

## THE HESWALL SOCIETY

The Society was established in 1953 'for the public benefit to conserve the heritage of the Parish of Heswall' and in particular:

To stimulate public interest in the area

To promote high standards of planning

To secure the preservation, protection, development and improvement of features of historic or public interest

The Wirral Borough Council welcomes the Society's views on major planning issues. The Society was active in securing the designation of Conservation Areas at Gayton and the Lower Village; it also acts as an advisory Committee to the Wirral Council on all planning matters in these areas.

The Heswall Society is non-political and a registered charity.

Further details and membership application forms may be obtained from the Hon. Secretary or Treasurer (addresses available in Heswall Library).

### Conservation Areas

Conservation Areas are defined by the local authority so that special care can be taken to conserve and improve their special qualities. In considering new development, the local authority must be satisfied that it will 'preserve and enhance the character of the Area'.

Conservation of walls, paving, trees and other incidental items of the landscape is important. The local authority must be notified of any proposal to lop or fell a tree (expert advice is freely available) and consent is required for any demolition or major alteration of buildings.

Front cover photograph by kind permission of Mr Stephen Fletcher, a past Chairman of the Society.

Walk 4 illustration by kind permission of Mrs Kay Fletcher.

## WALK THROUGH HISTORIC HESWALL



The seeds of Heswall - whose name may be derived from Hazel Well - were sown when the Merchant Princes set up houses on the Wirral banks of the River Dee, initially as holiday retreats because of the spectacular views of Wales, wonderful scenery and invigorating fresh air. Subsequently, when a rail link was made between West Kirby and Hooton, passing through Heswall, they decided to build their grand homes there and commute to Liverpool. Dramatic changes have taken place within the lifetime of some older residents. This leaflet has some of the history of the Village included in four walks which enable you to stroll along the route of ancient highways and byways to find old blended with new: a heritage handed down by earlier generations that helps to form the character of Heswall today. Nothing stands still in a living landscape and living community. Adapting to that change whilst conserving our heritage from the past is the theme of these walks.



From the Domesday survey to the 1850s Heswall was a small hamlet around the present Lower Village. Within the 20th century's spread of bricks and tarmac we can still find evidence of old farmhouses, fishermen's cottages, and a church built in the reign of Edward I.

This walk takes you along routes that existed over 150 years ago. We are never out of sight of the local sandstone - either as 'living rock' or on boundary walls and buildings. The Dee Estuary was a lifeline for former generations; it remains a major feature of our landscape.

The suggested route is about one and a half miles; allow 2 hours for a leisurely stroll with time to stand and stare. Numerous diversions or alternatives are available if you have the time and the urge to explore further.

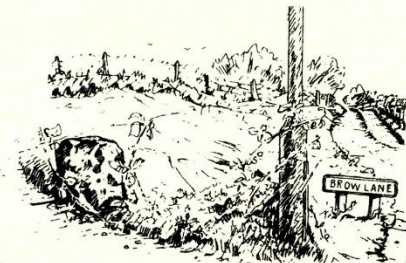
Start from the car park behind Heswall Hall - access from Mount Avenue. The Hall and the Library were built by the former local authorities, just before the local government changes of 1974.

On the crest behind the car park is the Jug & Bottle, the former Council Offices. Originally built as a private house at the beginning of the 19th century - reputedly with money from the 'slave trade' - and haunted by the ghost of a black dog prowling at the foot of the stairs! Until about 1880 it was surrounded by bleak, open heathland almost as far as the eye could see. The sandstone cottages on Rocky Lane probably pre-date Hill House; this was part of the ancient route from Pensby to Heswall.

At the junction with Dawstone Road you enter the Lower Village Conservation Area and have the first glimpse of the estuary with the Welsh hills beyond. Pause a moment to savour the view that changes with every season. Note also the unusual wall letter-box with Edward VII's monogram.

The original route to Heswall (now the Lower Village) continued down Brow Lane and School Hill. Dee View Road and The Mount (originally Liverpool Road) were mid-19th century improvements, zigzagging up the hill for the benefit of wheeled traffic. The land between the two roads then provided convenient building plots with magnificent views over the estuary.

At the top of School Hill the cottages at right angles to the road are of sandstone beneath their later cement rendering. Although over 120 years old, they provide pleasant small homes - today attracting investment rather than demolition - like many more in this area.



This well-known Boundary Stone on SCHOOL HILL is one of two gateposts of the gate into Farmer Swift's field above. The field is now DAWSTONE PARK, see small gate on right.

Richmond Hall, at the corner of West Grove (formerly known as Back or backside lane) is all that remains of the Parish School built in 1872 to replace the first school in a cottage by the church. The School and headmaster's house were partly destroyed by enemy action in 1941. The modern primary school - seen from West Grove - was opened in 1961.

Turning left into Brow Lane you are again on the ancient route to Barnston; it continues to the left of Dawstone Cottage. Although now rather overgrown through lack of use, this lane has changed little in the past 150 years.

Dawstone Park was provided by the Heswall-cum-Oldfield Parish Council in 1931, on an area known as Ned Swift's field. As the plaque on the eastern boundary wall proclaims - Floreat Sanctum Sanctorum. At the top of Brow Lane is the entrance to Dawstone, a house whose present appearance hides its past. 150 years ago it was an extensive single-storey structure surrounded by open heathland to the east and farmland on the lower slopes. (Dawstone is probably derived from dur stan - a boundary stone. Two such stones can be seen between Brow Lane and the western side of the Park).

Although now built up on both sides, Dawstone Road is dominated by trees and sandstone walls. The conservation of these features is vital for its future. But trees grow old and walls crumble - often made worse by bad pointing.

The trees and large gardens encourage a wide variety of bird and animal life. Keen eyes may often spot nuthatch, coal tit, jay, pied wagtail, great spotted woodpecker and tawny owl (heard if not seen). In the evening you may see fox cubs playing in the Park. The grey squirrel displays amazing agility in the trees - although regarded by some as a pest.

The land between Dawstone Road and Wallrake provided a country home called Roscote for the shipping magnate Thomas Brocklebank in the 1860s. 100 years later it was demolished and now is remembered only by the name of new roads - The Roscote and Roscote Close. Formerly part of the Roscote estate on Wallrake are The Clock Tower, The Lodge - beside the original entrance - and The Croft, all forming a pleasant informal group of buildings reminiscent of an earlier age and a mid-European setting.

Wallrake (waella rake - the lane to the well) contained the best remembered of the numerous wells that formerly provided Heswall's only water supply. In the dry season there were 15 steps down to the water level. A plaque on the boundary wall by Hesse Well House - maintained by the Heswall Society - commemorates its closure in 1891.



"White Lodge." This was THE WHITE LION and one of the villages four public houses. It was closed in 1882 and the licence transferred to the Hotel Victoria in 1902. Rebuilt in 1910, note the ten elegant chimney pots.

White Lodge, at the junction with Gayton Road, hides its sandstone origins beneath modern pebble-dash. It was the White Lion Inn until it was sold on 22nd June 1891 and the license transferred to the new Victoria Hotel (now demolished) in Gayton Road. At the junction of these cross-roads was the Village Square where celebrations would take place, particularly at Easter time. Station Road is a new road built, just after the opening of the railway in 1886, to 'bypass' the narrow village roads for station traffic. The railway was closed for passenger traffic in 1956 and later it became The Wirral Way - the UK's first linear country park - an idea first promoted by The Wirral Green Belt Council in 1965.

Village Road takes you back through the centuries - a hamlet clustered around the church on the original road from Chester and Neston through to Thurstaston and West Kirby.

The central part of Stivelooms is probably 17th century. It is said that it was always painted white as a guide to shipping in the Dee. Its original stone walls are now hidden by the later extensions and cement rendering.

Probably the oldest remaining buildings still displaying their original stone walls are The Smithy and the adjoining cottage now known as Anvil Cottage - both worth a closer look. The Lydiate (probably hliid-geat: a swing gate) was the original road down to the river.



ANVIL COTTAGE  
Built about 1728 by Totty  
1803 given in marriage to  
Smallwood the blacksmith  
& in 1843 bought by

William and Mary Price, shoemaker. Burkes, the newagents until 1958  
since then renovated with due regard by Steve Fletcher.

Opposite The Lydiate in Village Road was a beer-house, the Ship Inn, mentioned in 1860, closed in 1892 and long since demolished. The adjoining cottages became a shop and recently were restored for use as a private dwelling.

140 years ago the Village had a wheelwright and blacksmith, a butcher, a provision dealer and two boot and shoe makers (William Price kept the men and women well shod at Anvil Cottage, whilst Jos. Smallwood shod horses at the adjoining Smithy). There were also various tradesmen such as joiners, stonemasons and, of course, farmers - some of whom also dispensed beer in the local inns! By 1874 the records show, in addition, a police constable, the grocer and baker (acting also as sub-postmaster and as a builder!), not to mention seven people involved in selling beer! In 1899 a new post office was built (now Oyster Grey). Note

the gap in the wall where the original post-box was - unused for many years before being stolen during the 1990s.

Let us look at some recent developments in the Lower Village: do you consider that they 'preserve and enhance the character' of this Conservation area?



Lydiate Farm Cottage might fool you at first (but it is new) on the site of an old farm building

Adjoining Stivelooms is Baytree Cottage; another recent house, replacing a former thatched cottage.

Tithebarn Close - a new cul-de-sac with a variety of house styles and materials - offers a 'new village' character.

Church Farm Close - on the last remnant of former farm land, has been carefully designed to blend in with new.

The fascinating story of Church and Parish is to be found in a booklet by a former Rector, "Church of St. Peter" by Canon Kenneth Lee. Copies are available in the Church. The Tower dates from the 14th century; it has served all three churches on this site. The first was built around 1300. The second, built in 1739, was severely damaged by a storm on 19th September 1875 that killed the organist and injured others. The present structure was finished and dedicated in 1879. In the parish registers (dating back to 1539) and in the graveyard are the names of local families who have served church and parish for many generations.

The Children's Church was restored in 1955. It was a thatched cottage used partly as a school and later as a parish office; it is now an office no longer owned by the church. Adjoining it was another thatched stone cottage - Elder Cottage, built in 1686 - in which the church pioneered the 'Dame' school, until 1872 when the new Parish School was built in School Hill. The village well and later a drinking fountain, were just outside the church gate - all to be swept away by road widening.

The Black Horse public house (formerly the Heswall Hotel) has a stone central section, built in 1843, with later extensive additions. Behind the Black Horse in School Hill are new flats built on the site of The Hermitage - previously known as Rosebank - built in the first part of the nineteenth century and recorded in 1850. At the adjoining Rose Cottage lived Mrs Barnes-Grundy who in 1870 wrote *Vacillations of Hazel*, a romantic novel set in 'Heatherland', clearly recognizable as Heswall. If you walk up School Hill note the cobbled gutter, now partly covered by modern tarmac.

The walk takes you through the rock cutting, out of the Village (once known as Bungalow Hill) and along Farr Hall Road. For many past centuries this route led to Farr Hall, the original Manor of Heswall, called Eswelle in Domesday. The Hall later became a farmhouse and was demolished at the end of the 19th century. Another building on the site of the Hall is also called Farr Hall and is now divided into apartments.

The return journey takes you up Herbert's Lane, part of the ancient route, now overgrown and little used. A recent invader is Japanese Knotweed, very handsome in full summer foliage but a cause of some concern because of its prolific growth. An electricity sub-station behind a sandstone wall at the end of West Grove marks the site of a pinfold, later converted to a temporary mortuary.

Pause a moment to look at the old cottages between Thurstaston Road and Dee View Road.



These would have been the homes of fishermen and farm workers. Kemp's Cottage preserves the name of a well-known local fishing family; Woodward Cottages that of a local farmer.

Feather Lane (once known as Swift's Rocks) existed long before the present roads that lead up to the top of the hill. It was also known as Feather Bed Lane as it was often used by tramps as a sleeping place. On the right you pass Lumbersdale and The Nest, both of which originally had access only from Feather Lane. Lumbersdale was the farmhouse for the fields stretching to the south before they disappeared under bricks and tarmac.

The castellated stone gate piers at the top of Feather Lane are all that remains of Heswall Castle. Built in 1870 as a private house - known locally as 'Tytherington's Folly' - it later became the 'Liverpool Female Orphan's Asylum' and was demolished in 1930. The name is perpetuated in Castle Buildings, the shops built in 1936 on Telegraph Road, and Castle Drive behind.

Continue along The Mount and right into Mount Avenue to return to your starting point.