merseyside? **PAUL CLIFFORD** goes to the Wirral to see what we're missing.



PRETTY much everyone must know the song Ferry Across The Mersey.

And I dare say a fair few people have been on it. But how many people get off on the other side and visit the Wirral?

I've been once before, about 10 years ago to see a gig by The Coral in New Brighton, but I didn't see much apart from the inside of a big top.

So I was looking forward to going back to see what the town, and those nearby, were like.

My girlfriend and I were staying in West Kirby, a pretty little town on the coast of the Wirral Peninsula, which looks across the River Dee towards North Wales.

We were staying at 21 Park House, a lovely Edwardian bed and breakfast on the leafy Park Road.

As we drove in we passed a few good-looking bars, restaurants and cafés that were just minutes away from our base.

First though, we had a wonderful welcome at the B&B from owner Maddie, who showed us to our bright, clean room.

It was raining outside but, because of how close everything was, it didn't matter too much. We had a few beers, looked in some independent clothes shops and a great beer and wine store.

As far as the bars go, my favourite was Red Door, which had a brilliant range of cocktails, served some lovely-looking food, and played some cracking music.

For food we went to Milan, not surprisingly an Italian restaurant.

We had an excellent meal there with

TRAVEL FACTS

WE stayed at 21 Park House in Park Road, West Kirby. Rooms start at £49 per night.

For more information and to book, visit www.21parkhouse.co.uk or call 0151 625 4665.

More information about the Wirral can be found at www.visitwirral.com

some nice wine, and I'd certainly recommend it to anyone who pays West Kirby a visit. The meatballs I had for a starter were unbelievable.

The next day, after a hearty breakfast, we explored more of the Wirral.

First stop was Birkenhead Park. Bir-

kenhead is the first place you come to when you drive through the Mersey Tunnel, and without knowing about it, you could drive straight past the park.

If you did, you'd really be missing out. Opened in 1847, it was the first park in the country created with public money for their own enjoyment.

It is a huge place, with a fantastic new visitor centre and café, cricket and rugby clubs, and beautiful gardens and lakes.

A visit by American architect Frederick Olmsted in 1850 also provided inspiration for New York's Central Park, which he designed on returning to the USA.

The volunteers who give guided tours were also phenomenal – happy to help and an endless source of knowledge.

Next we went to seaside town New Brighton, which has some uncanny simi-

larities to South Shields. It has its own Victorian park with miniature steam train, a thriving fairground and a proud shipping tradition – with a Dolly Peel-type figure.

We had a guided tour by Barry, who runs Timelines, a company specialising in the history of New Brighton and music memorabilia, which was fun and informative and highly recommended.

Our last stop was Leasowe Lighthouse, an eerie, stark structure which stands proudly on its own looking out over the Mersey.

Built in 1763, it is the oldest brick lighthouse in England and has some fascinating stories to tell – not least the one about the last 'keeper', Elizabeth Williams, who looked after and lived in the 101ft, seven-storey building with her nine children.

After a packed day, we made one more stop-off on the way back to West Kirby, at the Portrait restaurant in Hoylake, where we had another fine meal.

The next day (and after another huge brekkie) we checked out of 21 Park Road and headed to the unbelievable Port Sunlight before heading home.

Port Sunlight is a purpose-built picture-postcard village, designed to house the workers at the Lever soap factory.

It's an intriguing, strange, place that really has to be seen to be believed. It is also home to the Lady Lever Art Gallery, which houses a stunning collection of paintings, sculptures and pieces of history.

Our visit to the Wirral was brief, but we loved every second.

I'd say the best way to find out more is to give it a go. Take the Ferry Across the Mersey (or the tunnel) and see what's on the other side.



PARK LIFE ... Port Sunlight, above, and Birkenhead Park, top.