

Christleton Parish Heritage Walk 4 (2.6km) (The Canons Tale)

Start at the Village Green facing St James' Church.

Historical features are highlighted in italics.



Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee Day

Canon Lionel Garnett 1897

1. The 5 Townships of Christleton Parish are;

Christleton, Little Christleton - Littleton, Rogh Christleton- Rowton, Cotton Edmunds, Cotton Abbotts. One derivation of the name Christleton is "The place of the Christians", or a farmstead with a cross. This could have been from a cross placed on the site of the Manor House, to the right of the church which was once an active farm. A church has existed here since before the Domesday Book was written, and in 1086 it belonged to Robert the Baron of Malpas. It later passed to his daughter Leticia, and by 1470 a stone building existed, built by **Wilhelm Mayor** from Bavaria. This tower still stands, although the rest of the building has been remodelled three times, the last time in 1876. **The Rector Lionel Garnett** employed the distinguished Victorian architect **William Butterfield** to do this work. **Rector Garnett** was a giant of a man, a great churchman, superb cricketer and sportsman, and was the biggest influence behind village institutions and the way the village looks today. He created The Village Fete, Village Show, rebuilt the church and schools, The Institute and all the Sports clubs.

The oak shingle covered **Pump house** in front of you indicates the site of a well, a main source of water for the village. The **Manor House** beyond is believed to date from 1603, and constructed of local bricks dug from the Pit at Littleheath. **Birch Heath Lodge Nursing Home** opposite to your right was once a Private School for Gentlemen, and opened in 1817 by the Parkin brothers. It was also a private house called Holly Bank, and in the 1970's became a Leonard Cheshire Home for severely handicapped children.

Cross over the road to the Lych Gate, and turn right past the Manor House towards Little Heath Road. Cross over by the township milepost and stand outside the Old Hall.

2. The Old Hall.

This is reputed to be one of the oldest houses in the village and dates from 1605 when it was built by the Egerton's of Tatton. Later occupants were Robert Townsend the Recorder of Chester, and the Ince Family including Townsend Ince. It was also owned by Mary Legh & J Verney Lace whose family are portrayed in the baptism window at St James', and Major W G Townsend Currie who inherited it from the Inces. It was later sold to pay death duties, and acquired by a relative, the Rev.d Alyn Arthur Guest Williams Rector of the Parish from 1924 until 1964. It was originally a black & white timbered house but was encased in red Ruabon brick in the 1890s. Captain Currie was a keen scouter and Lord Baden Powell founder of the Scout movement once stayed with him at the Old Hall.

Now walk carefully along the pavement towards The Pit, noticing the large number of former barns that are now converted into houses. The area of Church Walks was once the site of a very productive dairy farm run by the Lunt family, later farmed by the Arden's who vacated it in the 1990's, moving to Tile Farm in Guilden Sutton. Stop in front of the old Smithy Cottage where there is a small open space.

3. You have just passed the **Tithe Barn** which was used by the Rector to collect tithes. The sale of items such as timber, grain, and other agricultural products, helped to pay the salary of the Rector. The house on the corner named **Tara** was once a cobblers shop, and next door to the left was a village **Smithy**. Just beyond that on the right behind the telephone exchange were two slaughter houses owned by the **Mayers family** of nearby **Pits Farm**, and **Joe Mosford** a local butcher.

Walk on towards the Pit (Village Pond) and on route notice Hawthorn House, The Square and the Methodist Chapel.

4. Georgian style **Hawthorn House** on your right 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 St James' Church to win many competitions. The house was also the home of **Norman Wildig** who went to war in 1918 as a 17yr old, just out of school, joined the newly formed **104 Squadron RAF** and was killed whilst acting as a rear gunner/navigator of a DH9 bomber on 7th July 1918. **The Rector of Christleton GMV Hickey** quoted "**that he was killed taking bombs to the enemy**". His career lasted just over a month and he was buried with full military honours at Rixingen, where his name is read out each **Remembrance Day** as "**A Hero of France**".



Norman Wildig



The crash site at Rixingen where he was killed.

The Christleton Methodist Chapel was built in 1888 and the original building has hardly changed, although a vestry and school room was added later. One of the first families worshipping there were the **Handley's**, and **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, and its current minister is the Revd. Jo Brown.

Cross the road by the Pit and stand facing the water in front of the granite boulder.

5. The granite boulder is an erratic, a remnant of the last Ice Age, and hundreds of similar boulders can be found all over Cheshire. The clay marl found in places like The Pit was

excellent for brick making and was the source of material 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. Christleton Pit was also a pond for fish, we know this because of a court case brought against **Robert Townsend** by the Lord of the Manor, **John Harper Crewe of Caulke Abbey**, in 1772 “for the non payment of taxes since 1711 on his pond for fish”. One unusual feature of Littleheath Pit, is that it has no source of water except rain water and this has caused trouble for the parish many times over the years. The last time was in 1975/6 when it completely dried up and resembled a cracked desert landscape.



The Pit Image Phil Hirst 2020



Christleton Pit 2020

Dixon's Houses.

The black & white timbered **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** second son of the famous Victorian Architect, Sir **George Gilbert Scott**. The six residential units are home to elderly residents, and priority used to be given to residents of Littleton & Christleton.



Dixon's Alms Houses

Now walk along in front of the Alms Houses, and turn right at the small gate before the Little Mere complex. Walk straight ahead towards the meadow and take the little gate on right onto the Legion Meadow. Keep your eyes open for a group of memorial trees, and hopefully see many wild flowers on the meadow including orchids in mid summer. Follow one of the grass paths that lead west back towards Little Heath Road, which you reach through a narrow passageway between houses & gardens. When you reach Little Heath road turn left back towards the village, eventually crossing the entrance to Birch Heath Lane by the red telephone box, and stop facing the Village Green when you see a wider place to stop.

6. Rock House & William Huggins.

The large imposing **Georgian House** to the left of the Village Green, now housing the Dental Surgery was once the home of **William Huggins** an eminent painter from the Victorian era, who is said to have painted from life. A story is told locally that as his paintings were often bible stories such as Daniel in the Lions Den, that he kept a small menagerie behind the house. Many of his paintings can be seen, at **The Grosvenor**

Museum in Chester and the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool. The small **Ruabon** brick building at the front of **Rock House** was once a **butcher's shop** belonging initially to the **Mosford Family** and later **Jim & Lucy Partington**.



Joe Mosford Butchers Shop 1907



Jim Partington Butcher in 1980's

The site where the Parish Hall stands today was originally the site of the **Ring O Bells Pub**. In the 1890s the site was bought by the **John Sellers Charity** for their new Boys School, which was moved from its original site in the churchyard. This new school became a Church Boys School led by The Rector Revd. Lionel Garnett. It remained a church school until 1974, when the staff and children transferred to an exciting new purpose-built **County Primary School** in Quarry Lane. This opened on 23rd April 1974. The former Boys School then became the **Parish Hall** with strong links to St James' Church. The **Ring o Bells** name had been given to the former "**Red Lion**" building in Village Road in 1970. It had been opened by the **Venables Family** of Christleton in 1817.

Walk along Village Road, past the Village Stores, The Institute & Bridge Club, and stop opposite the black & white timbered Old Farm 1653.

7. The black & white timbered **Old Farm** was the first building in the village rebuilt after the English Civil war in 1653 and one of its most famous occupants was **Digger Swindley**. He is reputed to have made black puddings and sold them in the village stores.

The original **Institute** building was planned and guided by **Rector Lionel Garnett in 1871**, and was a place which looked after the needs of the young men of the village. All the sports clubs met here, football, cricket, rugby etc. and there were also two village brass bands "to occupy the youths in the evenings". The original building was replaced in 1917 by a new premises erected by **Edward Porritt**, a Cotton Merchant from Liverpool and his wife **Ada** in memory of their son **Edward Radcliff Porritt, 17th Batt. King's Liverpool Regt**, who died on the Somme on 30th July 1916 aged 22yrs.

The Institute now caters for all members of the community, and the former **Women's Institute** is now the **Deva Bridge Club**. Just beyond these buildings is **The Grange**, the Rectory built for Rector Lionel Garnett in 1870. Look for his crest and the initials **LG** on the balcony of the house, with its motto "**Nisi Dominus**" Bless this house. It is now two private houses.

Continue walking towards Christleton High School along the red sandstone walled footpath. Stop on the north side of the entrance to the school.

8. **Christleton High School** opened in 1958 as a County Secondary School led by the inspirational Headteacher Les George. It remains an excellent school and an exciting place to study. Just to the right of the school entrance between three large trees stood an **ice house**. This was maintained by the Rector for villagers use before the era of refrigeration. Just to the right of this was an old tavern called the "**Bottom of the Wood**". This was a popular local inn, but above it in a small annexe and still visible from the road, was a **Dame School**. The dame school mistress was **Catherine Mayers** sister of **George Mayers** the

Headteacher of the Boys School. You can also see the former **C of E Girls and Infants School** building on the corner of Quarry Lane and Rowton Bridge Road. (Now 5 apartments) and just beyond along Plough Lane to your left was one of the two village smithies. **Mr Crump** was the last **Blacksmith** working here in the 1980s. It is now a private house.



“Hen Davarn, The Dame School & The Old Smithy A photograph of the Smithy in 1907

The area around the crossroads was the site of a **large village pond** where slurry from farms and excess water accumulated in the 1800s before the advent of a sewerage system. There were times when the children from the Girls & Infant School couldn't get home after school. The former highway from **Chester to London** once ran through the village. The road leaving Chester came through **Boughton** and along the **Whitchurch Road** until it led into **Quarry Lane**. It continued along **Plough Lane** and then over the ancient pack horse bridges at **Hockenhull**. We learn that through history Kings and Queens have travelled this route. **Edward The Black Prince** paid 20s for the upkeep of the bridges in 1353, and travellers such as **Celia Fiennes** the “**Lady on the White Horse from Banbury Cross**” describes the route in her travel diary in 1698.

9. The main occupation of the village through the ages was **Farming** and the “**Woodfields**” were the fields belonging to the **Old Farm**. In 1911 one of the nearby cottages in Quarry Lane was built by **Fred Wright**, and his eldest daughter 10yr old **Effie** kept a diary and on one page she painted a beautiful “**nightingale**” It is clear she did so after seeing and hearing such a bird, as “Waggonettes” were reported by the local newspapers to have come from Chester carrying people to listen to the “**nightingales**” in **The Woodfields**. One of her brothers **Cecil** died in France on **9th November 1918**, but four others survived.

Cross the road carefully at this point and go onto the bank opposite, alongside the houses of the Woodfield Estate. Keep on the footpath along Quarry Lane, crossing the two roads of the housing estate and reaching the Primary School entranceway.

This County Primary School was opened by **Christleton resident & City Mayor Wilf Mitchell** in **1974**, and as well as being an excellent school, offering a wide curriculum for its students, it hosts the **Village Fete** each year.

Walk along Quarry Lane in front of the Primary School until you reach the big oak tree. Carefully cross over the lane, onto the canal side of Quarry lane. Stop on the bridge.

10. Quarry Bridge now carries pedestrians across the canal, but it was still being used for vehicular traffic in the 1950's. Evidence of a Roman Road was found at the base of the bridge and Quarry Lane in the 1980's, and the Quarry that existed in the fields ahead of you, provided stone for the **Roman Walls in Chester in AD73**, as well as for the buildings and walls of the village itself.

11. Christleton and the Leisure Boat Industry

Further along the canal as you look east towards Rowton Bridge there were three important boat yards producing leisure craft for the Canal Industry. **Dean's Marina**,

Wain's & Luxton's Boat yards built over one hundred wooden leisure cruisers for families to enjoy holidays afloat. The boat building stopped in the 1960's. (See Walk 1 The Boatman's tale)

12. Butler's Mill now residential accommodation was a mill built in the 1850's producing agricultural foodstuffs and products for local farms. It also had a small shop and bakery. The mill owned by the Butler Family was in operation until the 1970s. The mill was supplied with grain by "**Mersey Flats**" which were horse drawn and these double width boats could be turned around in the basin just beyond Quarry Bridge.

The Shropshire Union Canal was originally constructed as the **Chester Canal in 1772**, and designed by **James Brindley**. This section from Chester to Nantwich through Beeston was completed in three years. It was built to carry agricultural cargo such as oats, wheat, corn etc. It was then connected to the **Ellesmere & Montgomery Canals**, and later amalgamated further to form part of the **Shropshire Union Canal Company** taking goods from the Midlands but primarily from **Ellesmere to the village of Netherpool on the River Mersey**, later to become the town of **Ellesmere Port**.



Wain's Boat Yard near Rowton Bridge



Butler's Mill

Now walk towards the pedestrian crossing on Whitchurch Road and turn right. Walk a short distance along the pavement and take the entry to the towpath just before the Mill buildings. Turn left and notice the overhanging mill gantry ahead (now part of a housing complex), and the old bake house door, and then walk along the canal to The Trooper Inn. (Sadly now closed)

13. The Trooper.

The Trooper was the name given to a **Civil War horse soldier**. **The Battle of Rowton Moor** took place around the townships of Rowton and Christleton on September 24th 1645. The **Parliamentarians** had control of Christleton and **King Charles 1st** was within the city walls in Chester. (See The Cavaliers Tale Walks 2 & 3)

Adjacent to **The Trooper Inn** was a **Tannery**, producing leather from animal skins for use in shoemaking, and Mr Jones a cobbler had his premises close by on Roadside. The big field opposite was often used to hold village sports and particularly for Village Coronation celebrations. The races included swimming across the canal!

Go under the Trooper Bridge, take the steps up left from the canal side, or the slope, and then go left again over the bridge and into Pepper Street towards the Village Centre. Stop just before the gate to the University of Law .

14. Thomas Ince & Christleton Hall.

Christleton Hall was originally built in the 1760s as a private house by **Thomas Ince** to rival the house of his father in law, **Robert Townsend at The Old Hall**. Thomas got into debt building the property, but as his wife Elizabeth died shortly after their marriage, somehow the debt was removed. He later remarried and became a wine merchant in London. His son **Townsend** then became the owner of **Christleton Hall** and married **Lucy**

Ann Fuller Meyrick a descendant of Francis Drake and they funded a great deal of the new building projects planned by Rector Canon Lionel Garnett. The Hall later became a grand private house, and owned by several distinguished families, but in the 1920s was sold to become a **Salvatorian College**, a training establishment for **Jesuit Priests**. In 1974 it changed again and became one of three national **Colleges of The Law Society**. It is currently the University of Law, but the site is up for sale for possible conversion to housing. (2020)

Walk along the road until you reach Windmill Lane. As you walk look out for evidence of the sandstone bedrock of the Quarry. These red sandstone walls are typical of those constructed from local stone. The marl bricks above the stone work were made & fired at Christleton Pit, and the small Gazebo ahead of you is said to have been used by ladies of the village to entertain and have afternoon tea.

15. The village windmill existed at the top of **Windmill Lane** until the 1840s together with **The Johnson Family and later Morgan's Bakery & Stores**. It was also the first Post Office in Christleton.



An old Village Bakery & Post Office



Georgian Ivy House

Notice the fine **Georgian Houses** in this part of the village where wealthy merchants of Liverpool and Manchester set up their homes. **Stoneydale** on your left is also said to have been a summer house for the Bishop of Chester. **Faulkners Lodge** opposite is an early Victorian property which was the home of the **Cullimore Family** who played an important part in the life and the village, city and county over 150 years.

Just beyond is **Ivy House**, another elegant Georgian property dating from 1713. It has three storeys with the roof hidden behind a decorated balustrade. There is a delightful semi circular sunrise panel above the door and a lever mechanism to operate the door bell. It has a Jacobean staircase and several large rooms typical of this period. It was once occupied by the **Pickering's** who were **Yeoman Farmers**, but also involved in soap making, and had a Patent for its products from **Queen Victoria**. The family were also involved in the formation of the Methodist Movement, through **Richard Reece**, a one time companion of **John Wesley**, and in conducting trade with Poland and many Baltic Countries through the expanding docks in Liverpool.

The line of smaller red bricked cottages were the homes for the **tanners men**, and the black & white "**Two Gables**" was designed by Thomas Lockwood for the **Mayers Family**. It was built by **John Mayers & Company**, who were employed to do a great deal of the work in Chester, for the **Grosvenor Estate** and their architects, **John Douglas** and **Thomas Lockwood**. This is no doubt why many of the buildings in this part of the village are made of red **Ruabon** brick, developed and produced for the Grosvenor Estate at their Ruabon works. These buildings can all be dated after 1885 because of this. "**Two Gables**" was the first home of Gilbert Mayers and his wife Doris (nee Morgan). **The Post Office** moved here in 1908, when the old Post Office & Bakery at the corner of Windmill Lane was rebuilt.

Church View next door was the home of **George Mayers**, School Master and Parish Clerk, another of the Mayers bellringing family. George was head of the **John Sellers Charity School** once sited on the west side of the Church Green. The move to the old “Red Lion” site took place in the time of Rector Rev.d Lionel Garnett whose own memorial cross is on that Green. George was followed as Headteacher by **Sam Earlam** who was responsible for most musical events & village entertainment at the turn of the century, including running a brass band. A tea ticket found under the floorboards of Church View showed the price of 1s 6d, a very large sum of money at that time. However the money was being used to fund the running costs of the school, which had previously come from the proceeds of the **Village Fetes**. **Christleton House** on your left, is another Georgian style house dating from 1760, with a false or painted window on the church side of the house, and an interesting porch. The house also has a fascinating garden complete with a brick gazebo. It was once owned by the **Hodson Family**, prominent in village life between 1600-1800, who were also churchwardens at the time of the 1737 rebuilding of the church in that same Georgian style.

Now walk along until you reach the Littleton footpath and the small gate to the churchyard, once the entrance to the Sellers Charity School. The large tomb on the left of the church footpath was for burials of the Townsend Ince Family. Finish your walk at the Lych Gate, or enjoy a visit to St James’ Church which has an open door policy for worship and visits each day.



The interior of the Butterfield building



A Flower Service on the Church Green

St James’ Church

People have worshipped in this area of Christleton since the village was first founded probably around 650AD. The initial wooden cross was replaced by a building that was in the ownership of **Robert Baron of Malpas** in 1086. The current tower dates from 1470, and the nave and chancel from 1886/7 when it was largely rebuilt by the efforts of Canon Lionel Garnett, Lucy Ann Ince and the Parishioners. The building is constructed of red sandstone from **Christleton, Waverton and Delamere Quarries** and creamy white **Stourton stone** from Wirral. The design was by William Butterfield with stained glass windows mainly by the famous glass artist **Charles Ermer Kempe**. The tower has a peal of eight bells and the Guild of Bellringers at St James’ goes back to 1743. The list of Rector’s of St James’ date from the year 1215.

Our current **Rector is Rev. Dr. Stefan Collier** and services held at 9.00am Communion, 10.45 Family Service/Morning Worship and 4.00pm Evensong or Contemplative Worship.



Georgian St James' in 1831.

David Cummings 2020