

The Marsh Cat of Parkgate A Sad Tale

(2007)

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On the east side of the river Dee estuary, part way up the peninsula of land known as the Wirral, west of the Liverpool, lies the village of Parkgate. A couple of centuries or more ago it was a thriving and bustling place — an important port dealing with many ships and their cargoes and passengers from far and wide.

These days it's a quiet place, no longer on the river, because now there is a marsh between Parkgate and the Dee.

As the ships in earlier times could be at sea for months at a time, most of them carried one or more cats to keep down rodents and preserve their cargo. One particular cat, around 1775, was known as one of the best in the business; consequently he was much in demand and voyaged the world over — Europe, Asia, the Americas and the Caribbean: even to Australia. His was such an important job, and he was so good at it, that it became his privilege to be fed from the captain's table — which of course tended to have the choicest food.

But as the globetrotting feline grew old, had used up most of his nine lives and was becoming weary of fierce storms, heavy seas and foreign ports, he was looking forward to an easier life. He wanted to leave the sea and retire to live with his last captain, Samuel Davies, and his wife at the King's Arms public house in Parkgate. Captain Davies's ship was the *Nonpareil*.

But there was one more journey to make — to take a Major Castlefield and other passengers, including a number of vagrants from a nearby House of Correction, to Ireland. It should have been a routine voyage; but the weather was bad and casting off was difficult. In addition the captain had a bad premonition; but eventually the *Nonpareil* set sail out of Parkgate.

It was never seen again. The ship foundered and all aboard her perished in a terrible storm in the Irish Sea.

According to legend, the spirit of the ship's cat wanders the parade (what used to be the quay), looking for the best food to be had among its restaurants. His favourite is the 'Marsh Cat' (*pictured*), where the good fare to be had reminds him of his adventures of many years ago, before the marshes came to Parkgate.



Links:

[Parkgate then and now](#) | [Onion Ring](#) (the Parkgate cat tale)

Wikipedia: [Parkgate](#)

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Jean de La Fontaine (2005)

The fables of Jean de La Fontaine (1621–95), using animals to point up human morals, were first published in 1668. *Le Chat, la Belette et le petit Lapin* ('The Cat, the Weasel and the little Rabbit') tells of the weasel taking possession of the rabbit's burrow one day while the rabbit was out. When he returned, the weasel refused to let him in, saying, in effect, that 'Possession is nine-tenths of the law.' The rabbit argued that the burrow was his by custom and usage, having been passed down from generation to generation of his family. They argued until finally the weasel agreed that Raminagobis, a wise old cat who lived like a hermit, should arbitrate for them (the reclusive cat was seen as a 'dig' at seventeenth-century French clerics).

The cat said, 'Come close, my children, for advancing years have caused me to become deaf.' The other two animals, unsuspecting, approached him. The cat suggested that they should stand on his set of scales, so that he could weigh his judgement. When they were there, still arguing, he struck out at both of them with his claws, causing them to quickly stop disagreeing and reach an accord.

This tale strongly resembles squabbles that petty rulers have amongst themselves, said de La Fontaine, before both are swallowed up by mighty kings.

The illustrations below are from a set of French stamps and labels issued in 1995 to commemorate the 300th anniversary of de La Fontaine's death.

They were designed by Roland & Claudine Sabatier.



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