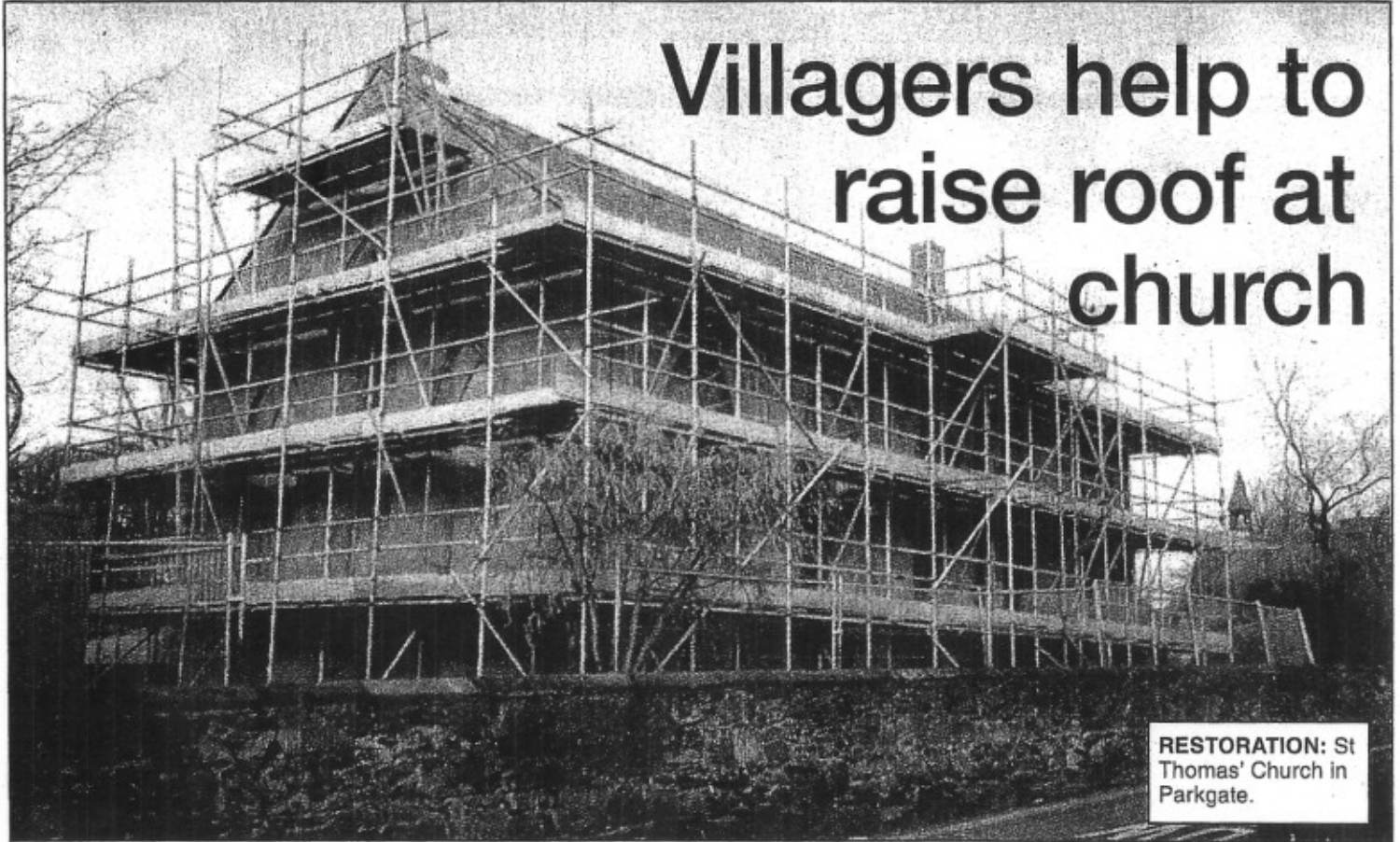


Villagers help to raise roof at church



RESTORATION: St Thomas' Church in Parkgate.

RESTORATION work has started on St Thomas' Church in Parkgate in the first of three planned phases.

The roof is being restored, insulated and re-slatted and the sandstone walls are being repaired, repointed and strengthened so the building is safe and waterproof.

Phrase two will deal with the plumbing, heating and lighting, and in phase three furniture and fittings will be installed.

St Thomas', known as the Fisherman's Church, has had an

unsettling 15 years resulting from the building being declared unsafe, the parish of Neston's acute shortage of funds and difficulties in deciding how the restoration project might be managed.

But work is has begun thanks to an innovative scheme by villagers.

In 2001 a Trust was formed to negotiate a full repairing lease of the property at a peppercorn rent, to raise the necessary money and to manage the restoration works.

On completion the renovated listed

building will be handed back to the landlords, the Diocesan Board of Finance and the vicar of Neston.

They have agreed it will be fully reinstated as a daughter church of the parish, with the added benefit of allowing it to be used as a village community centre.

Phase one, the most costly stage, is expected to be completed in May.

The overall cost of the project is estimated at £200,000 and strict supervision is being exercised by the Trust to contain expenditure.

A spokesman for the Trust said: 'Since we launched the fundraising campaign 18 months ago we have raised £124,000, including a joint English Heritage and Heritage Lottery Fund grant of £40,000.

'We have four teams of fundraisers - events, appeals, sales and PR.'

He added: 'We see a vibrant rejuvenated church being a lively new social centre for this small community, which will also enhance the focal point of one of Wirral's most visited and historic villages.'