

## Christleton Coronation Heritage Trail

2023



**May 6<sup>th</sup> 2023**

The text is by David Cummings, and the Art work by Philip Hodges.  
The Project is being supported by Christleton Parish Council



**The village emblem is a mute swan.**

### ***Background Information.***

Christleton Village has existed in some form since Roman times and this new Trail, to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III on May 6<sup>th</sup> 2023 highlights some of the historic buildings and features you can see on a self guided walk around the Village. It is certain that buildings existed in what is now Christleton since Roman times, but the first documented evidence comes from the Domesday Book, when “Cristentone” is part of the Norman Barony of Malpas, and the property of Robert, the Norman earl. The unique name of Christleton is said to mean “The place of the Christians” or “a farmstead with a cross”. It is likely that a wooden church stood near the current church site in the late Saxon period, as the village is well established by the Norman period, and one of the larger villages of Cheshire.

The Ecclesiastical **Parish of Christleton** has five townships.

**Christleton**, rogh Christleton -**Rowton**, little Christleton - **Littleton**, **Cotton Abbots** and **Cotton Edmunds**

If travelling by car, please park beyond the Pit at King George VI Playing Fields. Start the walk at Christleton Pit. The approximate distance is 2.5 miles but can easily be adapted to a shorter distance.

### 1. Little Heath or Christleton Pit.

*(Stand with your back to the Dixon's Houses facing the water.)*

The granite boulder you see at the edge of the Pit is a remnant of the last Ice Age and hundreds of similar boulders can be found all over village and the county. The clay marl found in places like The Pit was excellent for brick making and was the source of bricks for building local houses. The marl was also spread over the sandy soil and improved its quality for growing crops. Marlers would descend on the village in the autumn each year and extract the marl. They also brought their songs and traditional dances with them. The Pit was also a pond for fish. We learn about this because of a court case against Robert Townsend from The Old Hall brought by the Lord of the Manor in 1772 "for the non payment of taxes on his pond for fish since 1711" An unusual feature of The Pit is that it has no source of water other than rain water, and this has caused problems for the parish many times over the years. The last time in 1975/6 when it dried up completely. It is now managed by the Village Pit Conservation Group on behalf of the Parish Council.



### 2. Dixon's Houses.

The Black & White **timber framed Dixons Alms Houses** were given to the people of Littleton & Christleton by the Dixon Family from Littleton Old Hall in memory of James Dixon who died in 1866. They were built to the design of **John Oldrid Scott** son of the famous

Victorian Architect, George Gilbert Scott. The six residential units are home to older members of the Community.

*Now walk towards the village passing the Chapel on your right, but please keep to the pavement as the road is dangerous at this point.*



**3. Christleton Methodist Chapel** was built in 1888 and the original building has hardly changed, although a vestry and school room were added later. Among the founder member families who built the church were the Handley's. **Walter Handley** was one of four young men from the chapel who went to America and Canada to serve as missionaries. Walter became a Curate in the Episcopal Church of America, but when war was declared he came back to serve his country with the Royal Welsh Fusiliers. He died at Pas de Calais in 1918 and is commemorated on the Arras Memorial as well as in the village. The Chapel still plays an important role in village life.

Also on the right is **The Square** a small community of older village residents. There was originally a farm there, surrounded by a group of cottages.

**4.** Georgian style **Hawthorn House** just beyond the bend with its attached coach house, was once the home of **Joseph Mayers**, head of one of the most influential families in the village, with brother **Thomas** living at nearby Pits

Farm. The Mayers Family were all great bellringers and enabled Christleton to win many regional competitions. The house was also the home of **Norman Wildig** who joined the newly formed 104 Squadron RAF in 1918 but was killed whilst acting as a rear gunner/navigator of a DH9 bomber on 7<sup>th</sup> July 1918.

The Rector GMV Hickey quoted in the Parish Magazine “**that he was killed taking bombs to the enemy**”. His career had lasted just over a month and he was buried with full military honours at **Rixingen**. His name is read out there each **Remembrance Day** as “**A Hero of France**”

Continue walking along the pavement and notice on your left Smithy Cottage, one of the two Blacksmith’s workshops in the Village, dating from the 17<sup>th</sup>C followed by “Tara”, once a Village Shoemakers workshop, closely followed by the **Tithe Barn**. This was once the property where village tithes/taxes were collected. The Rector was entitled to collect either money or goods to the value 1/10 of your rent or income. Goods would have been stored in the building before being sold. All along the road on both sides are former barns that have now been converted into residential accommodation. These were originally part of several local dairy or mixed farms operating in the village. They produced milk, butter, cheese, meat, eggs, poultry, vegetables etc. making the village self-contained in Victorian times. The nearby slaughter-house, and tan-yards at Littleton, would have also benefitted from the farms.

Continue around the sharp bend and on your right opposite the Tithe Barn, is **Church Walks**, a group of neat modern houses which occupies the site of the former Arden’s Farm, which stopped production in the late 1980’s. As you approach the village centre, you come to one of the oldest properties in the village.



##### **5. The Old Hall.**

This building believed to date from 1605, once belonged to the **Egerton Family**, and was later the property of **Robert Townsend**, Recorder of Chester, a senior law officer, whose family dominated village life for over 200years. The red brick you see, is rather deceiving, as it is a skin of red “Ruabon” bricks which covers the original timber frame building. There are fine ceilings of early 17<sup>th</sup>C plasterwork, Jacobean oak panelling and flooring, a large entrance hall and staircase, that befits a fine house. There used to be evidence of an archery range, and six bread ovens in the garden, and a tunnel around the property which is reputed to be linked to the Manor House & Church. This theory is linked to the fact that the house was used as a forward Headquarters for Sir William Brereton, Northern Commander of the Parliamentarian Army, who led the attack on the Royalist Army of King Charles at the Battle of Rowton Moor on 24<sup>th</sup> Sept 1645.

In 1946 the Rev. Alyn Arthur Guest Williams acquired the house from the Townsend Ince Family and their descendants, to whom he was related, through the Curries of Boughton Hall, another grand house in nearby Boughton. Elizabeth Currie had married John Williams of Gwersylt Park in 1743. Their descendants were heavily involved in the life of the Church and the Parish for over 200years until the mid 1970’s.

Cross carefully over the road at this point until you face the Manor House.



### 6. The Manor House.

This beautiful brick building dates from around the 1600s. A coin with the image of Queen Elizabeth I dated 1580 was found in the garden, which gives this credence. It was also an important farm house until well after WWI, as we learn of war horses injured on the battlefield in France being re-habilitated there.



### 7. The Pump House.

This structure was erected in Victorian times to keep villagers dry when collecting water from the village well. The well goes down to about 20m into the sandstone bedrock that forms the base of the village. This sandstone dates from the Devonian period of geological time about 300million years ago. At one point an electric pump was installed, but the supply was un-reliable and the villagers went back to using the old pump handle. It was restored in the 1990's, with new

oak shingles covering the roof. At the same time cobble stones from around the church entrance were moved and set to form a decorative pattern around the structure. The work was designed by Eric Kenyon.

### 8. Birch Heath Lodge.

Originally built in 1700 as a private house, it was enlarged in 1814 to become a Boarding School for Young Gentlemen run by Benjamin and Ephraim Parkin. They engaged Thomas Lakeland as Schoolmaster, and there were 15boys aged between 9-15years studying there. The boys wore dress suits and mortar board hats and would often be seen walking around the village. We get a description of what life was like there, in the form of a letter written by 12year old Thomas Welsby, to his father a wine merchant in Chester. He describes reading Caesars commentaries in Gaul as his Latin textbook, and says he is advanced in Miscellaneous Questions and mathematics. He also says that they break up on the 16<sup>th</sup> June and go back to school on 26<sup>th</sup> July. The house later became the home of Cannon Garnett's sister Annie Rolt, the mother of LTC (Tom) Rolt the famous canal enthusiast and engineer. In 1974, it became a Leonard Cheshire Home for severely handicapped children, and is now Birch Heath Lodge Care Home.



This is another view of the Village Green which was once called "**Phoenix Park**" and a gathering place for villagers for many local events, such as Coronation Celebrations, Marlers Festivals, Fairs, Fetes and other entertainment. In the background you can see **Rock House**, once the home of famous Victorian Artist William Huggins and his

family. In front of this was the butchers shop of the Mosford and later the Partington families. They served the village wonderfully for over 150 years.



### 9. Rock House

On the land to the right of Rock House was a pub called the Ring O Bells. This site was purchased in the 1870's to build a new Boys School, the **John Sellers Charity School**, which had stood in the church grounds since 1779. The original log book is still in use by the clerk of the Sellers Charity. The school, for boys aged 7 to 14 yrs was very important in village life, also hosting village events, as it had the biggest hall and stage. A Girls and Infants school had been built in Quarry Lane in 1863. This building together with the Boys School, closed in 1974 and the pupils moved to the new purpose built County Primary School in Quarry Lane. The Hall then became the **Parish Hall** for general community use soon afterwards.



### 10. Christleton Boys School now the Parish Hall

Immediately opposite the school is

**11. St James Church.** A wooden building probably stood on the site in Saxon times. The sandstone tower built in 1470 by Wilhelm Mayor, a craftsman from Bavaria, is the only part of the original stone building surviving. The Nave and chancel have been rebuilt on two occasions, the last being in 1876,

when the enthusiastic Rector Canon Lionel Garnett, employed the eminent Victorian Architect **William Butterfield** to redesign the nave and chancel. The building we see today has his stamp on it, with the distinctive chequered chess board design of creamy white and red sandstone above the sanctuary. There are also many fine stained glass windows, mainly the work of **Charles E Kemp & Co.** dated between 1884-1909. Two other windows are exceptional, the Baptistry window under the tower by **Alexander Gibbs** dated C 1877, and the **Millennium Window** in the Lady Chapel the work of Bill Davies of Wirral and placed to commemorate the Millennium, which depicts images of some of the historic figures who were connected with the village in some way over the last 1,000 years.

The church also has a fine **Restoration Board** commemorating the return of Royalty to the throne in 1665. This work is by Randle Holmes, Herald to King Charles I who lived in Chester, and witnessed and wrote about the civil war in the city. It is very poignant that this board is in the church, as it was garrisoned by the Parliamentarian Army between 1643-46 as described earlier. The **Battle of Rowton Moor** took place on 24<sup>th</sup> September 1645, and Royalist army defeated. The King, Charles I left Chester that evening, and from that moment was always on the move. He was eventually captured at Newark, and taken to London for trial and subsequent execution.



**St James is a Grade II** listed building in the Gothic revival style. There are many historic graves in the churchyard, including eight War Graves, maintained

on behalf of the CWGC. A full guide book can be purchased from the back of the church, which is open daily from 9.30am to 6.00pm Note the sundial set on a Derbyshire Millstone on the church path almost opposite the grave of **William Huggins**. Also the **Lych Gate** erected to the memory of Harriet Garnett of Wyreside in Lancs., mother of Rector Lionel Garnett. The oak used in its beams is believed to have come from the Bell Tower. There are eight bells in the tower dating from 1737, when the Guild of Christleton Bellringers was formed. This Tower is recognised for its fine peal of bells.

Leave the Village Green area and walk west along **Pepper Street** towards the canal and Trooper Bridge. Immediately opposite and adjacent to the Parish Hall is Church View, once the Headteachers House for the Sellers Trust School. **George Mayers** the first head, was in post for 44years. He was also the Parish Clerk, and an award winning bellringer.



A **Beating of Bounds Ceremony** takes place every ten years, over a distance of about 14miles. In several places ancient boundary stones exist, where traditionally a child is ceremonially bumped on the stone, to remind them where their parish boundary is. The ceremony takes place on or around rogation Sunday, when church services are held to bless the land, together with prayers for the farmer and farmworkers, their animals and crops that grow in the fields.



### 12. Two Gables

Built for the Mayers Family around the turn of the 20thC, it is in the style of many Victorian buildings in Chester. It was probably designed by Thomas Lockwood as a reward for the work done by the Mayers Builders on other similar buildings in the city, including St Michaels Arcade in Bridge St.

Gilbert Mayers married Doris Morgan from the Old Post Office & Bakery further along Pepper Street, and the Post Office moved to this building in 1908. **Morgan's Shop** which can only be described as a "Superstore" selling everything under the sun, was still operating in 1974. **Reg Morgan** a son, was the Village Photographer who recorded events of the village throughout his life. Most of them were sold as postcards in the shop, and are a wonderful record of Village life.

As you walk along **Pepper Street**, notice the number of elegant **Georgian Houses**, built for wealthy merchants, who traded in wool, cloth, sugar, grain, copper, soap, in Chester, Liverpool and Manchester.



### 13. Ivy House

**Ivy House** was the home of the Pickering Family, Yeoman Farmers, who later

traded in Soap, with Royal Patronage from **Queen Victoria**.

These families could easily get to Liverpool or Manchester by train or canal & ferry. Many are buried in the churchyard at St James, in fine tombs with decorated memorials. The **Pickerings** and extended family also began trading with Poland and other Baltic Countries from the new docks in an expanding Liverpool. **Richard Reece** another member of the family was, together with John Wesley, a founder of the Methodist Church movement. He was responsible for the first meeting place in Christleton, on the upper floor of Morgan's shop almost directly opposite Ivy House.

**Christleton House** on the right of the street just beyond the Church pathway is another Georgian house dating from 1760. It has a gazebo at the end of its garden, and a false or painted window on the church side. It was owned by the Hodson Family prominent in village life between 1600-1800, who were also related to the Pickering's at Ivy House. They were churchwardens at St James in 1737, and responsible for the rebuilding of the church at that time, using a "**Parliamentary brief**" a system used to get churches throughout the land to contribute to the re-building at Christleton. They signed their names with the wax seal with the image of a swan, which is possibly the origin of the swan as the Village Emblem.



**Former Post Office Store & Bakery**  
**14. Village Stores and Bakery.**

This building which once stood on the corner of Windmill Lane was the first

Post Office in the village with Stores and Bakery attached. The lane led to the village windmill up on the sandstone ridge, now marked with a ring of conifers. The mill is recorded as being in the ownership of the Sneyde Family from Staffordshire in the 17thC. It seems to have been taken down in 1840.

Across the road you pass the former site of a huge barn for storage of the grain/flour. The Georgian house on your right is **Stoneydale**. It originally had three storeys, and was said to have been the summer house for the Bishop of Chester. It was also the home of the Dolphin Family, whose youngest son John an engineer, rose to fame as one of a small band of men who founded the SOE (Special Operations Executive) defending England in case of a land invasion by the German Army in WWII. He became **Lt Col. John Dolphin CBE**.

The Victorian House opposite Stoneydale is Faulkners Lodge, home to the **Cullimore Family** for many years. Members of the family were very active in the political and business life of the City & County. **2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. John Cullimore** Cheshire Regt. was outstanding in his bravery during the Gallipoli Campaign, but sadly died in Amara, Iraq in the following battle. The family donated a unique and large archive of glass slides & negatives to the Local History Group, which illustrate village life between 1900-1920. An amazing collection.

As you continue to walk along Pepper Street, notice another Gazebo, a square shaped tower, and also small outcrops of sandstone from the village quarry which existed to your left on the land you see down to the canal. The perimeter walls of Christleton Hall, are constructed of local bricks on top of the red sandstone. There are also some fine specimen trees, planted when the house was first built around 1750.



**Christleton Hall.**

### 15. Christleton Hall

This historic house set in its own grounds with a walled garden, was built by Thomas Ince, as an establishment to rival that of his father-in-law Robert Townsend at the Old Hall. Thomas got into debt whilst building the property, but his wife Elizabeth, Robert's daughter died shortly after its completion, so somehow the debt was removed. Thomas later re-married and became a successful wine merchant in London. His son Townsend became the owner and married **Lucy Ann Fuller Meyrick**, a descendant of Sir Francis Drake. The family Townsend Ince then became very influential in village and county affairs, and it was Lucy Ann who provided the funds for many of Canon Lionel Garnett's projects, including a new Church, two new schools, and the Village Institute. The house remained as a private house until in 1928 when it was acquired by Salvatorian Brothers, an organisation of Jesuit priests, who created a training establishment. They even had a small burial ground behind the house. One interesting fact that has emerged is that during WWII, German Brothers training here were taken to the Isle of Man as Prisoners of War.

In 1974 it was sold to the Law Society who established one of three national colleges here. In 2023 it was subsequently acquired by developers who are currently preparing the site for residential use.



### 16. The Old Trooper Inn

An Inn named the Old Trooper was in existence before 1900, and the proprietor was also a "**Tanner**" by trade. He and his men produced leather from animal skins for the use of shoemaking, and a Mr Jones a local cobbler had his workshop just along the canal bank behind Roadside. His son Alfred Perry (Percy) Jones became a "Cobbler" at Flint. He joined the Royal artillery as a Bombardier and was killed in action in WWII.

*(While you are in this part of the Village, you might like the opportunity to look at The Abbotts Well Hotel, and the Old Glass House on Whitchurch Road. To do this you need to go back onto the A41 and walk on the pavement in the direction of Chester and over the railway bridge.)*

### 17. The Abbotts Well.

Within a short distance you are directly opposite the site of what was in Victorian times a grand house called **Christleton Bank**, the home of Ambrose Dixon and family. Later of **Lt Col & Mrs Edward Townsend Logan, Cheshire Regt.** Edward died commanding the 15<sup>th</sup> Bttn. Durham Light Infantry in WWI. It is now the Mercure Hotel at **The Abbotts Well**. Water from a well in the fields behind the hotel was the original source of water for the **Abbey in Chester**. Clay pipes of 1 1/2inch diameter were laid from this well through Boughton into the City. The water flowed by gravity into the cloisters at the Abbey.

*Continue walking along the A41 towards Chester and in a short distance you will see on your left the Old Glass House.*



### **18. The Old Glass House.**

The former **Old Glass House Inn** is one of the oldest houses in the Parish, dating from about 1600, and the boundary between Christleton and Boughton. There are several boundary stones around the house, as well as one of the 1847 stones on the pavement nearby. The Inn has a fascinating history and first appears on John Ogilby's map of the route from Chester to London in 1695. The Inn was said to have had an excellent cuisine when visited by the "County Gentry" between 1680 and 1720 when owned by John Witter a Yeoman. He became overseer for the poor in Boughton. Parts of the 17<sup>th</sup>C building survive today, including brick cellars with stone flagged floors

Now return back along Whitchurch Road to pick up your trail on the canal towpath behind the **Trooper Inn**. Walk in an easterly direction towards Quarry Bridge, and as you do so look out for a kingfisher which frequents this part of the canal in winter. The field opposite was once the site of Village Celebrations for Coronations. It was also the site of the Village Quarry, which provided a source of building stone for the Walls of Chester in Roman times, for the Church in Christleton, and for the red sandstone walls all around the village. The Quarry became disused in the 1930's and was planted over with trees.

### **19. The Shropshire Union Canal.**

This section of the Chester Canal was dug out between 1772-75 by navies working for The Chester Canal Company. They completed the section between Chester and Nantwich by 1778, an incredible feat

of engineering, as the canal is double width throughout this section to enable double width "flats" to operate especially carrying grain. The locks were built of local stone and brick, and the winding hole near Quarry Bridge was the turning point for the barges (Mersey Flats) taking grain to Butlers Mill which you will see on your right.

### **20 Butlers Mill.**

The Butler Family ran this operation for over 100 years, and combined the art of milling flour for breadmaking, with that of producing animal feeds for the local farming community. They used a system of pulleys attached to a horse, (which walked along the towpath) to lift the cargo of grain sacks onto the top floor of the mill. Horse power was then replaced by a more efficient gas engine. The Mill closed in 1973 and was tastefully converted into flats. You can still see evidence of the hoist cover, the old bakery door and the different floors of the milling operation.



### **Butlers Mill**

Continue walking along the towpath, going under Quarry Bridge and in 800 metres you will see the Cheshire Cat Inn on your right.

### **21. Cheshire Cat Inn**

This Georgian style house and gardens was built on a piece of land called Streetway Hill, and occupied in 1611 by Ralph Goulbourne a Yeoman Farmer. Since then it has had various uses, as a family house, been occupied by the Military in WWII, a Farm Shop and now an Inn. As a gentleman's residence it was occupied in 1903 by the Heywood Family. Arthur Heywood was an accountant from Manchester Firm of

Wool & Cloth Manufacturers, and typical of the businessmen who found Christleton an ideal place to live and with easy access to Chester, Liverpool Manchester and North Wales. He was a charitable man, who served the community on several charitable & health boards.

Just ahead of you on your left was the site of one of the three Boat Yards for the Canal Leisure Industry which were at their height of success in the 1930's.



## 22. Canal Leisure Industry

**Dean's Marina** which was on the left as you approach Rowton Bridge was responsible for fitting out and hiring the boats. **Wain's and Luxton's Yards** on the other side of Bridge 20, and along Skips Lane, built their boats out of timber, using traditional boat building techniques. Over 100 of these leisure craft were built for the embryo canal leisure industry. It was very profitable until the war years, 1939-45, but after a short decline became very active until the late 1970's.



Continue to walk towards the bridge but then take the slope to your right to the gate. Turn left at this point and walk over the bridge and into the village.

One of the cottages on your left was the home of Jones the Salt Man who provided a regular supply of salt for the village during Victorian times, when salt was need for all sorts of uses in the home.



**The Salt Man**

Continue to walk carefully along Rowton Bridge Road (there is no footpath) until you reach the area opposite the High School where it is safe to stand to see several new strands of Village History.

## 23. Ancient Highway

Quarry Lane and Plough Lane were along the route of the ancient highway from Chester to London, which crossed the three packhorse bridges over the River Gowy at Hockenhull Platts, two miles east of Christleton. The bridges were so important for the movement of troops and goods, they were maintained by Edward the Black Prince in the mid

1350's. There is credible evidence to suggest that the local name "Roman Bridges" is feasible, with two practice fortresses being found just beyond the highway. The three sandstone bridges we see at Hockenhull today almost certainly date from the 15thC.

There used to be a village pond in front of where you are standing which no doubt caused problems for travellers, as it did for pupils at the Girls and Infants School on Quarry Lane, on the corner of the lane with Rowton Bridge Road. The original school with three classrooms was built by Joseph Mayers, a local builder in 1856 for £400, raised by public subscription, with support from the John Sellers Charity. It was extended in 1883 with money from The Duke of Westminster and Lucy Ann Ince.

The curriculum for girls included sewing, reading, writing, mathematics and religious education. Most girls left to go into service or travel as companions. One of the first pupils was Catherine Faulkner (Mayers) who later became Dame Schoolmistress. The school closed in 1974 and was converted into five flats. Next door, (now a detached house) was Sadler's Stores another shop worthy of the name superstore before such places existed. Just beyond, at the junction of Sandrock Road and Quarry Lane, was a large Air Raid Shelter, capable of housing all the children from the village during WWII!



**24. The Old Smithy.**

On the left hand side of Plough Lane as you look across the road junction, was the smithy of the main blacksmith in the village. It was in use until 1998, when the last owner Mr Crump retired. Until then

horses could be seen being shod on an almost daily basis, also the beautiful iron work he produced, including gates for Eaton Hall.

As you look across towards the High School, the building on your right, is "**Hen Davarn**" the old Tavern, also called "**The Bottom of the Wood**". This was indeed an old ale house, at the bottom of the Rectory Garden. Above it and clearly seen to the rear was a small "**Dame School**"



**25. The old Tavern and Dame School**

A Dame School was usually a small village establishment where ten or twelve children would gather and be taught lessons by an older lady or "dame"

The proprietor of this school was a Miss Bennett and the first mistress we learn about was Catherine Mayers, sister of George, the Boys school Headteacher and Parish Clerk.

This area of the village was once called Woodside, and the house immediately opposite, on the corner of Rowton Bridge Road is The Clock House. This was built in 1890 by a Mr David Shepherd, a retired Whale Oil Merchant from Dundee.

## **26. Christleton High School.**

The school opened as a Secondary Modern School in 1958, built on the grounds of the old Rectory, (*Christleton Grange*) known as The Lawn. A further piece of adjacent land, The Park, was sold off for housing at the same time. In Spring the woodland around the

entrance on Village Road is always thickly covered in a carpet of crocus. The Ice House was situated underground on the south side of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary gates, adjacent to Hen Davarn.

The school house names reflect village history from local field names of, Ketlan, Bythom, Badgerette and Lawns. The first Headteacher was the inspirational Les George. A charismatic figure who led and inspired his staff team and students, to create one of the best schools of its type in England. They achieved not only great academic success, but the school became well known for its creativity in art, craft, music, drama, sport and in developing programmes of work for students in the environment. The staff and students put on plays & musicals, such as Oliver, My Fair Lady, The Marriage of Figaro, The Peasant Cantata, The Magic Flute, A Midsummer Nights Dream and Twelfth Night. The students also had the reputation of being excellent citizens, and employers keen to sign them up on leaving school. Despite being a small secondary school when it opened, it soon became a model of its type, gaining a reputation for excellence far beyond its gates.

It became a Comprehensive School in 1974, and involved children of all abilities for the first time. The school continues to be a place of excellence in the Community and its influence has spread as it is now part of The Learning Trust, a multi academy trust, with campuses at Christleton, at Queens Park High, Chester International School and Belgrave Primary School in Chester.



## Christleton High School

Walk straight along the road towards the Village centre, walking past on your left Woodfields a post war housing development, built on farmland belonging to the Old Farm, a black and white building which you will pass later on your left.

### 27. The Old Farm



This was once the main farm in the centre of the village, belonging to a character called Digger Swindley. He is reputed to have made “black pudding” and sold it in the village stores.

The building dating from 1653, was one of the first to be rebuilt after the “torching of the village” by Royalist soldiers in March 1645. The small car park you pass on route, (*The Toast rack*) was once the farm pond. Incidentally in 1910 you could travel from Chester to Christleton by waggonette for 6d, to listen to the “nightingales” in the Woodfields.

### 28. The Grange

Opposite the Old Farm is a large house called The Grange. It was the Christleton Rectory, re-built for Canon Garnett in 1870, and his initials L.G can be seen on the balcony. The motto you see roughly translates as “Bless this house”



### **The Grange.**

The house was originally Jacobean, but rebuilt in the Victorian style, and later split into two properties.

Jas Storrar who lived there until the 1980's was a highly successful vet, but also a famous Battle of Britain pilot. The Stables which is currently being re-built was the home of Sir Basil Nield, a High Court Judge and his twin sister Beryl, a former Mayor of Chester. The extensive grounds to The Grange included large landscaped gardens, and part of this area was used for Village Fetes. It is said in village folklore that The Rector, Lionel Garnett an outstanding cricketer who played for Middlesex and the M.C.C. entertained W.G Grace on the ground, which was the home of all Christleton Sports Clubs for many years.

### **29. The Cottages and the Institute.**

Many of the cottages you see as you walk closer to the centre of the village are made of local bricks, and probably made and fired at The Pit. They date from the late 1700's and were part of the rebuilding of the village after the Civil War.

**The Institute** established by The Rector and Mrs Townsend Ince, was intended to be a vital part of the development of the young men of the village. It provided a safe place to meet and learn, to be involved in sport and athletic activities and to be an active "part of the village". There were two brass bands, and even bible classes. The original building was replaced at the end of WWI, by Mr & Mrs Porritt, in memory of their son, Edward who died on the Somme. We've since discovered that Edward climbed the

Matterhorn in Switzerland as a 16yr old. Clearly a strong leader, he served the Kings Liverpool Regiment with great courage and bravery.

### **30. The Ring O Bells.**

Just ahead of you on the left is the Ring O Bells, originally The Red Lion, which opened its doors in 1817 with Mr James Venables the proprietor, who invited friends to join him at 3.00 o'clock in the afternoon for a "Grand Opening" His wife Elizabeth succeeded him and ran the pub until well into her ninetieth year.



### **The Ring O Bells.**

Later the pub was run by Joseph Mosford until 1894, when he left to run his successful butchery business, at the front of nearby Rock House, the family home. He also had a slaughterhouse in the grounds where the current pub car park stands today.



### **31. The Village Centre.**

The Village stores on the right of this picture was once the Village Post Office, and still is a very attractive store, but sadly no longer a "Post Office". Drakes Hairdressers nearby was once a Grocery Store, and in the 1960s & 70s an excellent

Haberdashery. The houses on the right stand on outcrops of sandstone, the bedrock of the village. The old Surgery was once the home of the Postons. There were thirteen children, and many like their parents were employed as servants at Christleton Hall. Bill, a gardener reached the grand old age of 105, and his son Frank, a wonderful and colourful character, and captain of the Christleton Bellringers.

The cottages on your left as you pass the Pub and opposite The Village Green, named Primrose, Holly, Clematis and Rose are thought to be over 200 years old. On the south side of the Village Green is a memorial tree for the Mosford and Partington Families servants of the village through their Butchers Shop, and leadership of the Parish Council and W.I. for over one hundred years. The trees on the Green were initially Commemorative trees for Queen Victoria's Jubilees, and lots of village events have taken place here. The small garden on the right of the area, is a memorial to the late Margaret Croston BEM who served the Village as Parish Council Chairman, PCC secretary and Chairman of Governors at the Primary School for over fifty years. Margaret with David Cummings and other members of the Local History Group researched the story of the men from the village who fought and died in the Great War. As a result of their work a further twelve men were discovered, to add to the 39 official names on the original memorial, near the Lych Gate. A new memorial to the memory of all the Village Men who fell in the Great War now stands in the centre of the Green.



There is also a delightful Village Sign, illustrated with a painting by Philip Hodges. This commemorates the 60th Anniversary of the reign of our late Queen Elizabeth II. In spring the Green is covered by hundreds of colourful crocus, which brings the space to life, as does the memorial Copper Beech tree in memory of the Mosford - Partington families.

Walk carefully across the road, and turn right into Birch Heath Lane, just beyond the old telephone box. Cross over the road, onto the pavement and head east along the Lane for about 75m. On your right you will see High Walls, an 18<sup>th</sup> C farmhouse with many interesting features. These include an original staircase, wattle & daub inner walls, a false window, and signs of an original thatched roof. It also has a dairy, an air raid shelter, and a former schoolroom for Miss Dimmer's Private School.



### **32. High Walls**

Continue for another 100m and you will see a footpath sign alongside an old sandstone stile, without its steps. Go into

the field and walk diagonally across the field to the line of trees ahead of you. Turn left here, and follow the path for 50m, turn left again following the hedgerow for another 50m or so, and walk into the Legion Meadow on your right.

There is an array of wild flowers here during the spring & summer, together with a variety of butterflies and other insects. By mid June over 75 common spotted orchids can be seen. Follow the diagonal path until you see a Meadow sign board, and a gate that leads to a path between the back of Dixons Houses and the properties of Little Mere. Walk straight ahead and reach Christleton Pit. If you came by car and parked near the Playing Fields turn right and reach the car park after 100m. Thank you for visiting Christleton. We hope you have enjoyed this heritage trail around our unique village.

David Cummings 2023



**Royal Arms at St James' Church**