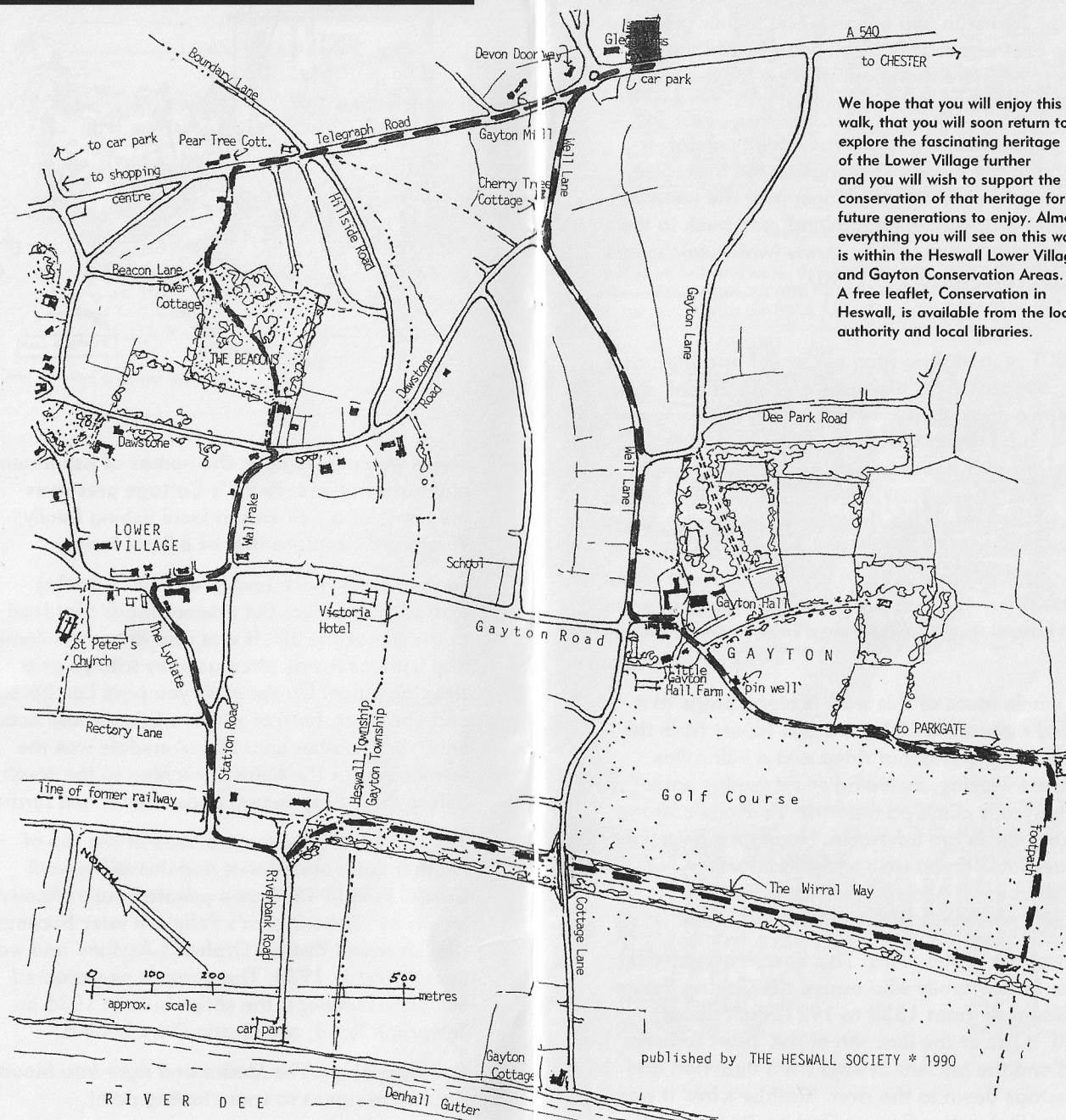


## WALK 2

### Gayton and the Lower Village



We hope that you will enjoy this walk, that you will soon return to explore the fascinating heritage of the Lower Village further and you will wish to support the conservation of that heritage for future generations to enjoy. Almost everything you will see on this walk is within the Heswall Lower Village and Gayton Conservation Areas. A free leaflet, *Conservation in Heswall*, is available from the local authority and local libraries.



From the Domesday survey to the 1850s Heswall and Gayton were small hamlets on the riverside route from Chester and Parkgate to Thurstaston, Pensby, Barnston and beyond. The higher ground to the east was mostly bleak open heathland, offering no more than poor grazing for the sheep of local farmers.

This walk passes through the historic core of Gayton to the meadows alongside the River Dee, returning, via the Lower Village, over the last remnant of the 'bleak heathland' and back to the starting point at the Glegg Arms (which celebrated its 150th anniversary in 1990).



The whole route of this walk is along paths that existed more than 150 years ago (apart from the Wirral Way). It is about three and a half miles of mixed walking, including some muddy paths and a steady climb up onto the 'Beacons'. Strong walking shoes are advisable. Numerous diversions are available if you wish to explore further - or avoid the mud! Allow at least 3 hours for a leisurely stroll with time to stand and stare.

Start at the Glegg Arms. This hostelry bears the name of the family who owned the Gayton Estate continuously from 1330 to 1921. Built about 1840, it lies at the junction of the 'new' turnpike road and the ancient byways from Barnston and Brimstage down to the river. 'Crabbe's Inn' it was once called - after George Crabbe, its landlord

until 1890.

By 1906 you could take the Mersey Railway Company's bus from Central Station in Birkenhead to the Glegg Arms (price 1s 6d return).

Cross the main road and take the first left; this is Well Lane, for many centuries the track to Gayton Village and down to the Dee for a ferry across to the Welsh side. Look for no. 10 on the right - this is Cherry Tree Cottage, one of the few remaining farmhouses and reputed to be over 300 years old. At one time renowned for its sale of home-made black puddings and sausages, it has been used as a dairy and for stabling. How pleasant to see its modest but robust character retained in use today as part of a high quality residential area.



150 years ago you would have found a patchwork of small fields on both sides of Well Lane, but around the turn of the last century it began to provide desirable building plots for merchants from Liverpool seeking a rural retreat from the increasingly squalid conditions of the city.

The road ahead shows an entrance to Gayton Hall and then bends right past, but not through, Gayton Farm. Note the plaque on 'Old Farm'. The cobbles are of the same glacial erratics as deposited on Thurstaston shore, using large ones for the wheel lanes and small ones in the centre for the animal's grip. Gradually, over the past



80 years or so, trees and hedges have grown up to hide the new houses and provide shelter for a pleasant walk, but do watch out for traffic.

At the junction with Gayton Lane (another ancient track, once known as Norris Lane), you reach the boundary of the grounds of Gayton Hall. Further down Well Lane turn left into Gayton Farm Road and you enter the Gayton Conservation Area. 100 years ago this was Little Gayton; Gayton Farmhouse was Little Gayton Hall. At the end of the cobbled road is the 'back entrance' to Gayton Hall. In 1330 the ownership of Gayton passed from the Cistercian Abbey of Vale Royal to the Glegg family (Baskervyle Glegg from 1758). A fortified manor house, surrounded by a moat, this was the Glegg family home for many centuries; it was probably destroyed by the troops of Oliver Cromwell. Part of the present building is timber framed and dates from the mid-17th century. Extensions and a new south façade, in the classic early Georgian style, were added about 1725; fine Jacobean staircases, oak paneling and fireplaces grace its interior. The beautiful parkland setting contains tithe barns and other farm buildings - now converted to separate dwellings - and a



columbarium (dovecote) of 1663.

In the garden are two evergreen oaks, named William and Mary, reputedly planted in 1690 by William III when he stayed at the Hall and

knighthood Sir William Glegg.

The Hall left the Glegg family in 1921. Subsequent owners found it increasingly difficult to maintain the estate and its division and development began in 1958. Modern bungalows were built in Gayton Farm Road and Well Lane; other buildings were converted to dwellings and land was sold for possible development. The original drive from Gayton Lane no longer provides access to the Hall.

Fortunately, in recent years, clear policies preventing unsuitable development have been established by designation of the Conservation Area and the Green Belt to the south. A proposal to develop land adjoining the original drive was rejected after a planning appeal in 1984. At the public enquiry the Heswall Society presented a strong case against further development.

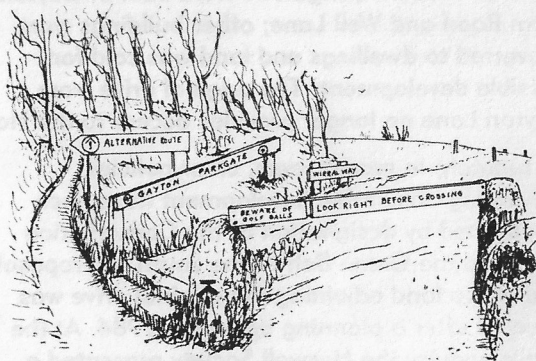
The Hall itself is now privately owned and major restoration of both the building and the grounds has taken place. None of the estate is open to the public, but you can catch a glimpse of over 600 years of history that has shaped Gayton and is now part of this corner of Wirral's history.

Continue your stroll towards the golf course. Water running down the path, even in fine weather, is evidence of a still active spring - the Pin Well - that no doubt provided the only local supply of water many years ago. It is said that William III's horses drank from this well in 1689. The well site was repaired in 2009 at the instigation of the Society. This is the ancient route from Chester and Parkgate, linking the riverside settlements. Turn right at the signpost and walk straight across the golf course, keeping to the footpath and with a wary eye open for low-flying golf balls.

This brings you to The Wirral Way, the UK's first linear country park based upon a disused railway line. A passenger and goods service opened 19th April 1885 from Hooton to West Kirby, but closed to passengers on 15th September 1956 and goods in 1962. The Wirral Way idea was first promoted by the Wirral Green Belt Council in 1965, then



taken up by Cheshire County Council and, since 1974, enthusiastically supported by Wirral Council. The line was removed and part of the land sold for development before Cheshire County Council bought the remainder.



Put dog on lead.

Today, twin paths (for walkers and horses) run along the former track, footpaths link to nearby areas and acquisition of further land has provided a network of informal recreation facilities to meet a variety of other interests.

Birdwatchers can readily find redwing and fieldfare feeding on berries in winter, the characteristic aerial song-flight of whitethroat in spring, as well as numerous yellowhammers and a variety of tits throughout the year. Over the nearby fields watch out for the soaring skylark and occasionally a sparrow hawk or short-eared owl hunting prey. In May you will surely hear the local cuckoo.

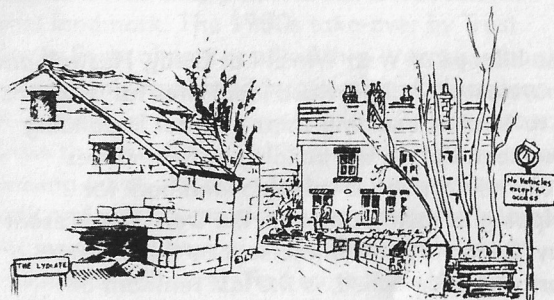
For botanists and fungi-hunters the Wirral Way offers a growing range of species protected from disturbance by ploughing or grazing. The limestone imported during construction of the railway fosters the growth of plants not seen elsewhere in this part of the Wirral.

Where the Wirral Way passes under Cottage Lane you can take an interesting diversion to the river bank. Gayton Cottage was the Ferry House. Silting of the estuary over the past 200 years has diminished its importance for shipping and made the ferry crossing virtually impossible. In the early 18th century ships regularly called at Parkgate,

Gayton and 'Dawpool' - long before Liverpool began its maritime connections.

At Riverbank Road you must leave the Wirral Way although you can rejoin it about half a mile further on (the land between was sold for housing in the 1960s). Riverbank Close occupies the land of the former Heswall Station - note the station house and a pair of railway cottages amongst the modern bungalows. You can also see remnants of the bridge where Station Road passed over the railway.

Continue along The Lydiate into the Lower Village, the heart of the original Heswall hamlet, with a church that can be traced back to at least 1300 and a group of sandstone buildings of the late 18th and 19th centuries. Most of the Lower Village is now a Conservation Area in which particular care is taken to preserve and enhance its special character (see Walk 1 to explore this area).



Left, LYDIATE FARM owned by Totty for many years then M'Dermott since 1940-

Turn right for a short time along Village Road and then climb up out of the village along Wallrake, past the 'Hessle Welle'. Closed in 1891 and commemorated by a plaque in the sandstone wall, this was one of the numerous wells and springs that ensured a supply of fresh water for man and beast alike.

Trees and sandstone walls are the dominant features of this area. The houses in large gardens blend into the background of greenery and the rising land above. Even the newer houses on



smaller plots are being absorbed into this complex web of rich textures and intriguing views that form the character of this pleasant residential area.

After crossing Dawstone Road take the footpath between the houses, marked 'to the Beacons'. Arriving - slightly breathless - at the summit, rest on the conveniently placed seat and admire one of the finest views of the Dee estuary, with Heswall and Gayton nestling in the trees below you.

Various paths across The Beacons all lead eventually to Beacon Lane, once known as Pinnacle Road. The sign for Pinnacle Road can still be seen in the wall of the house at the rocky Lane end of Beacon Lane.



The hilltops of West Wirral - at Caldy, Heswall and Thurstaston - all provided ideal sites for 'beacons', lit to warn of invading ships or other impending disasters. Before the building of lighthouses these hills formed a valuable landmark for shipping in their journey up the Dee. The present day 'Beacons', or Summerseat as the southern part was once called, is the last remnant of that 'bleak open heathland' that 150 years ago extended northwards to link up with the Dales and eastwards to Pensby.

Today the character of the Beacons is changing; even during the past decade it has become clothed in miniature woodland, mostly of silver birch. Some seeding trees have been removed but views across the Dee, well known to older residents, have now disappeared. The Beacons is an invaluable open space for local residents and the state of the footpaths indicates heavy usage. If its aesthetic and practical value is to survive, there must be a policy of landscape management. In these circumstances 'nature' cannot be left alone.

Telegraph Road brings you back firmly into the 21st century with its shops, churches and garages, but perhaps most noticeably its traffic. A few sandstone cottages confirm the existence of a centuries old track along this route. Go left towards West Kirby and you will find a good range of shops and the other facilities of a small town centre, but turn right back towards your starting point. At Boundary Lane (formerly Totteys Road) and Hillside Road, you will cross the boundary between the old townships of Heswall and Gayton. Gayton Mill, probably Wirral's surviving tower mill, once ground corn for the local farmers. It lay derelict for most of the last century. Another landmark of the more recent past is the Devon Doorway pub, built in 1936. The architect was a Mr Aldridge from Devon, whose wife ran the restaurant, renowned for its fresh home-grown food. The design reflects their wish to retain images of Devon cottages rather than any local tradition. However, it now forms a well-known local landmark. The 1980s take-over by Trust House Forte almost resulted in a dramatic change of face, only frustrated by the roar of objections from those who have come to love its appearance. Cross the roundabout with care and return to your starting point. We hope that you have enjoyed this walk and will have noticed many items of interest not mentioned here; a further visit and further exploration will surely find more. The Heswall Society needs your support to conserve our heritage for future generations to enjoy.