

A brief history of Churchtown

Whilst Southport celebrated its Bicentenary in 1992, the ancient parish of North Meols, which includes the villages of Churchtown, Marshside and Crossens, can trace its history back to pre-Conquest days. In fact, Otegrimeles, as it was then known, was held by Saxon "Lords" up until the Norman Conquest and is mentioned in the Domesday Book which says that it was "quit of the (Dane)geld ... but rendered all other customs".

Following the Norman invasion, the lands around North Meols were passed on to William De Coudrey, who's son, Robert, built the first Manor House in the parish - now Meols Hall. At this time the parish of North Meols consisted of a narrow strip of arable land and meadows, bounded by the sea to the west and north, and by Martin Mere to the east (Martin Mere was an expanse of water which has since been drained for use as agricultural land). This meant that the area was fairly isolated and cut off from inland districts. Development was therefore slow and gradual as the inhabitants eked out a meagre living from the sea and the land, living in clamshaft and daub cottages clustered around the south wall of the Church. This small cluster of cottages eventually became known as Church Town.

A gradual process of land reclamation has been under way since the very early days using embankments and sea cops'. The first of these embankments was constructed by Cistercian monks from the Abbey of Sawley in the Ribble valley. Bankfield Lane follows the line of this first sea defence. Some years ago a wharf was discovered below the entrance gates to Meols Hall, but a thorough excavation was not possible due to the proximity of the cottages. Further cops have been built over the years gradually moving the sea further and further back.

During the middle ages, sea fishing became an important industry in the area. A colony began to develop in the areas inside the new embankments as fishermen built their cottages closer to the sea. By the 19th century sea fishing had assumed a considerable importance to the economy of the North Meols area, along with the sale of shrimps, cockles and mussels. The district where the fishermen lived became known as Marshside, and many of the shrimpers cottages can still be seen today.

Handloom weaving was introduced to the parish in the late 18th century by a man named Hooton. The industry grew considerably and large number of inhabitants were soon engaged in the weaving of silk and cotton. The industry disappeared from North Meols almost entirely by the late 19th century due to a slump in the market and the effects of the American Civil War.

For many years Churchtown was the main centre of population in North Meols. This changed in the latter half of the 19th century when the growing popularity of sea bathing, for which the adjacent shore at South Haws was found to be eminently suitable, led to a new and far-reaching development. The new town of Southport grew rapidly into one of the most attractive seaside resorts in the north of England and Churchtown was eventually subsumed into the new County Borough, along with the other villages of Birkdale and Ainsdale.

Other sites of Interest

Roe Lane

Has been called Rows Lane and Row Lane (1606 onwards) probably because of the rows of cottages which formed the hamlet of New Rowe or the newe rowe.

Crossens

Formerly Crossenes or Crosnes meaning a "ness" or headland with a cross. The cross was possibly a guide for shipping or people crossing the Ribble Estuary from Freckleton (near Lytham). A hospice or lodging house was sited in Crossens where travellers could rest after making the crossing. It is also believed to be the point at which 2,000 horsemen from a retreating Royalist force crossed the Ribble estuary following the battle of Marston Moor. They later joined the battle at Lathom Hall.

Marshside

Marshside was originally a collection of shrimpers (or shankers) cottages. Many of these cottages survive today but are hidden by modern buildings. The best examples can be found in Knob Hall Lane, Threlfalls Lane, and Shellfield and Lytham Roads.

The Fog Bell

The Fog Bell in Marshside Road was erected in 1869 and rebuilt in 1886. It was erected in order to help prevent a repeat of the tragedy which occurred one night when 7 local fishermen were lost on the marshes when out "shanking" or shrimping during a fog. The bell replaced the foghorn which can still be seen in the Botanic Gardens Museum.

RSPC Reserve, Marshside

Part of the internationally important Ribble Estuary, Marshside has some of the best lowland wet grassland in the north-west of England. It is an important refuge in winter for pink-footed geese, wigeons, black-tailed godwits and golden plovers and in spring provides nesting places for lapwings and redshanks, which are declining elsewhere.

For details about the reserve, phone 01704 536378 (9 am to 5 pm) or visit the RSPB website at www.rspb.org.uk

NORTH MEOLS CIVIC SOCIETY

is a voluntary organisation established to promote and preserve all that is best in the area of Churchtown, Crossens and Marshside for the benefit of residents, businesses and visitors. The society is also concerned to secure improvements which will not only enhance the historic and natural resources of North Meols, but also seek to promote civic pride and co-operation.

We hold regular monthly meetings at the Churchtown Primary School, Sunny Road, and work to encourage co-operation with other voluntary organisations who have similar aims.

For more information contact :

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01704 231840

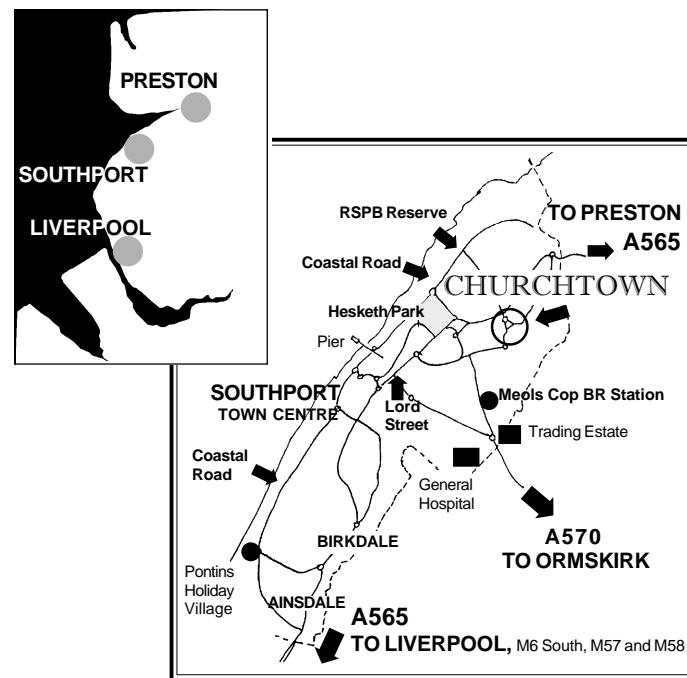
BUS ROUTES AND TIMES TO CHURCHTOWN

Visitors wishing to travel to Churchtown by bus can do so using the following services:

42, 42A, 44, 44A, 47, 47A, 48, 115
via Cambridge Road / Preston New Road, or
49, 49A, 109

via Mill Lane and Botanic Road

For further details phone the Merseytravel Line 0151 236 7676 or call at the ARRIVA offices at 1 Eastbank Street, Southport



WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK IN AND AROUND CHURCHTOWN

- THE HESKETH ARMS, Botanic Road, Churchtown
- THE BOLD ARMS, 59/61 Botanic Road, Churchtown
- BOTANIC GARDENS CAFE, Botanic Gardens, Churchtown
- CLAUDES PATISSERIE, 98 Botanic Road, Churchtown
- THE PLOUGH PUBLIC HOUSE, Rufford Road, Crossens
- THE SHRIMPER PUBLIC HOUSE, Fylde Road, Marshside

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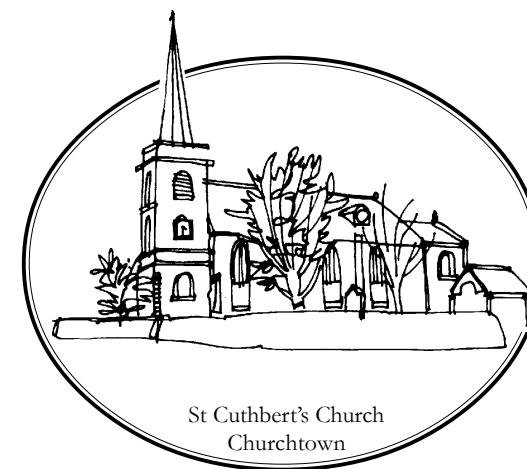
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The Churchtown Village Trail



St Cuthbert's Church
Churchtown

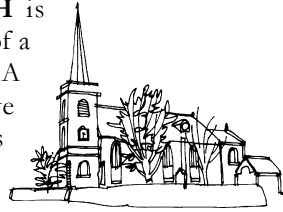
a guide
to this
historic
village

The Churchtown Village Trail

A GUIDE TO THIS HISTORIC VILLAGE

Produced by The North Meols Civic Society

1. ST CUTHBERT'S CHURCH is believed to have been built on the site of a church dating from pre-Conquest times. A place called Mele is one of the twelve resting places, in Lancashire, of the bones of St. Cuthbert during their wanderings in the 9th Century. The church was built in stone in 1571 and rebuilt in 1730-39 although very little of this now remains. The south door bears the inscription: 'James Rimmer, Thomas Rimmer, Robert Ball, Church Wardens. James Whitehead Rector 1730'. The tower and spire were rebuilt in 1850.



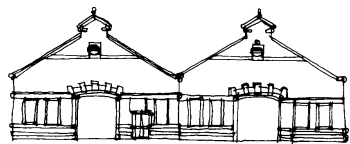
2. THE STOCKS are sited in St Cuthbert's Road adjacent to the church walls and may have been built by a John Linaker in 1741 (see inscription on the post). They were last used in 1860 when they held a John Rimmer for drunkenness.

3. THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL is the building now housing the Conservative Club. It was originally built in 1729 and was converted to a National School in 1826. The school moved to a new building in 1889 when it was known as St. Cuthbert's Church of England School. In 1911 the school was demolished and the present Churchtown Primary School was built by Southport Corporation and was known as Southport Churchtown Council School.

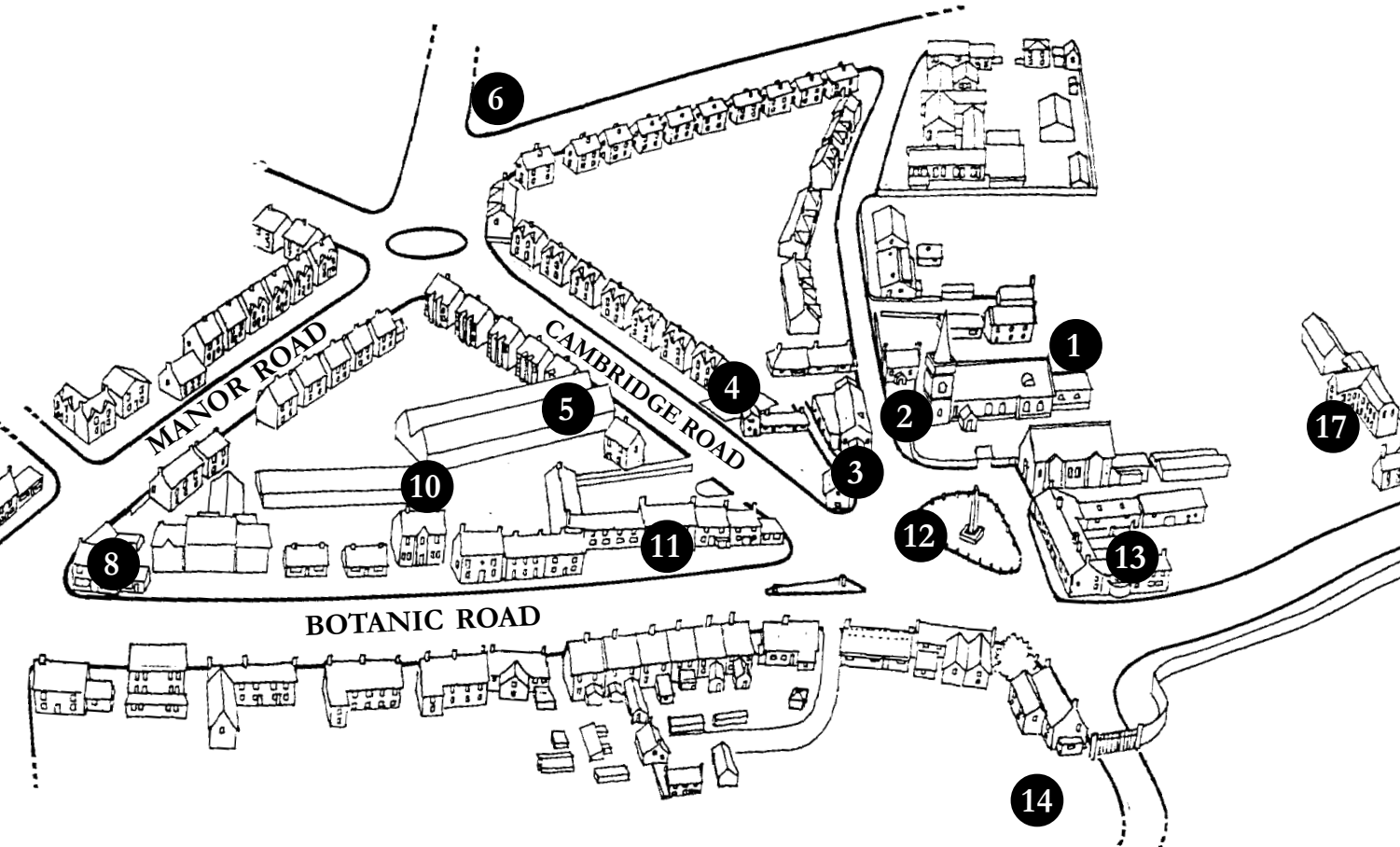


4. THE CIVIC GARDEN was opened in 1992 as the North Meols Civic Society's contribution to the town's Bicentenary celebrations. Originally the site of an ancient orchard and also the line of a track from the village to Sally's Farm, part of the site is now a wildlife sanctuary and is used by local schools for educational purposes. The rest of the site is laid out as a formal garden.

5. THE TRAM SHEDS were built in 1878 when the tramway owned by the Southport Tramway Co. extended its tracks along Cambridge Road. Prior to that the trams ran from Birkdale via Weld Road, York Road, Aughton Road, Lord Street, Manchester Road, Roe Lane, Mill Lane, and Botanic Road to the terminus at what is now the Botanic Gardens. The trams were converted to electric traction in 1900 and to omnibus service on 1st January 1935. Now the site of a new property development, only a gable-end of the old sheds remains.

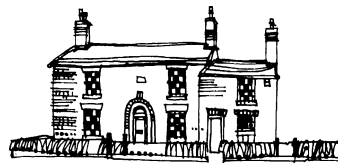


6. SUGAR HILLOCKS or SUGAR HOUSES formed part of a 'cop' or sea embankment and was the name given to the place where a cargo of sugar and potatoes was washed up from a shipwreck in 1575. Potatoes were first grown in England in this area as a consequence of this shipwreck. The Hillock later became the site of the Churchtown Railway Station.



The Churchtown Railway Station once occupied the site where the Health Clinic now stands. It was opened in 1882 and served the village until it was closed as part of the Beeching Cuts in the 1960s. The line went from Chapel Street Station via St. Lukes (Rose Hill - Ash Street) Station, Hesketh Park (Preston Road) Station, Churchtown, Crossens, and on to Preston. It was known as the Celery Line because of the market gardens it serviced.

7. BOLD HOUSE is situated at 36 Manor Road and was originally built prior to 1554. The present building dates from 1802. The site is where Kirkgate (now Churchgate) joined Marshside Lane (now Manor Road). This junction is where the Post Office now stands.

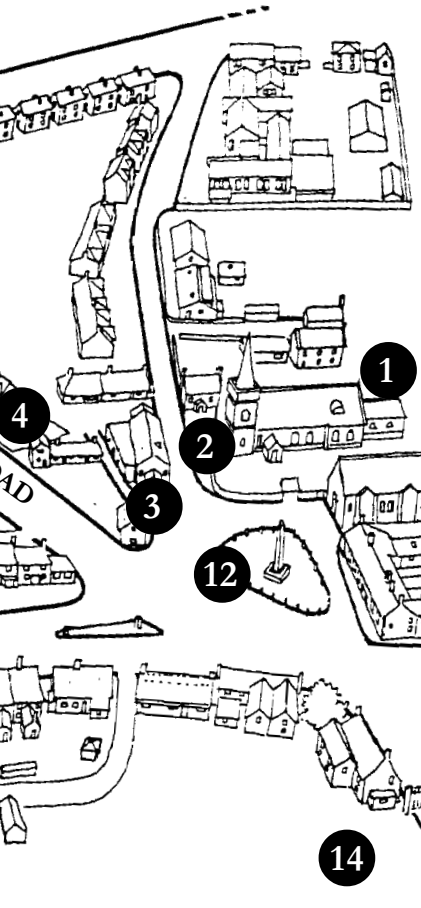
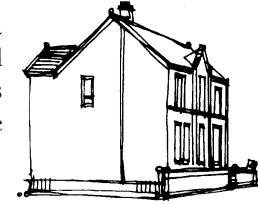


8. THE FARMERS ARMS ALE HOUSE occupied the site on the other side of the junction. The building still stands but is now a dwelling house, number 31a Botanic Road.

9. THE SMITHY and the cottages around that area stand on what was known as Cock's Clod, the origins of which are unknown. Opposite the smithy is what is now the United Reform Church, formerly the Congregational Church.



10. THE POLICE STATION - now a dwelling house number 51 Botanic Road was built at the turn of the century and was in use until the early 1950s. The cells are still in evidence at the side of the building.



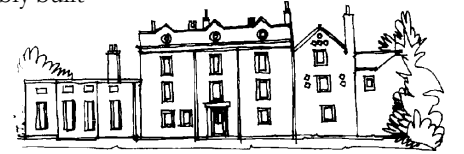
11. THE BOLD ARMS PUBLIC HOUSE used to be called The Griffin. The stable area at the rear of the building was used to house the horses for the first horse-drawn trams before the Tram Sheds were built.



12. THE VILLAGE GREEN lies at the front of the Church and was the site of the old market cross, the base of which still survives at Meols Hall. The present obelisk originally stood at Lathom Hall near Burscough and was erected here in the 1950s by Col. Roger Fleetwood Hesketh.

13. THE HESKETH ARMS PUBLIC HOUSE was originally called the Black Bull. The building was originally three fishermen's cottages. At the rear can be seen the coach house. William Sutton, also known as 'The Old Duke' was landlord of the Black Bull when he opened his bathing hut at South Hawes near what is now the junction of Duke Street and Lord Street. He later built the 'Original Hotel' on that site. This later became known as The Duke's Folly. South Hawes later became known as South Port or Southport.

14. MEOLS HALL. The first Manor House was built by Robert de Coudray. The site was probably chosen due to the proximity of the water mill on the Otterpool and the sea which came up to the embankment alongside what is now Bankfield Lane. (In 1903 the remains of a fishing wharf were found 11 feet below the ground where the Hall gates now stand). The present Hall was probably built during Elizabethan times but has been considerably altered over the years.



15. THE ROUND HOUSE AND POUND were originally situated at what is now the main entrance to the Botanic Gardens. The Round House or 'lock up' was demolished in 1874 but a copy was incorporated into the entrance and was used as a tram and bus shelter. The Pound was moved to Peet's Lane near to Churchgate.

16. THE BOTANIC GARDENS were originally opened in November 1874 by the Southport and Churchtown Botanic Gardens Company as a place with an almost endless variety of attractions, admission 4d. The Botanic Gardens Lake was formed from part of what was the Otter Pool or The Pool. This was a stream that flowed from Blowick through Meols Hall out to the Ribble Estuary. The monks who lived nearby fished for eels in this stream. The Gardens closed in 1932 but were saved from being sold for housing by the Southport Corporation. They were reopened on Saturday 28th August 1937 as The Botanic Gardens and King George Playing Fields. Although the Fernery still remains the magnificent Conservatory was demolished. The outline of the remains can still be seen in front of the Fernery and are now laid out as formal gardens.

17. THE BOTANIC GARDENS MUSEUM was opened in 1876. The famous showman Phileus T. Barnum was an advisor and his top hat can be seen on display in the museum.



When the gardens closed before the last war, all the effects and collections were sold off. However, when the museum reopened, Mr. John Scoles, the new curator collected much new material which forms the basis of the present collection.

The museum now contains many fine collections of local interest including natural and local history, a Victorian Period Room and special exhibitions of local interest. It is now the only museum in Sefton.

During the 1980s The Friends of the Botanic Gardens Museum were formed. They stopped the proposed closure of the museum and do a lot of work behind the scenes to ensure that the museum continues to stay open. The Friends also have their own shop within the museum building.

THE COTTAGES vary in age from the 16th to 18th century. The construction was originally of rough timber, mud and star grass which was gathered off the sandhills. The timber was often a tree cut in half forming crutches in the shape of an inverted 'V' at each end. Another tree being placed across the 'V's serves as a rigid pole. In some cases ship's timbers and masts were used. This is known as 'cruck' construction.