

Christleton Parish Heritage Walks Walk 5 (6km)

Historical features are highlighted in italics.

Littleton Township Trail.

Start on the Village Green facing St James' Church.

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 here 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 of 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.*

Walk through the Lychgate, and go to the right of the church, passing the grave of William Huggins the artist on your right, many of the Mayers family graves, and just beyond the church building stop at the large Dixon Tomb on your left.



Littleton Hall



Thomas Dixon's Chester Bank

2. The Dixons of Littleton Old Hall were very influential in the life of the Parish. *The first Thomas Dixon, a timber merchant and former Captain in the Merchant Navy had served under Admiral Rodney. He also had lease of a dock in the old Port of Chester and the family fortunes were built on the timber industry, and later Banking, when a younger **Thomas founded** one of the first banks in the city in Northgate St. He later sold the land to the Council and a new branch was built in Eastgate Street. The elegant classical designed building is still there today, now trading as the National Westminster Bank. Thomas was the toast of the City and his work is commemorated by a white marble plaque under the tower at St James' Church. One of the city businessmen who trusted him most was **Thomas Brassey** who used the **Dixon** bank to hold his accounts whilst building his railway engineering empire, throughout the world. Thomas who was held in the highest regard in the city and in the Parish attended the Kings School, and in addition to his role as a banker, became a **Councillor, Alderman, J.P., Magistrate and Mayor of Chester**. The Dixons also built the **Alms Houses in Littleheath** in memory of James Dixon who died in 1864.*

Now return to the front of the church and go towards the tower. In front of the Tower doorway, look for the Littleton Township Boundary stone. CP LT 1847 rescued by the bellringers when the new ring road roundabout was being built.

Continue along the church footpath towards Pepper Street and stop at the gate

3. The John Sellers of Littleton Charity School.

*This area of the churchyard was once the site of the **John Sellers Charity School**, which in 1789 provided education for the poor children of Christleton, Littleton and later Rowton. The Minute Book of the Charity is still used today, and the Charity funds projects for both individuals and the local schools. The church played an active part in the running of the school, helping with funding and guidance, with the Rector's and their wives being actively involved. The building was a two storey affair educating perhaps 100 children in subjects such as "reading, writing, arithmetic, gauging and navigation, spinning, sewing, knitting and other manual work". The trustees had to supply books, wheels, or other implements as required, and if the money was available, apprentice the poor children."*

*There are memorial plaques to the **Sellers and Gorst Families of Littleton** in the church porch, as their graves were removed when the new porch was added in 1876.*

Now go through the gate and turn right and take the footpath alongside the churchyard to Littleton. Stop near the oak tree on the top of the rise, just before a large oak tree and hedge on your left.

*4. **The large oak tree is the Morris Oak** which stands out as one of the oldest trees in the Parish. To your left is the **Mill Mound** site of the last **Christleton windmill** which was taken down in the 1840's. The site is marked by a ring of conifers, on the land now part of Christleton Hall. The fields around you are part of the heritage of farming in the parishes where once dairy products would have been the norm, with butter and cheese making taking place in many of the 25 dairy farms which existed in Christleton Parish alone. The **Lunts** and the **Ardens** were the last two farming families in this tradition at the farm which was situated on the land which Church Walks and the Church car parks occupy.*

Continue walking along the footpath until you reach Pearl Lane. Turn right and walk towards the crossroads in Littleton opposite Castle Cottage & Fir Tree Lane. Take care to keep single file and keep to the right of the road, as it is quite a busy one at times.

*5. **Cliff Boddy** one of the great characters of the Parish who was born in Littleton talked about there being a **Quoits Alley** on the way to school in Christleton. He also talked about the tradition of **leather production** in Littleton manufactured by the **Gorst Family** at their **tan yard at Littleton Hall Farm. Littleton Old Hall** (built in 1632) where the **Dixon Family** lived can just be seen on the left as you look towards Christleton. **Philip Hunter** a first class horseman also lived here, a man who promoted the **Christleton Agricultural & Horse Shows, The Littleton Point to Point Races which were held until 1978, and also became Master of the Cheshire Forest Hunt.** They also played polo in the fields behind the farm buildings.*

Cross the road and walk east towards Fir Tree Lane. However turn left into Littleton lane in 50m and walk along the lane until you see the Old Toll House on your left.



Littleton Vicars Cross Tarvin Rd Toll House



Littleton Lane Toll House

6. Toll houses were the means of collecting tolls or taxes from travellers using the Highways in the 18th/19thC. The two pictured were collecting tolls from travellers on the main Tarvin Road into Chester, and from Littleton Lane which was used primarily to try to prevent travellers avoiding the tollgates on the main roads. The A41/A51

Continue along Littleton Lane until you reach the main Tarvin Road. Keep to the right if it is safe to do so. At the crossroads stop and look across at the new sandstone cross.

7. Vicars Cross. The new sandstone cross was put up to commemorate the **Millennium** by **Littleton Parish Council led by Ted Kirk** who once owned the Nurseries which stood just along Tarvin Road on your right. (Now private housing) The original cross known as Vicars Cross was vandalised by **John Bruen a Puritan** from nearby Stapleford in 1605, one of four such crosses in the area which were destroyed. A stump of the old cross was found in the Kirk's garden. The main road here was once a **Roman Road - Watling Street**, which led from Chester to Manchester. After centuries of decay, the line of the road was reused by the **Chester Tarvin Turnpike Trust** in the 1780's to replace the much used former Chester to London route which crossed the Goway over the **Roman Bridges at Hockenhull Platts**. Barn House Surgery opposite was once the Vicars Cross Post Office and Toll House the home of **Harry Tushingham** who died on the Somme in 1917 during WWI. An **American Army Base and Italian Prisoner of war Camp** stood across the road from here during WWII. Vicars Cross House just behind you was used to house Officers from the American Army. It is said that **General Patton, Bob Hope Rita Heyworth and Glen Miller** visited the troops here. These visits were made in secret for security reasons, but local evidence suggests that these facts are true.

Now walk east along Tarvin Road until you reach the public footpath which turns right near Brickfield Lane. Take the footpath to the right towards Fir Tree Lane.

8. There is little to indicate today that the land on your right was the **crash site** of an **American Bomber** which came down whilst on a Weather Reconnaissance flight from Burtonwood. Both pilot and navigator were killed and the crash witnessed by a seven year old boy and his friend who were standing near the **Vicars Cross Post Office**. The area down to your left was once a source of clay and a brickyard with six brick kilns laid out in orderly rows which supplied bricks for Littleton, Christleton and Chester. Further to the east along the road was the main candle factory for the area, owned by Thomas Wilcoxin, which provided work for many residents of Christleton & Littleton, who used Fir Tree Lane as a route to the factory.

Continue walking to the junction with Fir Tree Lane and turn left. Follow the lane east for 300m or so until you come to the edge of an orchard, turn left, then shortly right until you pass the attractive house & garden (the converted Littleheath Barn) and then left towards Heathfield House.

9. The barn was once the candle factory mentioned earlier, and then occupied in the 1890's by **Dobies of Chester**, a quality seed producer who used the land around the area for their seed trials, and the barn for drying and packaging. **Kirks, Hunters and Dobies** were the principal nurseries in Littleton, providing seeds and produce including orchids for the wider markets in Chester and the UK. **Percy Dobie and his sister Amy** both served in WWI, with **Percy, of the Royal Scots Fusiliers** becoming a Prisoner of War after taking on a German Trench Single handed and being severely injured and captured. Amy gained an excellent reputation as a nurse in Rouen in France. Both survived the war, and Percy is buried in the churchyard at St James' together with another sister Nellie & her husband.

Heathfield House was also the home of the Dr's Vincent & Barbara Tonge who did so much to promote help for the older residents in the community, including providing facilities for a Tools for Self Reliance workshop, and the upper floor of the Barn was converted into a hostel for disadvantaged children to have short holidays.

You now have 2 alternatives. You can return the way you have just come, along the lane back to the Fir Tree Lane/Brickfield Lane crossing, or walk towards Tarvin Road, turn left and walk along the pavement on the busy A51 until you reach the Brick field Lane footpath sign. Then turn left to rejoin the footpath to Christleton at the junction mentioned above.

10. The area ahead of you, are fields which are now intensively farmed, usually with arable crops. These hide an interesting past, which is not obvious today, as we've learned that troops from the **Roman Garrison at Deva** (Chester) were sent to build practice forts along this stretch of land along Fir Tree and nearby Stamford lanes. The outlines of these three forts were spotted from the air by archaeological surveys taken when the land below was scorched by severe sun during heat waves. You are also crossing the line of the racecourse of the **Littleton Point to Point Races** which were extremely popular in the 1950's-70's.



Littleton point to Point Races



Littleheath Pit & Dixon's Alms Houses

Now take the footpath south towards Christleton, which in 200m or so deviates to the south east at a marker post, and follow the footpath at the edge of the field, go through an old sandstone stile and the line of trees to Bricky Lane, which is at the back of Little Heath Pit. Turn right and in a short distance reach The Pit. Keep walking safely around the Pit until you reach the Dixon's Alms Houses.

11. The Alms Houses & the Legacy of the Dixons.

The story of the Dixons and their heritage was told earlier, but these are the Alms Houses built by the family which provide excellent accommodation for the residents. There are six flats within the complex, which were last restored by the **Grand Order of St John of Jerusalem Charity in 1998**. The original agreement from 1868, had seen a most generous donation of land, the excellent building, and money in trust to provide repairs, maintenance and insurance for the future. The timber framed building was designed by **John Oldrid Scott** second son of **Sir George Gilbert Scott** the famous Victorian Architect, whose son **Sir Giles Gilbert Scott** later went on to design the huge **Anglican Cathedral in Liverpool**.

Walk back towards Littleheath Road and keep on the pavement back to The Village Green in Christleton.

12. As you walk back into the village you will pass **The Methodist Church 1888**, **Hawthorn House** a well designed late Georgian style House with Coach house, the **Square**, the village **Telephone Exchange**, a former **Village Smithy**, **Shoemakers Shop**, **Tithe Barn** and **Christleton Old Hall** built in 1605. You will also pass **Birch Heath Lodge Nursing Home**, which was first built in 1817 as a Private School for young Gentlemen. It later became a private house called "**Holly Bank**" and also a **Leonard Cheshire Home** for severely disabled children.

Cross the road safely to your starting point on the Village Green