

# **FORMBY HISTORY WALKS 1**

## **CHAPEL LANE AND AROUND**

***About 1 mile circular***

***Start/end point: corner of Chapel Lane, Elbow Lane and Brows Lane***

**At this starting point, looking South where Brows Lane merges into Chapel Lane, you are standing in front of a row of shops.** The modern-day Post Office is one of these, and on the opposite side of the road is a previous site of a Post Office and what is now the Royal Mail Delivery Office. One of Formby's earliest buildings used for post was also at this spot, a thatched cottage now demolished.

Before these shops were built there stood on this site a beautiful building variously called 'The Elms' or 'The Priory'. It was a large thatched building surrounded by old elm trees, it served as both a private house and a small hotel. Outside in the front garden for many years hung a cage holding a parrot that was famous for its cries and wolf whistles to passers-by! It stood on the site of roughly the modern-day Post Office.



*The Priory - formerly The Elms.*



Just a short walk West down Brows Lane is the house No 18 where Muriel Sibley lived. Muriel was a founder member of the Formby Society in 1953 and her legacy to our community through her drawings and watercolours is enormous. Her archive is now held for safety and protection at the Atkinson Gallery in Southport but the Civic Society maintains images of virtually all her work online on our Flickr website.



*This is the view you would have had maybe a century ago of Chapel Lane looking up past the shops towards the War Memorial. The corner for Elbow Lane is on your Right. Turn into ELBOW LANE and walk ahead.*

On your left is Sumner Road, built not many years ago for use by local buses, shops for deliveries and also a small car park. It is named after a local Physician of the 19<sup>th</sup> century called Dr. Sumner. He lived nearby and was well-known for his dedication and bravery in helping with the Formby Lifeboat.

Walk past Elm Lodge and you come to the first of two Surgeries, the Village Surgery. This is built on the site of what was once Whoof House and occupied by Marion, Chris, Hope and Arthur Christophers, a family strongly linked with the Methodist Church a little further down. Their Cornish grandfather Samuel Christophers had been the first Minister of what was originally the Wesleyan Church. Chris had lost his life in the trenches in WWI having volunteered in his late 30s for the 1<sup>st</sup> Sportsman's Battalion: he fell on active service on the Somme at Delville Wood in July 1916. The family played a full role in helping run the church and support soldiers in Formby during WWI. After the war the house was used as a private school, run by mother and daughter.



'Whoof House' drawn by Muriel Sibley

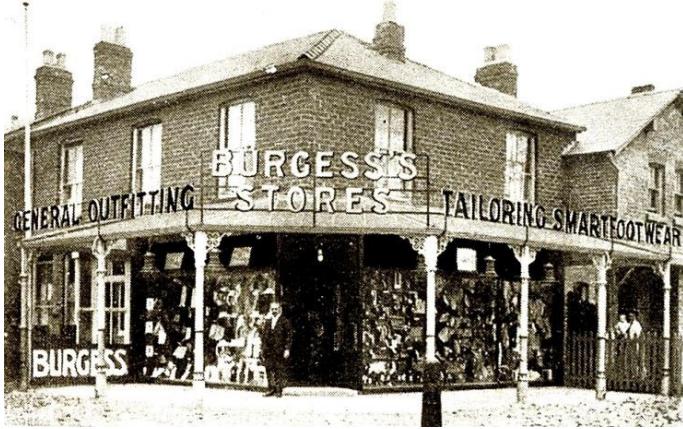


The next building is another Surgery, The Hollies. For a number of years in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century it was run as a Boarding House known as Raby Bank by Mrs. Annie Rennie, her mother and two children. Annie had previously lived elsewhere in Formby but moved to Raby Bank on the death of her husband in 1914.

You can visit the Methodist Church if you walk a little further down the road.

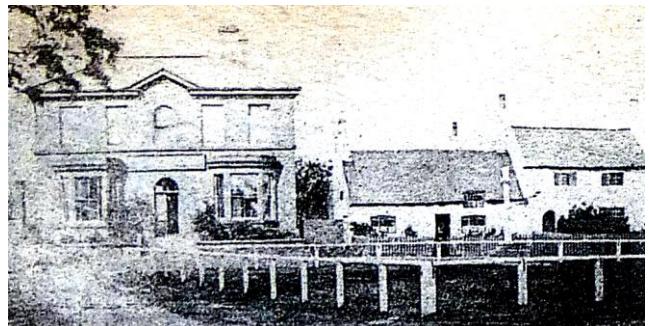


Turn left into Cropton Road.



Carry on up Cropton Road and turn right into **Three Tuns Lane**.

On the corner opposite you can see the pet store, Animal World UK. However, over a century ago it was the site of Burgess's Clothes Store.



### CROSS GREEN

Walk to the right along Three Tuns Lane. As the name implies, there was once a small brewery along here; indeed, you soon reach the **Cross House Inn** on Cross Green.

This iconic pub stands at the entrance to the old village and next to what would have been a village green that hosted Fairs and Markets. The Formby Fair was established in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and was held every 29 June, Oak Apple Day. These annual Fairs would have attracted people from miles around including the largest landowners. Nicholas Blundell wrote in his diary of how he and his wife visited the Fair in June 1710. It was a point for the sale and purchase of horses, cattle, sheep and pigs; also, there may well have been 'entertainments' at different times such as bull-baiting, bear-baiting, cock-fighting and archery or wrestling competitions.

On the Green itself you can see the sandstone Cross erected in 1879 with funding from the Weld Blundell family and which replaced an older wooden cross that was moved to St. Luke's Church together with the old stocks. The Cross House Inn (for many years the Blundell Arms) and the Green would have been the sight that welcomed road traffic to Formby in the days before the construction of the By-Pass in 1938.

*This advert for what was then the Blundell Arms dates from 1893.*

### CHURCH ROAD

**BLUNDELL ARMS HOTEL,**  
**FORMBY,**  
FIVE MINUTES' WALK FROM RAILWAY STATION,  
JOHN TICKLE, Proprietor.

THIS well-established and convenient Hotel, which has been in the possession of the present proprietor for a considerable time, is conducted under the personal supervision and management of Mr. Tickle, who, while gratefully acknowledging past favours, hopes for a continuance of the support and patronage which has at all times been so freely accorded this establishment.

Wines, Spirits, Ales, Stout, and Cigars,  
Are all of the Best Quality.

There is every Accommodation for Visitors,  
Large Commercial and Smoke Rooms.  
Elegant and Capacious Billiard Room and Bowling Green.

There is extensive Stabling Accommodation, and every other convenience for Tourists and Excursionists passing through the district.



**BUSY, WHAT!**—Well, they always are at the Red Cross Canteen at Roselands, Formby. But the soldier boys are grateful (see them tucking in in the right-hand top corner?), and all the work these patriotic women do is well worth while.

## Walk along Church Road to the North.

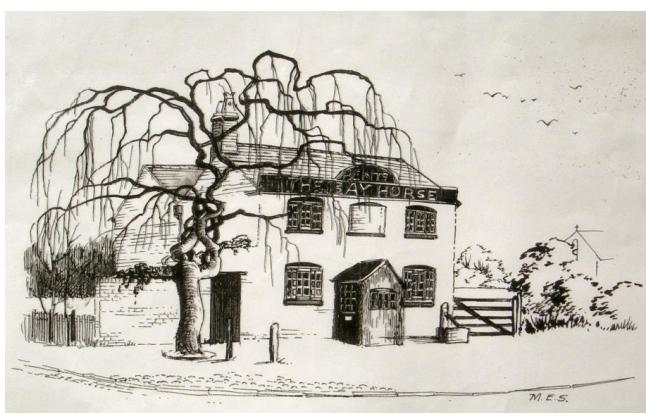
The next building along to the left is a large house called **Roselands**, now no longer a private house and used by a number of concerns. During the Second World War it acted as a Convalescent Home for Servicemen; it has also been associated with use by the Red Cross over the years.

*During the War an artist for the Formby Times captured the women opposite working at the Red Cross Canteen at Roselands.*

On the other side of the main road was **Ivy House Farm**, and which stood at the entrance to what were called Formby Fields. These were the town fields used as part of the old system of agriculture that lasted until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

### THE BAY HORSE

Further along Church Road to the left is a Toby Carvery but which was for many years an iconic pub, the Bay Horse. It was built about 1860 and run first by the Dickinson family whose name was synonymous with brewing in Formby for a century at least. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century the then-landladies, Lil and May Allcock, were still dispensing ale from flowered jugs. At this time the original pub was the left hand part of the present building and the front door was in the centre. The customers used to haul up the casks from the shallow cellar whose trap door was just inside the front door.



A weeping Ash tree stood at the southeast corner of the building for many years: it had a circular seat round its trunk where many locals and visitors could enjoy a quiet drink. It was known fondly as the 'Gum Tree' because American soldiers during WWII would sit outside with a drink and stick their used chewing gum to the trunk!

*A drawing of the Bay Horse by Muriel Sibley, showing the Gum Tree.*

will for many older Formby residents epitomize this landmark on the traditional main route through Formby: unfortunately, like an increasing amount of our heritage, has now gone. Continue along Church Road to the crossroads with School Lane and you pass a fairly new set of flats that used to be the site of **Our Lady's School**, built in 1871 but

closed in 1963 when the children moved to a new and more spacious building in Bull Cop.

Turn left into **SCHOOL LANE**

### **OUR LADY'S CHURCH**

On your left is Our Lady's Church – Our Lady of Compassion, Formby. The Blundell family had built a house for aged Jesuits in 1701 and this became the residence of a Roman Catholic Priest in 1712. A Catholic Chapel was built in the years before RC churches could legally be erected: it is thought it has a plain exterior so that it appears more like a private house or a barn. It was used for religious purposes from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century until the new church was erected in 1840. It is from this building that 'Chapel Lane' is derived for the thoroughfare through the village shops up to Brows Lane.



In the churchyard that lies alongside School Lane you can find the names of people who lost their lives in the Boer War and both World Wars. In the rear churchyard there are names of not only Formby people but also a number of Polish airmen who died in WWII in the service of the Allies. Outside the main door of the church is the War Memorial, thought to have been raised in 1917.

### **SCHOOL HOUSE**



The Balti House restaurant is based in an old building that once was Formby's first School House.

It was built in 1659 following an application to the lords of the manor by the people living in this area for a school on this site. Local people raised the money and then built and ran the school themselves for the children of Formby. It is clear to see the shape of a school when we look closely at it.

It became known eventually as the 'Old School' and School Lane took its name from it. This however, is not the original 17<sup>th</sup> century building; it was rebuilt in 1785 after the original site fell into disrepair. The photo dates from the 1950s. Outside it stands what many people take to be an old postal box – yet, in fact, it is an early 20<sup>th</sup> century electricity junction box.

The **Civic War Memorial** was opened in 1922 and lies on the crossroads of School Lane, Three Tuns Lane, Halsall Lane and Chapel Lane.

Councillor Fred Stephenson (an upholsterer) had recommended the creation of a Memorial Garden with gravel walks and seats: "a place in the fresh air, a central point to meet a friend or take a stroll". It was decided to use the 'piece of land at Three Tuns Lane corner' given by the Weld Blundell family.



The design of the Memorial to those Formby people who fell in WWI was carried out by J.F. Keely and Sons, monumental sculptors, Birkdale and was unveiled on 12 November 1922. It was carved from Cornish granite standing on a substantial (below ground) concrete base. It continues to commemorate local service people who have given their lives in subsequent conflicts.

There is just one woman commemorated on this War Memorial. She was Jane Murray who died of pneumonia aged 26 in 1918 whilst serving at the Thornton Camp near to Crosby. Her brother George is remembered also: he died in 1920 from injuries suffered whilst on active service. They are both buried at Our Lady's Church.

## CHAPEL LANE

This is the view of the corner of Halsall Lane, Chapel Lane and School Lane in 1970 from a drawing by Muriel Sibley.



The doorway to the former Barclay's Bank can be identified, but the trees further along have gone and we now have a row of shops before the M&S Store.

You can now look down **Chapel Lane** before returning to the starting point.

On the left is one of the few Banks left in Formby, Lloyds Bank. It was for many years a famous Formby store begun by Richard Rimmer and selling vegetables, poultry, game and fish. It continued from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century until the 1960s when the family moved to other premises.

On the right is the Barclays Bank closed in 2021. In 1900 it was a whitewashed thatched cottage with large, fine trees and only horses and carts or bicycles for transport. The cottage burnt down to be replaced eventually by the Bank.

By this time the village was growing following the opening of Formby Railway Station in 1848. The Weld Blundell family paid for the building of some imposing new stores and on one of the larger shops on the right can be seen '**WB 1888**'.

Another sign says '**The Village**', its familiar name, and on the other side of the street it says 'Chapel Lane'. This marks a name change: previously 'Brows Lane' had stretched up past Elbow Lane and on to Halsall Lane.



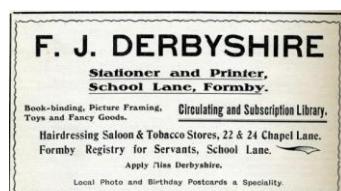
Walking along, you will see on the Left two famous names in the story of Chapel Lane and Formby:

On the site of the present-day **Woodward's Wine Bar** there used to stand the **Quality Shop**, popular with anyone who liked sweets! It closed down many years ago but was a favourite with everyone in its time.



The other shop is **Derbyshire's** and it still stands proudly today, a survivor of Chapel Lane in the latter 19<sup>th</sup> century. It has done so by being aware to the needs of succeeding generations and developing gradually over time..

This photo was taken probably in the 1960s.



On the opposite side of Chapel Lane at number 29 you will be able to identify what used to be Thomas Birtwistle's Family Grocers. The shop adjoined to it is today slightly extended and can be recognised as Boots the Chemist.

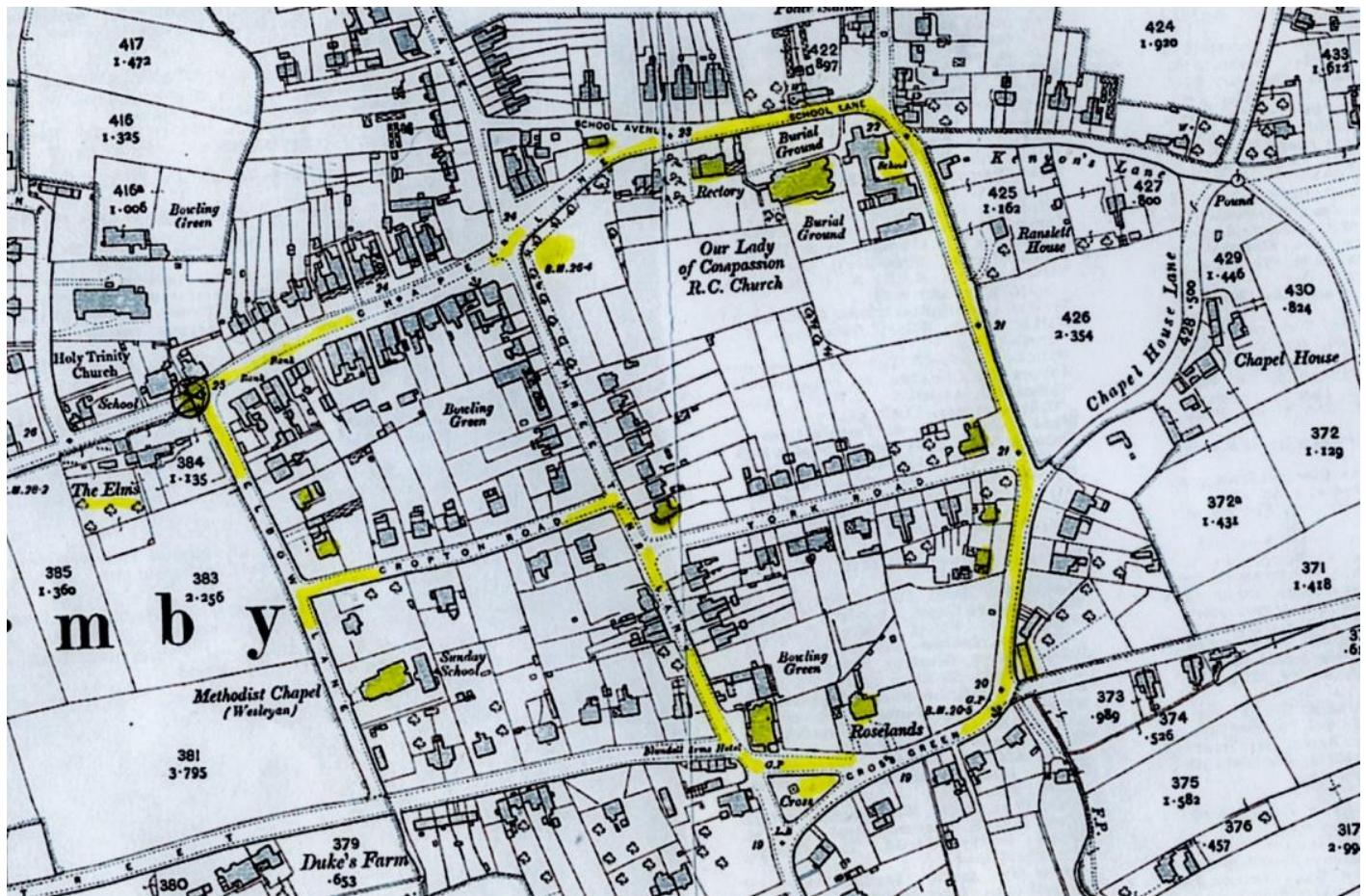
This lovely photograph from the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century surely helps us all to understand 'how times have changed'!





As we return to our starting point, look for Riva Wine Bar.

Over a century ago the same spot would have been Charters the Butchers and would have looked very much different.



*The map we have used to illustrate your walk  
is this section of the 1906 O.S. map.*