

LOWER BEBINGTON

Conservation Area

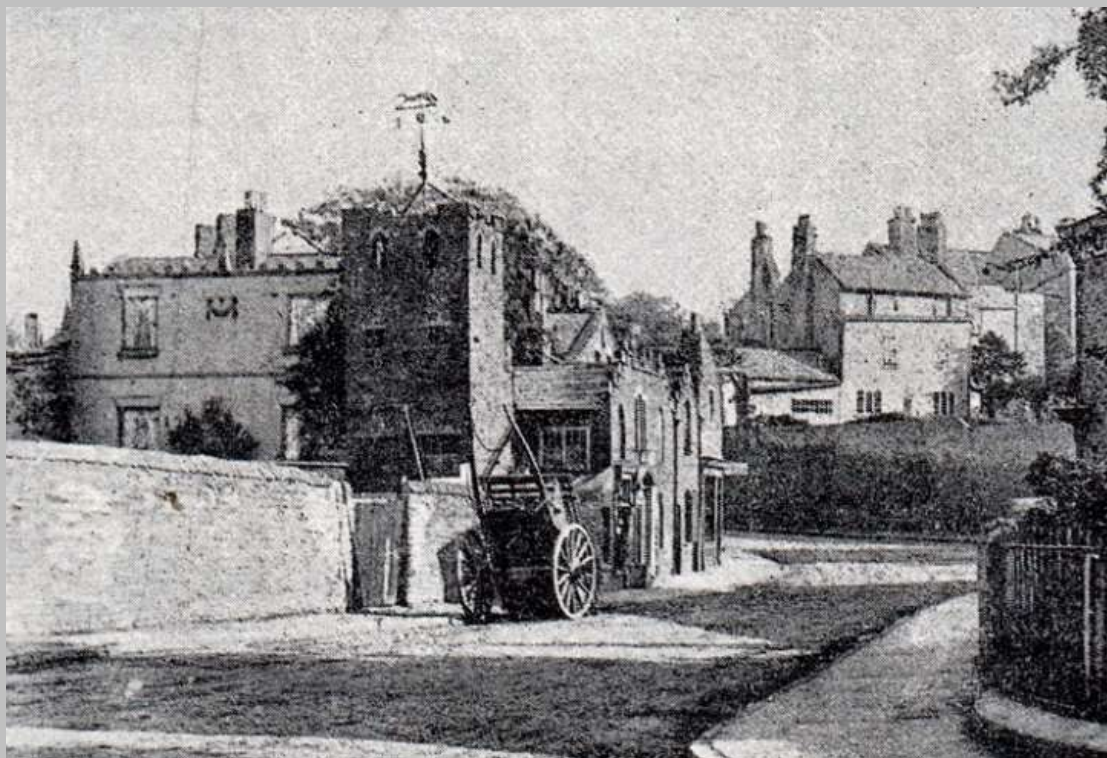


Heritage Trail

LOWER BEBINGTON

Heritage Trail





*Lower Bebington in days gone by seen from what appears to
be the corner of Acres Road, with Bebington Hall,
formerly the Rectory, in the distance*

This version ©DJF June 2022

Cover illustration: The Rose and Crown in spring

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Nathaniel Hawthorne's Description of 'Bebbington'

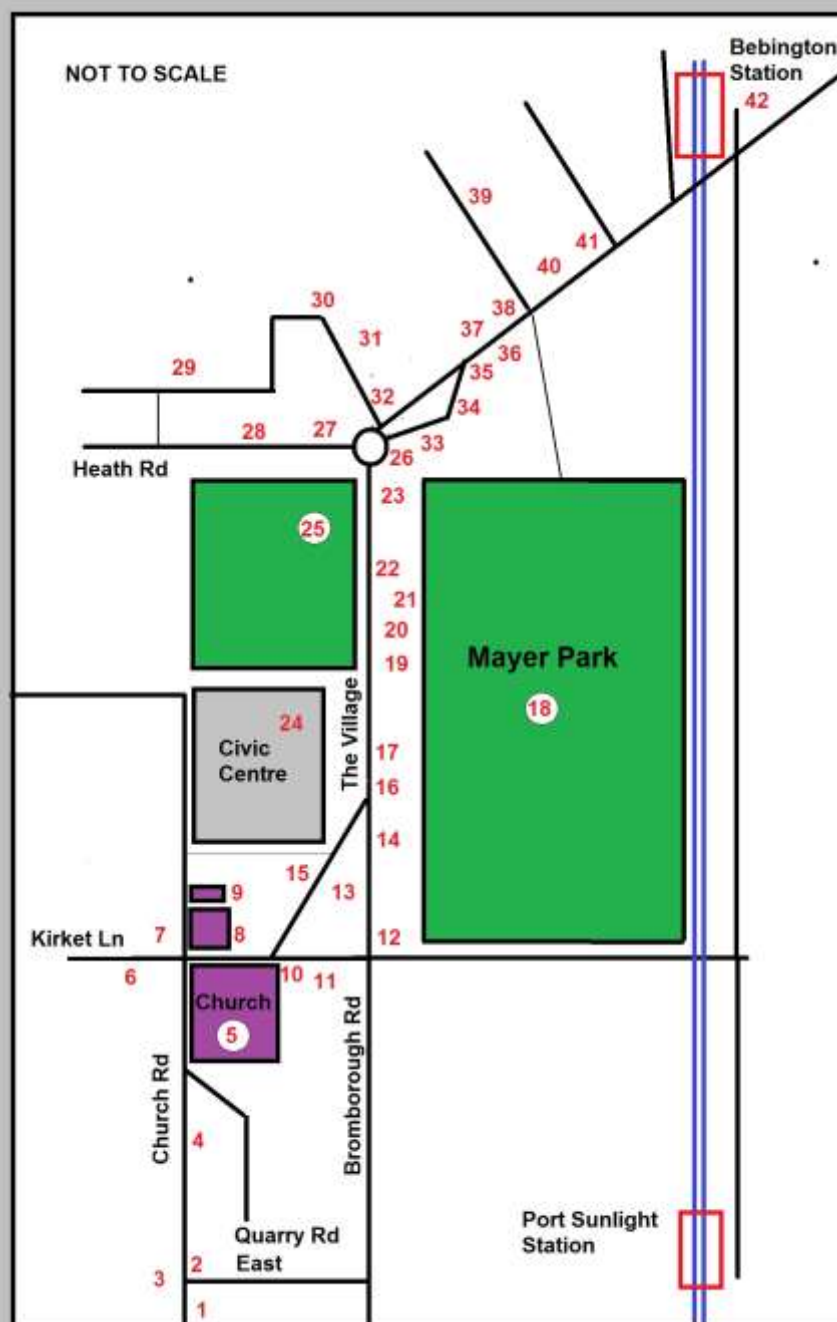
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INTRODUCTION TO THE TRAIL

LOWER BEBINGTON

Conservation Area Heritage Trail

This Heritage Trail takes the visitor round all the main features of interest in Lower Bebington. The linear route covers approximately 1.5 miles, starting just outside the boundary of the Conservation Area at the junction of **Church Road** and **Quarry Road East** and ending just outside it at **Bebington Station**. Most of the route is wheelchair accessible.



Points of Interest

- 1 Charlotte House (Church Road)
- 2 Corner of Church Road and Quarry Road East
- 3 The Stanton Estate
- 4 Mersey Terrace (Church Road)
- 5 St Andrew's Church
- 6 Kirket Lane
- 7 1930s Housing (Highcroft Avenue)
- 8 The Rectory (Highcroft Avenue)
- 9 The Church Hall (Highcroft Avenue)
- 10 War Memorial (Church Road)
- 11 Managers' Houses (The Wiend)
- 12 Entrance to Mayer Park (Bromborough Road)
- 13 The Firs (Bromborough Road)
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- 16 Park View Terrace (The Village)
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- 27 Heathdale Manor (Heath Road)
- 28 No. 32 Heath Road
- 29 Bethany Crescent
- 30 The School House (Acres Road)
- 31 The Grange (Acres Road)
- 32 Kirk's Funeral Parlour (The Village)
- 33 Willow Cottage (25 The Village)
- 34 The Grove
- 35 John George (The Village)
- 36 1-15 The Village
- 37 The Wellington (The Village)
- 38 Dog and Gun (The Village)
- 39 Townfield Lane
- 40 Cornerstone Church (Bebington Road)
- 41 Car Park (Bebington Road)
- 42 Bebington Station (Old Chester Road)

TRANSPORT ACCESS



Buses 73 (Heswall to Poulton Lancelyn) and **487** (Liverpool to Ness Gardens) stop at the bottom of Heath Road, by the Civic Centre and St Andrew's Church and near Quarry Road East.

Bus 410 (New Brighton to Clatterbridge) stops at Bebington Station, the Civic Centre and St Andrew's Church and near Quarry Road East.

Bus 464 (Liverpool to New Ferry) stops at the bottom of Heath Road and near Bebington Station.

Bus 418 (New Ferry to Birkenhead via Arrowe Park) stops at Bebington Station.

Buses 16 and 17 (Moreton to Eastham Rake) stop on Cross Lane.

Port Sunlight Station is less than 10 minutes' walk away from Quarry Road East and, like **Bebington Station**, has a frequent service to Chester, Birkenhead and Liverpool.

Parking is available at the Civic Centre (charges may apply)

Information correct as of June 2022

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BEBINGTON



An old map of Cheshire by John Seller c1700 showing 'Bebynton'

People have lived in this area since prehistoric times; Stone Age tools have been found at the site of Bromborough Court House near the Village Hotel on the A41. It is likely that there was a Celtic settlement here and the road from Chester to Birkenhead may be prehistoric or Roman.

The name Bebington means 'settlement of Bebb's people'. Bebb may have been a chief (but it can also be a woman's name or may simply mean 'protector') and the 'ton' ending indicates an early date of settlement after the Anglo-Saxon conquest. It is very possible that the historically decisive battle of Brunanburgh was fought across what is now Brackenwood golf course and Storeton Woods: in 937 King Athelstan defeated an alliance of Irish, Scottish, Welsh and Viking forces, thereby creating a united England. Archaeological finds are reported to have been made consistent with this location, though expert opinion remains divided.

Bebington is not mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 but there was a priest in the area, possibly at St Andrew's church. The first written reference to 'Bebinton' was the grant of the 'chapel' (St Andrew's) to St Werbergh's Abbey (now Chester Cathedral) in 1093. During the Middle Ages most of the land in the area was held by the Massey Stanley and Lancelyn families (Lancelyn Greene from 1570 when Elizabeth Lancelyn married Randle Greene).

For centuries Bebington was a quiet rural community. In 1620 or before a 'cow charity' was set up, by which cows donated to the scheme as legacies were loaned to the poor at 4d, later raised to 2/8d, a year. Only reliable people could borrow the cows, whose horns were branded with the initials of the rector and the parish. There was also a bread dole from 1641.

The growth of Liverpool meant that up to thirty coaches a day might pass through the village in the early 19th century and by the 1840s, while the village was still mostly agrarian, things were beginning to change. The population of Lower Bebington was 279 in 1810, 1,187 in 1840 and 3,768 by 1870. Merchants escaping the pollution of Liverpool were building houses in the pleasant environment not far from the ferry services and the coming of the railway (1840) and New Chester Road (1844) made the area in general more connected to the outside world

though Lower Bebington itself was somewhat by-passed and, as Harold Young put it in his *Perambulation of the Hundred of Wirral*, 'went peacefully to sleep'. Nathaniel Hawthorne, the American consul and author who lived in Rock Park, visited in the 1850s and described the people going to church as 'respectable-looking' and the children as 'cleanly-dressed'.

In the later 19th century suburbanisation began to envelop the old village and the development of Port Sunlight brought a major industry to its doorstep. Young noted in 1909 that, while 'there is still a rural feeling in Bebington, and many of the cottages are pretty, with nice old-fashioned gardens ... It has, however, awakened again, for great works have come into the close neighbourhood'.

The twentieth century brought further residential development until almost nothing was left of the rural setting but much of the development has been organic in nature with buildings surviving from many different eras and a key feature of the conservation area is the strong presence of trees and mature landscaping so that here and there one can still get a sense of the old village.

With its excellent transport links, amenities, schools and access to the green heart of the Wirral it is no wonder the CH63 postcode was recently judged the best place to live in England!

The term 'Lower Bebington'

The name 'Lower Bebington,' as opposed to Higher – or Superior, Upper, Little or Over – Bebington, had already been 'adopted by the magistracy, and acted upon in county affairs' by 1847 and is shown on the 1875 OS map but the village was not always called that. In the 11th century the area was called Bedintone; later variants include Byuinton, Bevyngton, Nether Bebinton (1249), Inferior Bebinton (c1280), Lower Bebynton (1439), Lower Bebyton (1594), Bebbington, Great Bebington, Kirke Bebynton and Church Bebytone.

Today there is a sign outside Wirral Grammar School for Girls which says 'Higher Bebington' in one direction but only 'Bebington' in the other!

Local Government of Bebington

1863 Lower Bebington Local Board

1922 Bebington and Bromborough Urban District

1933 Urban District of Bebington

1934 Coat of Arms granted

1937 Borough of Bebington (including Bromborough and Eastham)

1974 Wirral Borough Council

Bebington Coat of Arms

The coat of arms of Bebington was granted on 3 January 1934. The shield featured two wheat sheaves, an emblem of the county of Cheshire, and a ship to represent the borough's proximity to the River Mersey and the Manchester Ship Canal. The saltire of St Andrew is in the upper-centre and Bromborough Cross is featured at the top of the crest. The saltire of St Andrew is in the upper-centre and Bromborough Cross is featured at the top of the crest.



Bebington Coat of Arms

The Trail

1 Charlotte House (Church Road, Quarry Road East)

Now a care home but formally called Edgeworth, this was the childhood home of Charlotte ('Lottie') Dod (1871-1960). Lottie was the multi-talented daughter of a rich cotton merchant. As a girl she played the piano and banjo and she was member of a local choir. They had a tennis court at Edgeworth (where the modern entrance is); her early successes won her the nickname 'Little Wonder'. In 1887 Lottie won the first of her five Wimbledon titles (there were only six entrants that year and she wore a metal-and-whalebone corset which punctured her skin and caused her to bleed as she played). The *Guinness Book of Records* has named her as the most versatile female athlete of all time – she also competed or participated in golf, field hockey and archery, ice skating, tobogganing, cycling, curling and mountaineering. She also won the British Ladies' Amateur Golf Championship, played twice for the England women's national field hockey team (which she helped to found) and won a silver medal at the 1908 Summer Olympics in archery. Her brothers and sister were also good at sports: Annie was a good tennis player, golfer, ice skater and billiards player, Willy won the Olympic gold medal in archery at the 1908 Games, whilst Tony was a regional level archer and a chess and tennis player. In 1905 the family sold Edgeworth and moved south. Lottie was a volunteer nurse in WW1. She died, appropriately, listening to Wimbledon on the radio.



Edgeworth – childhood home of Lottie Dod (right), now a care home named after Bebington's most illustrious daughter



*The front of 'Charlotte House' – formerly Edgeworth.
The impressive chimneys are an indication of wealth*

2 Corner of Church Road and Quarry Road East

Originally there used to be a cottage on this corner, the home of the flagman who stopped traffic for the quarry train which at this point crossed the road on its route from Storeton to the River Dibbin and thence the Mersey for shipment. The tramway was opened in 1838 and operated downwards by gravity and returned under horse power.

3 The Stanton Estate

The estate opposite was judged the finest in Wirral at the time of its completion in the 1930s.

4 Mersey Terrace (Church Road)

Mersey Terrace is a neo-classical Regency (early 19th century) terrace in lime stucco render. Typical Regency carved stone gateposts in a low stone wall have survived. The Conservation Area report notes the end-gable chimneys, slate roof, parapet gutter and cornice, fanlight over the door and panelled pilasters either side of the front door.



Regency Houses on Church Road

5 St Andrew's Church

St Andrew's church has dominated the village for a thousand years and continues to play an important social role in the community. The curved form of the church yard may indicate that it is an early Celtic Christian or even pre-historic religious site and some say it was once a burial mound. The curved shape prevents evil spirits hiding in corners according to ancient beliefs. There has been a dramatic build-up of earth around the building over time, due to successive burials, imports of material and levelling and soil action. The first reference to the church was in 1093 when Scirard or Seward de Lancelyn granted the chapel to the Abbey of St Werburgh in Chester.

An originally timber Saxon church was rebuilt in stone just before the Norman Conquest and some of the stones from this church can still be seen in the south nave wall by the porch. The Storeton sandstone used

in the medieval church was light in colour and may have given the building its alternative name of 'Whitechurch'.

The church was rebuilt four times the size c1120-1130 with a central tower and two Norman arches can still be seen with further work in 1280 in the Decorated style (south wall and porch). At that time St Andrews's may have become a collegiate church with a resident team of clergy performing services day and night. In the 14th century the tower was moved to the west and the north aisle widened. In the 16th century the chancel was rebuilt in the Perpendicular style – it is suggested that the Abbot of Chester was spending money in anticipation of the Dissolution of the Monasteries but the evidence suggests that work had already started around 1520. Whatever the case, the work was not completed. Sadly the stained glass was destroyed during the Commonwealth. Cromwell's troops based nearby on Abbot's Grange supposedly used the steeple for target practice. The church was apparently looking rather dilapidated by the 19th century. In 1805 the tower was struck by lightning and had to be repaired and in 1847 a more extensive reworking was undertaken, adding a north aisle using the original materials. Further work was undertaken in 1867, when the spire was damaged in a gale, 1871 and 1897. The parish had transferred its allegiance from 'high' to 'low' church in the early 20th century and the Rectors were keen to remove the 1898 Chancel Screen which was not in keeping with their evangelical theology. It was not until 1989 that the controversial decision was made to remove it and to carry out a wider re-ordering of the interior.

Various stories are told of the church. Legend supposedly has it that the church was originally going to be built in Tranmere but the building materials were supernaturally transferred to the current site. A late medieval (or possibly Jacobean) prophet, Robert Nixon, foretold that the world would end if ivy reached the top of the spire so it was regularly cut back to prevent the prediction coming true! That at least is the tradition – but it seems that it may in fact be as recent as 1867 when Egerton Leigh published the 'Legend of Bebington Spire' in *Ballads and Legends of Cheshire*! Nixon supposedly told a man he met in Storeton woods that in the last days the one safe place would be 'God's Croft' between the Mersey and the Dee! The ivy was removed in 1911 due to the damage it was doing to the spire. The myth that Inigo Jones designed the tower ignores the fact that it predates him by two centuries! The fossil

footprints in the church wall were deemed the Devil's footprints or toenail. It is claimed that during work in the 19th century skeletons with fractured skulls were discovered along with swords and spearheads and that these were leading warriors killed at the battle of Brunanburgh but so far it has not been possible to verify this as they were reburied.



St Andrew's Church – it dates from Saxon times and possibly even earlier



The base of the village cross

The village's first school, established in 1655, was conducted in the belfry, later in the vestry located at the east and names and marks from sharpening slate pencils carved in stone can still be seen. By the north porch is the **base of the village cross** which possibly dates from 1554 – the head with an image of the Virgin and Child is in the south porch. It was discovered in a grave having probably been hidden in puritan times to prevent its destruction. There is a **sundial** with the possible date 1764 made from the base and shaft of a previous 14th century cross. A **lamppost** south of the church is said by local tradition to have inspired the one that appears in Narnia in C.S. Lewis' *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*. He was a friend of the Lancelyn Greens and would often attend services in the church then go out and smoke his pipe by the south porch so it is very likely that he noticed the lamp shining in the dark though some have doubted the veracity of the story. Nor can we be sure that ghostly monks really can be seen making their way to the church from the direction of Abbot's Grange, some floating above the ground, others seemingly sunk into it.



The Narnia Lamp and east end of the church with the Francis Monument



Names carved into the wall from the time the school was in the vestry

Among the local notables buried in the church yard are the Lancelyn Greens and Joseph Mayer (in the north-west section). By the north-eastern end of the chancel is a pillar carved with the words: 'Labor Vincit Omnia In Memory of Thomas Francis of this Parish who departed this life on the XIV day of April MDCCCL in the LXXXVI year of his age'.



The grave of Joseph Mayer – a major benefactor to Lower Bebington



The badly weathered memorial to Thomas Francis, local eccentric

The **Lych Gate** in oak, 1893, serves as a memorial to churchwarden Clarke Aspinall.



St Andrew's Church showing the Victorian Lych Gate



The north porch from east, west and north

6 Kirket Lane

Once called, for no good reason, the Roman Road, Kirket Lane was created in the 12th century to transport stone from Storeton quarry to rebuild the church – later the path was used as a cattle herding route.

7 1930s Housing (Highcroft Avenue)

This road constitutes an important high quality 1930s suburban development in the Arts & Crafts style typical of English urban expansion in this period. Interestingly the generous front gardens could accommodate parking for a car, a rarity for all but the very rich. One house unusually appears to have retained its original front door. Mr Boulton, who built the houses, intended the road to run through to Heath Road but the council refused permission and there is still no through route for cars.



1930s housing in Highcroft Avenue showing space to park a car – this house appears to have retained its original door or one like it

8 The Rectory (Highcroft Avenue)

Dating from 1880 this is 'an impressive exercise in terracotta in a Gothicised Arts & Crafts style' and has an impressive array of chimneys – fires symbolised wealth and an ability to hire servants to maintain the hearths.



The Rectory is an impressive Victorian residence



The large chimneys on the Rectory indicate the wealth of the residents

9 The Church Hall (Highcroft Avenue)

This is a modern building in an attractive style, built in 1959 and designed by local architects Patterson and Macauley.



The 1959 Church Hall

10 War Memorial (Church Road)

Designed by Charles E. deacon and Sons, this was unveiled on 14th October 1923 and dedicated by the Bishop of Chester. The quotation 'O valiant Hearts' is from a hymn by Sir John Arkwright.



The War Memorial and impressive manager's houses in the Wiend

11 Managers' Houses (The Wiend)

The 'stately' properties on south side of The Wiend were built for managers at Levers – for all the philanthropy of Port Sunlight the hierarchy among the staff is evident from the scale of these houses and the 'mastery and multiplication of their architectural details that sets them apart'. This is 'Arts & Crafts Architecture on a formidable scale'.



Arts and Crafts houses for managers at Levers' factory in Port Sunlight

12 Entrance to Mayer Park (Bromborough Road)

The entrance to the park next to Bromborough Road are said to show the pride invested in public amenities at the time it was transferred to the authority but the gates are a memorial to Bernard Ormerod (CLB).



The dedication to Bernard Ormerod



The entrance to the Mayer Park rose garden

13 The Firs (Bromborough Road)

Properties such as The Firs came along in the later 19th century, their tall ceiling heights and roofs allowing them to dominate Bromborough Road below. The bay windows are characteristically late Victorian, as are the large paned windows. Opposite there was once a drill hall.



The Firs on Bromborough Road

14 The Methodist Chapel (Bromborough Road)

The Wesleyan Methodist chapel dates from the turn of the last century, followed by a linked church hall some time later. The modern development adjacent is called Church Farm; the author of the Conservation Area report was not impressed by this recent addition to the village stating that ‘the design of the buildings themselves fails to generate any real interest or to create a unique character’.



The Methodist Church and Church Hall

15 Shops (Church Road)

The Conservation Area report notes that:

‘the village retains a significant retail presence along The Village and Church Road. There are a variety of shopfront styles, with some respecting the traditional character of the area more than others ... with shop windows framed by traditional stall-riser to base, pilasters and glazing bars to side and entablature above. The stallrisers are generally

tilled, with the remainder of the solid elements being fabricated from moulded timber joinery. Doorways are generally recessed, though they may be enclosed with an outer grille when the shop is closed.'

16 Park View Terrace (The Village)

These attractive old cottages are a 'fairly standard yet refined early Victorian terrace' dated 1852. The paired sash windows to the ground floor are relatively unusual for the time.



Park View Terrace

17 The Orchard (71 The Village)

The large detached house to the north is The Orchard; near to it used to stand The Poplars, one of several mid 19th century country house style developments.



The Orchard – one of the few surviving Victorian country houses

Joseph Mayer

Joseph Mayer made a major contribution to the life and appearance of Lower Bebington village. He was born in 1803 in Newcastle, Staffordshire, the son of a tanner, Sam Mare. His interest in antiquities was sparked by Roman coins discovered in an urn by a ploughman; his grandfather promised him a reward if he could decipher them – which he did. At twelve he enlisted as a drummer boy in the 34th Regiment of Foot but the war ended before he could make any contribution. He became a jeweller in Lord Street, Liverpool, in 1833 and in 1843 set up on his own. Soon his business was thriving. He travelled collecting objects (Egyptian, pre-historic, Wedgwood – the potter was a relative, gems, ivories etc.) and established a museum in his new premises in Colquitt Street. He presented his collection (worth £80,000 in 1867) to Liverpool Corporation and was recognised by a statue in St George's Hall.



Two images of Joseph Mayer – the sculpture by Giovanni Fontana is in St George's Hall in recognition of his gift to the city (photo: Reptonix)

In 1864 he moved from Dacre Park in Rock Ferry to Lower Bebington. He was a great philanthropist, arranging activities in the village and encouraging people to volunteer to help the community. He raised a company of Volunteer soldiers, perhaps inspired by his short experience as a drummer boy. He was chairman of the local board, raised funds for the hospital, established allotments, a flower show, sports (bowling, cricket, football and quoits), entertainments, held celebrations (each child got a new penny and two apples on Halloween, a mince pie and orange at Christmas) and gave flowers to ladies who came to the library! When he fell ill of heart disease he set up a trust which still provides for monthly lectures on topics of general interest (but not on religion or politics). He died in 1886 and is buried in St Andrew's Church Yard.

18 Mayer Park (The Village)

An orchard and meadow he bought became a park with an avenue of trees named after Charles Dickens. It is said that at the time you could see the river from the park. The large boulders were brought south by glacial action during the ice age. The park was gifted to the council in the 1920s.



Mayer Park looking towards the former Mayer Library



The boulders brought south in the Ice Age



The formal garden in Mayer Park

19 Mayer Library (The Village)

The words 'Tyranny's foe' appear at several points about this group of buildings, often carved into stone. Mayer encouraged people to think for themselves and appreciated that critical thought was not an innate faculty but required self-education and wider reading. He set up a library in the house of the late Mr Francis (see 23 below) in 1865 with 1,500 books. This was one of the first free libraries in the country. The school master ran it with the help of volunteers. He planned to build a new library in Townfield Lane but an 18th century farm and barn adjacent to his home came up for sale and he bought them. He converted the farmhouse, adding a tower and two rooms at the rear for reading and chess. The main room, lit by a gas chandelier, had a gallery with busts of famous people. The new library opened in 1870 with 10,000 books and was originally open 6-8.30pm Wednesday and Saturday and 12-1pm on Thursdays. A dinner was held in the Wellington to celebrate the opening. People came from outside Bebington to use the library and it remained

Bebington's library till the early 1970s. Sadly the interior no longer retains its original appearance.



The entrance to Mayer Park with the former Mayer Library and Mayer Hall to the left.

20 Mayer Hall (The Village)

A baker's shop and the barn were replaced by Mayer Hall, which included a local museum for Mr Mayer's collection (one item was Robert Burn's armchair) then became a council chamber. The lower room was used for meetings and social occasions. Not long ago the future of the Hall and Library was in real doubt but today a group of volunteers maintain them as a local amenity.

21 Pennant House (The Village)

Joseph Mayer bought a house which he enlarged and renamed Pennant House after Thomas Pennant, a naturalist. The architect he employed was E Heffer. In the attractive gardens at the rear in 1870 he managed to grow a rare water lily outdoors. The house has lost much of its elegance and serves as a Community Health hub.



Pennant House, between the Rose and Crown and Mayer Hall



Pennant House seen from what was Joseph Mayer's garden

22 The Rose and Crown (The Village)

The Rose and Crown stands on the site of an Elizabethan inn and was a coaching inn on the old road from Chester to Birkenhead and Wallasey. The date stone reads 1732 but the identity of GWH is unknown and it may be from another building. The building itself has retained much of its original configuration and seems to have started out as a pair of houses, perhaps being changed into an inn in the 19th century when travel became a more widespread activity. To the left of the pub were the premises of Joseph Dutton, horse and coach proprietor.



The Rose and Crown

23 Site of Thomas Francis' House (The Village)

The open space beyond the Rose and Crown used to be the location of a number of shops and other properties which were demolished in 1964 to widen the road. Their disappearance, together with the developments opposite, completely transformed the appearance of this part of Lower Bebington – originally it had a rather narrow and confined look rather than the open sense of space it has today.

One of the most interesting features there had been the **Puzzle Stones** which an eccentric local resident, Thomas Francis, had installed in his wall. One read:

**AR
UBB
I
NGS
TONEF
ORAS
SE
S**

That is, 'a rubbing stone for asses'. This was a reference to loafers who leaned against the wall talking noisily. Some say there was also a secret reference to a raid on Bebington long, long ago!

Another had:

Subtract 45 from 45 that 45 may remain

The answer is: $123456789 - 987654321 = 45$ (the numbers 1 to 9 added together make 45).

A third reads:

**From 6 take 9
From 9 take 10
And from 40 take 50
And 6 will remain**

The solution is to spell out the number six and treat the others as Roman numerals, thus:

$SIX - IX (9) > S$
 $IX (9) - X (10) > I$
 $XL (40) - L (50) > X$

Another one has a carving of an unidentified inn with a sign, the Two Crowns, and reads:

**My name and sign is thirty shillings just, and he who will tell
my name shall have a quart on trust, for why is not
five the fourth of twenty in all cases?**

This refers to the old coins, a mark (13/4d), a noble (6/8d) and a crown (5/-). A mark, a noble and two crowns made 30/-. To 'tell' means to count. The innkeeper's name was Mark Noble but the rest of the riddle remains obscure.

Finally there was a disjointed epitaph for a Chester pot-woman.



The site of the Puzzle Stones

Thomas Francis

Thomas Francis was a stonemason, born in 1762. He helped with the restoration of the church in 1847 and other work prior to that. His house, which faced Heath Road, was converted into a would-be fort with wooden cannons, apparently an attempt to prepare for an invasion by the French during the Napoleonic wars but perhaps just one of his little jokes! Nathaniel Hawthorne described 'a house built in imitation of a castle, with turrets in which an upper and under row of cannon were mounted'. Through the gate Hawthorne saw figures of two men, one in a blue coat, buff breeches and straw hat, and a chained dog, all statues. In his porch was a stone he had sculpted of steamship and a man, probably himself, and a woman drawing water with the words 'The

people Bebington murmured for want of water; I cut the rock and God gave them plenty'. No evidence remains of the well he supposedly gave to the villagers who were presumably very grateful to him! Thomas' other eccentricities included hosting dinners using large silver tureens in which he served his guests sparrows, digging his own grave which he brushed out each Saturday before sitting in it smoking his pipe and each birthday reclining in his coffin and his wife in hers – he would not pay for them till the lids were finally screwed down! He died in 1850. Later for a time his house was the site of Mr Mayer's library.

24 Civic Centre (Civic Way)

Designed by Patterson, Macaulay and Owens and opened in 1971, the Civic Centre reflects the municipal confidence of the Bebington council in the late '60s and early '70s and in this respect few other examples can equal it. It is reputed to be the most ambitious district civic project ever undertaken in the country at the time of its inception. Pre-existing structures were cleared away and a number of trees and two late Georgian townhouses were lost just to provide a view from the road – something we might today regret as sheer vandalism. The new complex was 'deliberately modernist', 'unashamedly modern classical in style' - horizontal rather than vertical gothic like the buildings opposite. It was 'plain, technocratic, brutal, open, linear' with marble pebbles from the Isle of Skye as a weathering surface to its cast wall panels and a 'ship's funnel' and porthole windows, 'a liner-like' form bringing, apparently, a slight maritime feel to the sea of landscaping in which it sits. The 'extensive unenclosed landscaping [...] creates a feeling of openness and technocratic progress' but according to Les Jones it 'adds to the windswept emptiness of the site, standing in mute testament to the hubris and conceit of planners and architects of the time'. The Library has an open and airy interior and the building includes meeting rooms and a medical centre. The Puzzle Stones (see No. 23 above) are now kept inside but are currently hidden behind a pile of stacked furniture.



View of the Civic Centre from the road



The rear entrance to the building



The view from the car park is less imposing than that from The Village



The interior of the library is light and airy



The recently refurbished Police Station dates from the same era as the Civic Centre and is built in a style in keeping with its larger neighbour

25 Site of Bebington Hall (Civic Way)

The mostly Georgian edifice of Bebington Hall once stood on the elevated land overlooking the Pennant House complex, being, as Les Jones so aptly puts it in *Lost Wirral*, 'needlessly demolished in 1965 to make way for an important grass verge' or, perhaps one should rather say, in order to create the landscaped setting for the new Town Hall. Built in the 1830s, this is likely to have been one of the more significant properties in the village, replacing an earlier vicarage. It was a linear stone built property of two stories, and would have functioned as the manor house for the village. Its first occupant was Robert Moseley Fielden, then George Fielden. Later it became council offices. The Town Hall which replaced it has now also been demolished, along with the offices behind it, leaving simply an open space.



*This uninspiring building (now demolished) was the
Town Hall Annexe (photo: ReptOn1x)*

In 1897 the road near here was widened and carved stonework was discovered dating to c1340 – a grange for the monks of the collegiate church may have stood there. No evidence has been found to support the legend that underground tunnels led from the site to the church.

26 Drinking Fountain

The fountain at the bottom of Heath Road, erected in 1863, was a gift from Charles Hill who lived at the Oaklands, a large house nearby. It was moved to Mayer Park in 1905 but has now been restored to its original location and although no longer functioning it is once again a significant landmark in the village.

27 Heathdale Manor

The Conservation Area report is harsh on this modern development:

‘The use of mock-Tudor cladding does little to enliven its dour, heavy and lifeless character. It is not the materials that offend, it is the form of the building itself that is out-of-place.’



The fountain with Heathdale Manor



The old cottage at 32 Heath Road

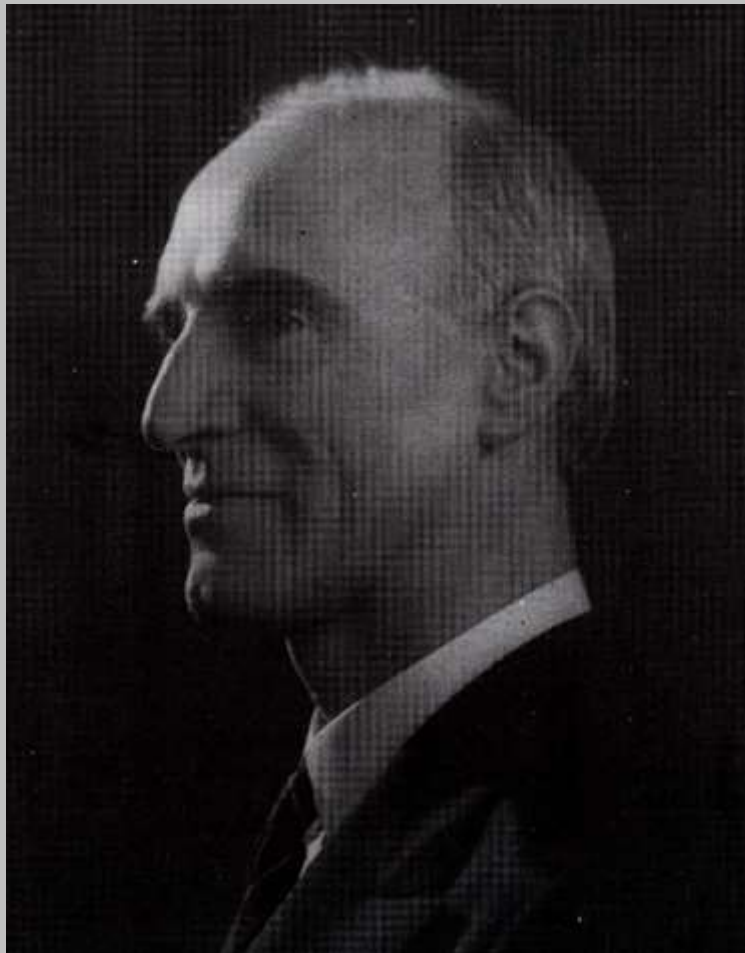
28 No. 32 Heath Road

This is a traditional 17th century vernacular stone cottage. The vertical sash windows were probably added in the early 19th century with traditional timber sashes recently reinstated.

A.H. Boulton

Mr A. H. (Archie Henry) Boulton (pronounced 'Bolton') is one of the most important, if not the most important, figures in the recent history of Bebington, for the simple reason that he built most of it. As a builder of residential property in this area he has no rival. He was born in West Derby in 1884, one of nine children in all, but his family moved to the Wirral when he was two. His parents were religious people and in 1899 he too committed his life to God and at that young age began his evangelical work, helping bring one of friends to belief in Jesus. He fell ill with typhoid fever at the age of 18 and was nursed by a girl he'd liked at school – they married in 1909. He was already in business as a builder and contractor in Lower Bebington. Mr Boulton built houses the ordinary workers could afford at a rent of 10s a week. They were so well-built they were known as 'Boulton's little palaces'. The area was still very rural, fields and ponds with lanes rather than roads and no electricity. He built his own electricity generating plant, thereby forcing Birkenhead Corporation to supply Bebington with power and he ensured that a sensible policy on drainage was instigated despite petty jealousies between Higher and Lower Bebington. He built hundreds of houses in Higher Bebington Road, Heath Road, Town Lane and the side roads leading off them. As well as homes he built educational facilities and was concerned about the architectural heritage of the district; one of the oldest buildings in the Borough of Bebington, Stanhope House in Bromborough, was saved and given by Mr Boulton to Bebington Council. Right up till the 1960s he was building in Bebington, Bromborough, Eastham and Prenton, making a major contribution to the local economy, providing jobs for many local craftsmen and transforming the appearance of the area. His role in redevelopment after the Second World War was recognised in letters from Winston Churchill and Harold MacMillan

Mr Boulton was a devout Christian who modelled his life on the Scriptures and once shared a platform with General Booth of the Salvation Army. He was careful to practice what he preached and spent a lot of the money he made on supporting the Christian faith. He provided almshouses, only asking a token rent, originally 2/6 a week, built Bethesda church and in 1961 gave the land and foundations for Jireh Chapel in Higher Bebington. He was involved with the Liverpool City Mission and supported overseas missionary work, himself travelling widely. On one occasion he discovered that a baby Arab girl had been abandoned outside a mission in Nazareth and arranged to pay for her upbringing.



A.H. Boulton aged 50

Mr Boulton was widowed in 1959 and remarried in 1968. He lived to the ripe old age of 101, grateful for a life full of adventure and able to say 'The lord has done great things for me, whereof I am glad'. Having no children of his own he left his considerable personal estate in trust to continue his evangelical and philanthropic mission to this day. The A.H. Boulton Trust has as its aims:

TO AID THE ERECTION AND MAINTENANCE OF BUILDINGS USED FOR THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL, RELIEVING THE SICK OR NEEDY OR OFFERING FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO INDIVIDUALS CONSIDERED TO BE DESERVING BY THE TRUSTEES



(Information and photographs courtesy of Dr. F.P. Gopsill)

29 Bethany Crescent

Despite Mr Boulton's significance there are few memorials to him. One is above the entrance to the 1927 almshouses forming Bethany Crescent. These bungalows were built in the Arts & Crafts style to house retired missionaries. In his later years he converted two of the bungalows into one and retired to live there – previously he had lived for a time in a large house at Spital Cross Roads (now demolished).



The entrance to Bethany Crescent



Bethany Crescent looks especially beautiful in spring

30 The School House (Acres Road)

There is still a St Andrew's Primary School today – located near the Oval in Townfield Lane. It is a very different looking building to its predecessor in Acres Road. A deed founding the school, at first in the church belfry and then in the vestry from 1791, dates to 1655 with common land near the present Port Sunlight station used to provide the teacher's income. When the vestry was demolished in 1827 the school was held in the south aisle but in 1828 Sir Thomas Massey gave the land in Acres Road, or 'School Lane' as it was apparently also known, on which two schoolrooms and a house for the schoolmaster were built by voluntary donation. These weren't built until around 1838 and it seems another building was used during construction. In 1856 Major Orred of Tranmere Hall gave 3,060 square yards of land in Green Lane for a new school 'a neat and spacious structure in the Gothic style', completed in 1856 for £500 (again by voluntary subscription). The 'Bebington National School' had three teachers and apparently room for 350 pupils. It was extended in 1888 and 1901 and refurbished in 1923. The present school built in 1974 but was burnt down in January 1992. A thirteen year old boy was charged with arson. The school was almost completely destroyed but was rebuilt and reopened in September 1993.



The School and attached house built in 1838

31 The Grange (Acres Road)

The Grange was a post-enclosure farm and a barn survives to this day. The working entrance was on Townfield Lane but there was a more polite entrance for respectable visitors, leading through gates in a finely built low stone wall with saddleback copings, on Acres Road. The house is essentially late-Georgian and its style and location suggest the owners had pretensions of upward mobility with 'good use made of the topography to create an elevated and prestigious progress' up to the house.



The Grange from Acres Road – this was the entrance for visitors

There are a number of other interesting and attractive old houses in Acres Road, including an Italianate cottage – it is one of the original roads that appears on the tithe map from the mid 19th century.



Victorian houses in Acres Road

32 Kirk's Funeral Parlour (The Village)

This has been a funeral parlour for over sixty years, though the clock is an addition to the original building. Mr Kirk used to stand outside smoking and people would say he was waiting for business!



The junction of Heath Road and The Village with Kirk's Parlour today

33 Willow Cottage (25 The Village)

Although it may actually predate the 17th century, it is a typical building of that period, dating in its present form from c1656, and shares many features with other old yeoman cottages on the Wirral. It is grade 2 listed and was for a time the oldest council house in Wirral.

The Conservation Area report describes it thus:

‘Of roughly three bays, the central portion of the building projects; it is likely that this represents the original core, later extended on either side with the section to the north east becoming a separate dwelling. In common with other timber-framed buildings in the Wirral, it appears that the lower timber-framed panels have been replaced with stone as the original sole plate and framing have rotted away. Buttresses have been added for additional stabilisation. Perhaps contemporary with this activity (early 18th century?) the building has been extended to the North with a timber-framed extension (with a piggery attached) and to the South with a stone-built wing. The northern wing with its domestic details is suggestive of residential expansion, whilst the stone built northern section could indicate the housing of livestock.’



The cottage today



This was originally the front of the cottage

34 The Grove

Originally the main Chester road ran behind the cottage but because of increasing traffic and larger vehicles it was rerouted in 1840. A large house, Laurel Bank, was a college before the establishment of Carlett Park – only the gate-house still stands.



A view towards The Grove from what was the site of Mr Francis' house



An old house on The Grove



Old Houses off The Grove



An unusual house in The Grove

35 John George (The Village)

This was at one time the North and South Wales Bank.



Now a hairdresser's, the building on the corner was once a bank

36 1-15 The Village

The row of properties was constructed in the early 20th century and shows a form of construction that is typically Edwardian.



Edwardian houses located between the station and the village

37 The Wellington (The Village)

This 18th century building, which appears on the tithe map of 1844, seems to comprise an earlier structure that has been transformed into a coaching inn. In 1832 William Francis, a relative of Thomas, was killed by the Bristol mail coach as he was leaving. The mock-Tudor improvements were added in the Edwardian period.



The Wellington has been an inn for two hundred years

38 Dog and Gun (The Village)

The building on the corner of Townfield Lane was once the Dog and Gun pub which only had a beer license. In 1850 the landlord was Samuel Aspinall who was also the blacksmith. In the late 19th century it was run by a Mrs Anne Deighton and in 1890 by James Green. It was a post office in the early 20th century and more recently a betting shop. After a period of neglect it is now a residential property.



The former Dog and Gun and Post Office



These houses on Townfield Lane were built in 1851 – a plaque with the date has the initials 'J. EP'. The former Dog and Gun is on the corner and the lane continues as a footpath on the other side of the main road

39 Townfield Lane

This lane led from Lower Bebington to Town Lane and was used to herd cattle, sheep and pigs to graze in fields where the Oval and Bebington Cemetery are now. It went past a number of gentry homes including Wellington Park and The Oaklands. On the left are gate posts at the working entrance to The Grange and on the opposite side are the Bethesda alms houses, another of Mr Boulton's philanthropic projects. The bungalows surround a pleasant courtyard.



This was the working entrance to The Grange when it was a farm



*Bethesda was one of Mr Boulton's two local developments
to house retired Christian workers*

Just along the road used to stand Wellington School, founded in 1953 by 'visionary and idealist' John Fogg as a traditional Christian educational establishment in the pre-war mould. He allowed prefects to administer corporal punishment and gave the pupils a half holiday to celebrate the fall of the Wilson government in 1970! The main school building was a Victorian villa, Mount Allars. After Mr Fogg retired the school struggled to maintain standards: in 1992 *The Independent* noted rather harshly that 'judged solely on its exam results, Wellington School in the Wirral could be the worst fee-paying school in the country'. Eventually it was closed and the old house demolished to make way for the housing off Wellington Road.



Wellington School with pupils in their distinctive green blazers

40 Cornerstone Church (Bebington Road)

The present Cornerstone church was until recently called Bethesda and was a Brethren Church built in 1927 by Mr Boulton who worshipped there himself. He later built a hall behind the church, known as the 'schoolroom'.



Behind the church built by Mr Boulton for the Brethren can be seen one of the large old houses that were typical of the later Victorian period

41 Car Park (Bebington Road)

There used to be a large house on this site and, more recently, a nursery.

42 Bebington Station (Old Chester Road)

The Chester and Birkenhead Railway was planned by George Stephenson and work began in 1838. The official opening of the line in September 1840 saw the locomotive *The Wirral* leave Grange Lane Station, Birkenhead, on the 50-minute journey to Brook Street, Chester, where cottages had been pressed into services as a station. Use of these cottages continued until Chester General Station opened in 1848. Bebington was one of the few original stations to serve the line from the start. Initially the line was single track, but by 1847 much of the route had been doubled, whilst in 1902 traffic growth required the provision of four tracks. Much manoeuvring led to the line coming under the joint control of the Great Western Railway and London & North Western Railway on 20th November 1860. This arrangement lasted until 1922 when the London, Midland & Scottish Railway took over the LNWR.

Within one month of opening 10,000 passengers had travelled on the line. In the 1841/42 year 317,739 passengers are recorded, a figure which appears to have increased gradually year on year. By 1885 about 22 passenger trains, ran from Chester to Birkenhead each day. Passenger trains were divided in four classes. In 1840 Chester to Birkenhead fares were 1st Class 3/6-, 2nd 2/6-, 3rd 2/-, 4th 1/- (17.5p, 12.5p, 10p and 5p respectively). By 1847 an annual season ticket could be obtained for £15 (£20 after 1859). 1st Class carriages would have been unheated until at least 1856 and 2nd Class to at least 1870. In the 1840s the fastest journey from Bebington to Chester was around half an hour – not much different to today, though that was an express journey with only a few stops and most trains took about forty minutes. Express passenger services operated from Birkenhead to Birmingham from 1857 and to London Paddington from October 1861 (but did not stop at Bebington). Post-1850, however, freight produced more revenue. And there were almost twice as many goods trains carrying coal, manufactured fertilizer, grain, flour, Canadian iron ore, building materials and manufactured goods.

The station was renamed 'Bebington and New Ferry' on 1st May 1895 but changed back to just Bebington on 6th May 1974.



*Bebington and New Ferry Station when it had four platforms
(photo: Ben Brooksbank)*



The station booking office as it is today

Just round the corner from the station, the world-famous **Port Sunlight village** with the outstanding **Lady Lever Art Gallery** and **Heritage Centre** is adjacent to the Lower Bebington Conservation Area and is also well worth a visit.



The Dell, Port Sunlight, in spring



Lady Lever Art Gallery

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Nathaniel Hawthorne's Description of 'Bebbington'



The plaque on Mayer Library commemorating the visit of Nathaniel Hawthorne (photo: Rodhullandemu)

WALK TO BEBBINGTON. Rock Ferry, August 29th._Yesterday we all took a walk into the country. It was a fine afternoon, with clouds, of course, in different parts of the sky, but a clear atmosphere, bright sunshine, and altogether a Septembrish feeling. The ramble was very pleasant, along the hedge-lined roads in which there were flowers blooming, and the varnished holly, certainly one of the most beautiful shrubs in the world, so far as foliage goes. We saw one cottage which I suppose was several hundred years old. It was of stone, filled into a wooden frame, the black-oak of which was visible like an external skeleton; it had a thatched roof, and was whitewashed. We passed through a village,_higher Bebbington, I believe, with narrow streets and mean houses all of brick or stone, and not standing wide apart from each other as in American country villages, but conjoined. There was an immense almshouse in the midst; at least, I took it to be so. In the centre of the village, too, we saw a moderate-sized brick house, built in imitation of a castle with a tower and turret, in which an upper and an under row of small cannon were mounted, now green with moss. There were also

battlements along the roof of the house, which looked as if it might have been built eighty or a hundred years ago. In the centre of it there was the dial of a clock, but the inner machinery had been removed, and the hands, hanging listlessly, moved to and fro in the wind. It was quite a novel symbol of decay and neglect. On the wall, close to the street, there were certain eccentric inscriptions cut into slabs of stone, but I could make no sense of them. At the end of the house opposite the turret, we peeped through the bars of an iron gate and beheld a little paved court-yard, and at the farther side of it a small piazza, beneath which seemed to stand the figure of a man. He appeared well advanced in years, and was dressed in a blue coat and buff breeches, with a white or straw hat on his head. Behold, too, in a kennel beside the porch, a large dog sitting on his hind legs, chained! Also, close beside the gateway, another man, seated in a kind of arbor! All these were wooden images; and the whole castellated, small, village-dwelling, with the inscriptions and the queer statuary, was probably the whim of some half-crazy person, who has now, no doubt, been long asleep in Bebbington churchyard. The bell of the old church was ringing as we went along, and many respectable-looking people and cleanly dressed children were moving towards the sound. Soon we reached the church, and I have seen nothing yet in England that so completely answered my idea of what such a thing was, as this old village church of Bebbington.

It is quite a large edifice, built in the form of a cross, a low peaked porch in the side, over which, rudely cut in stone, is the date 1300 and something. The steeple has ivy on it, and looks old, old, old; so does the whole church, though portions of it have been renewed, but not so as to impair the aspect of heavy, substantial endurance, and long, long decay, which may go on hundreds of years longer before the church is a ruin. There it stands, among the surrounding graves, looking just the same as it did in Bloody Mary's days; just as it did in Cromwell's time. A bird (and perhaps many birds) had its nest in the steeple, and flew in and out of the loopholes that were opened into it. The stone framework of the windows looked particularly old. There were monuments about the church, some lying flat on the ground, others elevated on low pillars, or on cross slabs of stone, and almost all looking dark, moss-grown, and very antique. But on reading some of the inscriptions, I was surprised to find them very recent; for, in fact, twenty years of this climate suffices to give as much or more antiquity of aspect, whether to gravestone or edifice, than a hundred years of our own, _so soon dolichens creep over

the surface, so soon does it blacken, so soon do the edges lose their sharpness, so soon does Time gnaw away the records. The only really old monuments (and those not very old) were two, standing close together, and raised on low rude arches, the dates on which were 1684 and 1686. On one a cross was rudely cut into the stone. But there may have been hundreds older than this, the records on which had been quite obliterated, and the stones removed, and the graves dug over anew. None of the monuments commemorate people of rank; on only one the buried person was recorded as _Gent._ While we sat on the flat slabs resting ourselves, several little girls, healthy-looking and prettily dressed enough, came into the churchyard, and began to talk and laugh, and to skip merrily from one tombstone to another. They stared very broadly at us, and one of them, by and by, ran up to U. and J., and gave each of them a green apple, then they skipped upon the tombstones again, while, within the church, we heard them singing, sounding pretty much as I have heard it in our pine-built New England meeting-houses. Meantime the rector had detected the voices of these naughty little girls, and perhaps had caught glimpses of them through the windows; for, anon, out came the sexton, and, addressing himself to us, asked whether there had been any noise or disturbance in the churchyard. I should not have borne testimony against these little villagers, but S. was so anxious to exonerate our own children that she pointed out these poor little sinners to the sexton, who forthwith turned them out. He would have done the same to us, no doubt, had my coat been worse than it was; but, as the matter stood, his demeanor was rather apologetic than menacing, when he informed us that the rector had sent him. We stayed a little longer, looking at the graves, some of which were between the buttresses of the church and quite close to the wall, as if the sleepers anticipated greater comfort and security the nearer they could get to the sacred edifice. As we went out of the churchyard, we passed the aforesaid little girls, who were sitting behind the mound of a tomb, and busily babbling together. They called after us, expressing their discontent that we had betrayed them to the sexton, and saying that it was not they who made the noise. Going homeward, we went astray in a green lane, that terminated in the midst of a field, without outlet, so that we had to retrace a good many of our footsteps. Close to the wall of the church, beside the door, there was an ancient baptismal font of stone. In fact, it was a pile of roughly hewn stone steps, five or six feet high, with a block of stone at the summit, in which was a hollow about as big as a wash-bowl. It was full of rainwater.

PHOTO GALLERY

Images of Lower Bebington through the seasons



Stanton Estate Houses



COVID rainbows outside Stanton Road School



Suburban Housing on Church Road



St Andrew's Church from the south



St Andrew's Church from the north



St Andrew's Church and the Lych Gate in autumn



St Andrew's Church and the Lych Gate in winter



The Firs – a fine Victorian terrace on Bromborough Road



The Orchard from Mayer Park



The boulder in Mayer Park



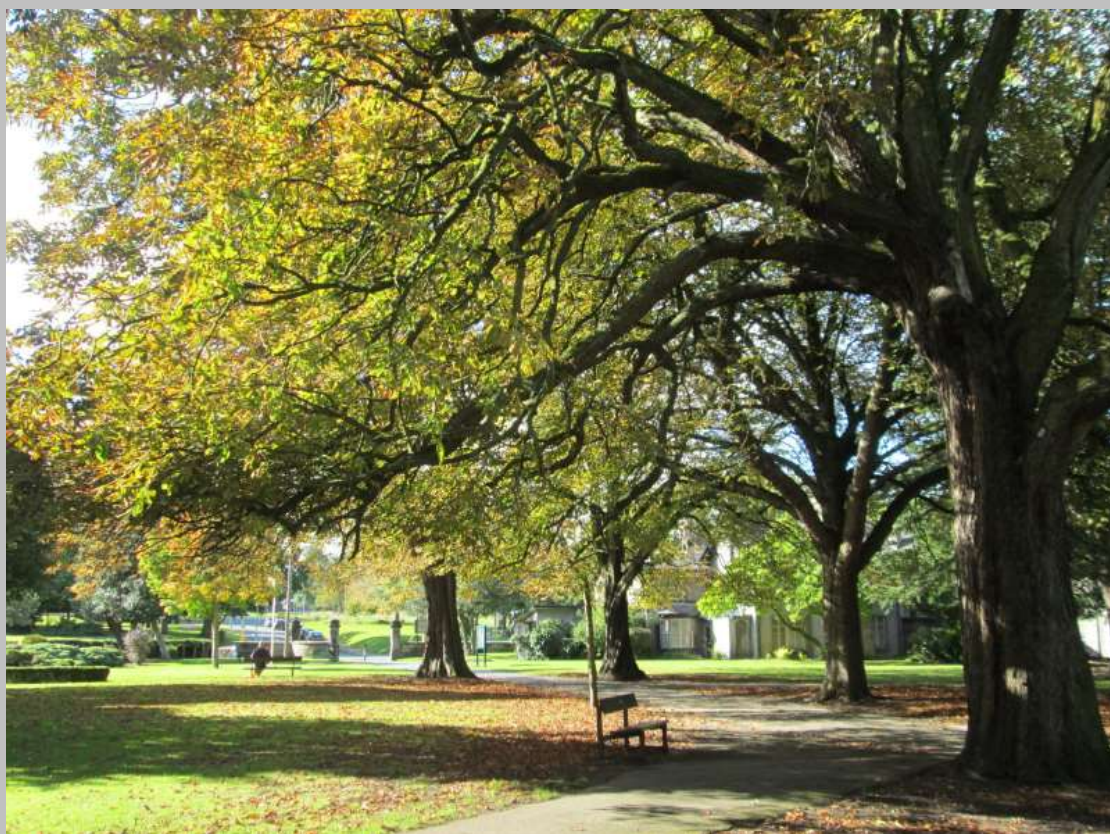
Mayer Park showing the rear of the former Mayer Library



The rear of the former Mayer Library



Mayer Park in early autumn



Mayer Park in the autumn



Dickens Avenue, Mayer Park, in the autumn



Mayer Park in autumn looking towards the Civic Centre



The entrance to Mayer Park in autumn



The former Mayer Library with crocuses



The former Mayer Library with daffodils



The former Mayer Library with daffodils



The village in spring



Pennant House, Mayer Hall and the former Mayer Library in summer



The Rose and Crown with crocuses



The Rose and Crown with daffodils



The village in autumn



The former Mayer Library in late autumn



The village in winter



The Civic Centre in spring



The Civic Centre in spring



The Civic Centre in autumn



The site of Bebington Hall in spring looking towards Toleman Avenue



The site of Bebington Hall in spring



Site of Bebington Hall in autumn



Spring flowers in Bethany Crescent



Green Lane



The School House in Acres Road



Gates to The Grange



Willow Cottage in spring



Willow Cottage in spring



Willow Cottage in spring



Willow Cottage in spring



Willow Cottage in spring



Willow Cottage



Willow Cottage



Willow Cottage in autumn



Willow Cottage in autumn



Willow Cottage in autumn



Gateway in The Grove



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