

FORMBY HISTORY WALKS - 4

THE GREEN LANE CONSERVATION AREA AND AROUND

About 1 mile circular

Start/end point: Grapes Hotel

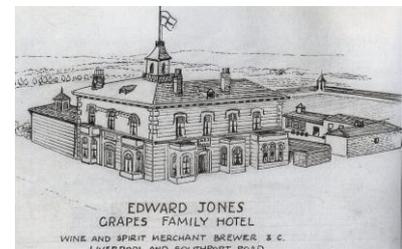
THE GRAPES HOTEL

The Grapes was built about 1880 and was originally a 'Family Hotel'. Due to the opening of the Liverpool to Southport Railway, people were by then able to travel out to Formby to enjoy the countryside and stop here for refreshments.



It was built on Piercefield Road on the main road to Southport. Many people still used horses for transport and a 'mounting step' for riders can still be seen outside.

There are still memories – just! – of an old Formby tradition called 'The Formby Mile'. Local men would take part in an informal 'run' from the Grapes up to Southport Road (originally known as 'Sholicars Lane'), right down Deansgate Lane (originally 'Danesgate Lane', down Cable Street and back towards the Grapes. Was it actually a mile in length? Who can say ... You can see the point at which the race would have started if you stand outside the Embassy Building with your back to the cobbler's and look straight over the road to the side and rear of the Grapes.



FORMBY ICE RINK
Formby 7263 HOME OF Formby 7263
FRESHFIELD WINTER SPORTS CLUB
OPEN ALL THE YEAR ROUND FOR
ICE SKATING
VISITORS SPECIALLY WELCOME



OPEN EVERY DAY
Evenings at 7.30 p.m. (except Thursdays)

Saturday and Sunday at 9.30 till 12; 2.30 till 4.30
and 7.30 till 10

SPECIAL CHILDREN'S SESSIONS
Tuesday Evening 7.30–10.0 Admission 2/6
Wednesday 4.0–5.30 Admission 1/6
CHILDREN'S CLASS SATURDAY MORNING

FREE TUITION FOR BEGINNERS
over 15—Monday Evenings

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THE EMBASSY BUILDING

Opposite the Grapes is the Embassy Building. It was originally opened in 1928 as an ice-skating rink. In April 1932 it became a Cinema – in the early days of 'Talkies'. The forecourt was originally used as a petrol station in the early years of motor transport and prior to the opening of the Formby By-Pass.



It closed as a cinema in 1962 and for a number of years reverted to being an ice-rink.

THIMBLE HALL and MAY COTTAGE

As you start down Green Lane, stop and look at the two old buildings on your left.

Thimble Hall, 11 Green Lane, is an 18th century building but was extensively modernised in 1979. It was previously known as Ivy Cottage and was a 'one-up, one-down' building. It is adjacent to May Cottage.

May Cottage, 15a Green Lane, is possibly an early 17th century building. It has a strong oak beam frame made from tree trunks - a 'cruck' frame. The exterior walls are of brick but there is 'wattle walling' inside. There are two spiral staircases as it was originally three cottages. The kitchen section was known as The Cottage and was a 'one-up and one-down' building: the main part was known as May Cottage. A coin dated 1690 was found at the back of the fireplace during alterations. A date of 1620 is inscribed on internal brickwork but was painted over.



Muriel Sibley drawing



*What did Green Lane look like about a century ago?
These old photographs provide an impression.*



In particular, the photo of Green Lane in the 1920s on the right depicts overgrown bushes and trees as well as the rough dirt road prior to the laying of cobbles.

As you walk down Green Lane towards St. Peter's Church, you will see two lovely old white houses on your left. Both are close to the church as shown in this Muriel Sibley drawing.



21 Green Lane – ‘Church Cottage’



This 18th century thatched cottage was originally a farmhouse: one room had been used as a dairy and another was used by itinerant Irish labourers who came over to England for the potato picking. It has a thatched roof and unusual timber guttering with a sloping open downspout.

27 Green Lane, ‘Church House’

Elements of Church House date back to the 18th Century when the building served as a public house. The Tithe map of 1845 records the building as **Church House**, owned by Mary Formby and occupied by Thomas Dickinson junior. A map of 1848 labels it as the **Formby Arms Inn**. There is a stone on the east gable of the south range (a later addition to the building) with the date of 1864. On a map of 1893 it was labelled as **Church House** again. The house was given to St. Peter's church to become the **Vicarage** by Miss Harley in her will in the late 1960s.



St. PETER'S CHURCH



Formby's first place of worship was Formby Chapel which stood very near St. Luke's Church.

The original ‘Old Town of Formby’ stood near to St. Luke's – that was where the village had grown up in the Middle Ages. Many people would have worked as fishermen and sailors. By the 1700s Formby was still a small agricultural community but with poor, sandy soil. Farms were small and other means of making a living were fishing and keeping rabbit warrens. There were ‘fishing stalls’ on the shore. Road transport was made difficult by the poor, sandy cart tracks and the village was virtually isolated from the outside world by ‘the Moss’ that lay outside the village in the direction of Ormskirk. More and more people had moved away to farm and work inland, and so a new ‘centre’ began to build up along the line of the roads from the Grapes Hotel to Cross House Green. The line of the old path to the Old Town ran along ‘Old Town Lane’.

The Old Chapel was now a long and difficult journey for many, including the Formby family of Formby Hall. Building started on the new church in 1742. Some of the stones of the old church were brought to the site and used in the foundations. The bell, dated 1661, and the royal coat of arms of Queen Anne, dated 1710, were also recovered from the old church. The sundial in the churchyard has a date of 1719.

St. Peter's was opened in 1746. The Church was enlarged in 1830, but the chancel was not added until 1873. The official Consecration Service was conducted by the Bishop of Chester. This had to be done in the summer of 1747 because the surrounding roads were so bad that the Bishop's coach might not otherwise have reached Formby. It was also necessary to provide Altcar people with one shilling (a lot of money at the time!) to repair the local road.



St. Peter's Church today maintains an excellent website that describes the stones and monuments in the Churchyard. <https://stpetersformby.co.uk/churchyard-records/churchyard-grave-records/>

**SECOND-LIEUT. G. E. THOMPSON
(KILLED).**

News has been received that Second-Lieut. Thompson, of the King's Liverpool Regiment, elder son of Mr. and Mrs. Geo. Thompson, of Parkfield, Freshfield, has been killed in action. Second-Lieut. Thompson who was twenty years of age, was educated at Dunchurch Hall, Rugby, and at Harrow, playing for the school at cricket against Eton and at football against Winchester. After leaving school he joined the staff of Messrs. Milligan and Mackintosh, cotton merchants, Liverpool, and became a playing member of the Northern Cricket Club and the West Lancashire Golf Club. He enlisted in a Liverpool Regiment shortly after war broke out, and obtained his commission in December, 1915. He had been seven weeks at the front. His colonel writes that he was killed whilst leading his platoon into action.

Standing close to the wall bounding Green Lane, is the Battlefield Cross brought back to Formby after the end of WWI, almost certainly by the family of George Thompson. It was made and erected at an advanced field hospital to commemorate 8 members of the King's Liverpool Regiment who lost their lives on the Somme in 1916. Two of the men commemorated on the Battlefield Cross lived in Formby at the start of the War.

2nd Lt. George Thompson lived with his parents and family in Freshfield Road. He was 20 when he died leading his men into action.



Kenneth Lotherington Hutchings was an international cricketer from Tonbridge Wells in Kent. He had had recently taken a post in paper manufacture in Liverpool and lived at South View in Old Town Lane in Formby.

He was hit by a shell and killed instantly on the Somme in 1916. He had joined up at the start of the war.

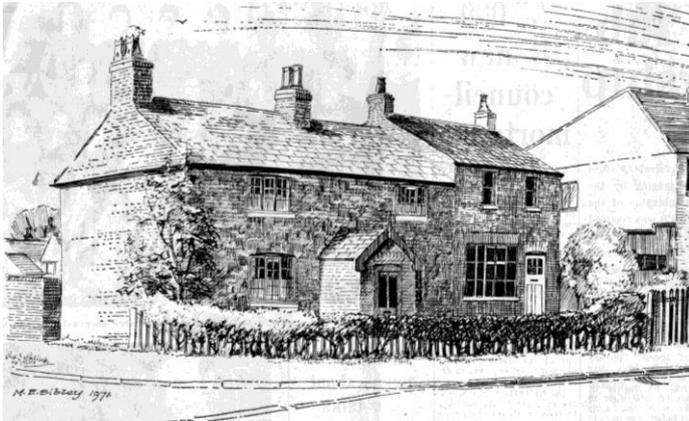


CRICKET PATH AND FORMBY CRICKET/HOCKEY/SQUASH CLUB



The Cricket Club was founded in 1865 and has gradually embraced other sports. Just along from it in the direction of Gores Lane is Formby Tennis Club. By the start of the 20th century it was also the home of Formby Hockey Club. It was opened after the arrival of the railway in Freshfield and the increasing development and house-building that followed.

The Cricket Club was used for army drills during WWI following the establishment of the 'Formby Guard' in November 1914. A twice-weekly Drill and rifle instruction were offered. There were also lectures given on such topics as how to use a compass and protractor, drawing maps and the digging of trenches.



There is some empty land at the corner of Cricket Path and Green Lane. The Muriel Sibley drawing shows the buildings that stood there before their demolition in 1971.

On the right was Birtles Cobblers, and the larger building on the left was used as an estate office by the Formby family. The 'Office' had a stable built behind it for use on Sundays when a

large number of the Formby family and friends came to the church services from Formby Hall. At the time of the funeral of Queen Victoria in 1901, a large wreath was made by flower seller Annie Carr and laid out in this office so that local people could see it before it was taken by rail to London to be hung with others on lamp-posts lining the route of the funeral cortege.

A little further on alongside Dune Heath can be found the remains of what was once a major Golf Course – Freshfield Golf Club. In its heyday it used to employ liveried hosts to welcome members but closed during WWII when the Government requisitioned the land in order to build the Woodvale airfield. The base of the old clubhouse can still be seen. Opposite is a rare view of the old Freshfield Golf Club, now the site of RAF Woodvale.



FORMBY OLD PARSONAGE, Green Lane

This was built in 1775/76. It was in use as a Parsonage until 1967 when Church House became the vicarage for St. Peter's. However, the Vicar in the early years of the 20th century – Thomas Bishop - had already decided to move to Church House for reasons of comfort. The Old Parsonage was sold in 1966.



WRIGLEY'S LANE

Turn back towards the church, then turn left and walk up Wrigley's Lane.



On your left was what had been 'Brock House' in the years of WWI, the home of Mrs. Storey who was so influential in leading the work of the Voluntary Working Parties in the village. After the war she sold the house to Grace Trevor to be used as the new premises for Bishop's Court, the R.C. Boarding School.

As you walk up Wrigley's Lane the site of the school was on your left, though now it has all been redeveloped. The modern entrance is on the site of the original entrance. On the left was a cricket pitch and on the land alongside Brewery Lane were three rugby pitches. On the drive, in front of the house in the days of the Storey family, was a floral display; it was kept in an immaculate condition by two members of the Bourhill family, both named Dick Bourhill. Inside the house was a huge stone fireplace with the letters 'JJW' carved on it – did this refer to the original Mr. Wrigley?

When you reach Paradise Lane, turn right.



School for Girls



School Mistress's House

On the right you will see two buildings from the mid-19th century, built by the Formby family.

In 1849 Mary Formby and her sisters Ann and Elizabeth had run a school in the grounds of Formby Hall since 1812. In 1849 Mary “had a new building erected in Paradise Lane with a house nearby for the school mistress...; and in 1850 the new school for girls, or the ‘Female School’ as it was called, was opened There were two school mistresses, the original one Miss Esther Brown and a new teacher, Miss Betsy Rimmer Park, who was engaged as a teacher of ‘scripture, reading, writing and accounts, and all other matters considered desirable’ ... They had charge of 95 to 100 scholars in winter but considerably fewer in summer when the children’s help would be needed on the farms.” (‘Viking Village’, edited by Edith Kelly, 1973).

In January 1915 the St. Peter’s Girls Friendly Society held a sale of work in support of the WWI war effort at the School for Girls. They created “an array of tidy needlework” and sold other items provided by friends “at reasonable prices”.

Opposite, you will see the old School for Boys standing on Paradise Lane. It replaced the ‘old school’ on School Lane in the Village. This was paid for by the Formby family in 1858 and included a house for the school master.

The Muriel Sibley drawing opposite was made from a 1965 photo.



At the turn of the 20th century, the seating arrangements for boys were on benches in a single, long room. In cold weather, ‘school monitors’ kept the open fires stoked with coal and one former pupils said, “We sat on our hands to warm them a little, but our feet nearly froze.”

Continue to the end of Paradise Lane and turn right onto the main road, where Southport Road meets Ryeground Lane. This was an area with many old cottages until the 1960s when they were gradually demolished and replaced by more modern properties. The cottage opposite, drawn by Muriel Sibley, is a good example: it enjoyed beehives, fruit trees, vegetables and even a donkey in the small stable. It stood at the point where Paradise Lane meets Southport Road before it was replaced in 1957 by two bungalows.



In 1974, this would still have been the scene at the corner of Ryeground Lane and Southport Road.



Return to the Grapes Hotel along Ryeground Lane.



You will find many double-fronted Victorian houses here, built in the years following the arrival of Freshfield Station in the mid-19th century. They were often the homes of well-to-do merchants and businessmen who wanted to live in more rural surroundings than the city of Liverpool in which they worked. Servants and gardeners looked after their needs in these large houses, providing opportunities for local employment. In the early years of the railway coming to Formby, the Railway Company was known to offer special First Class Rail Passes for ten years on this line as an incentive for businessmen to build houses here.

You return to the Grapes from here.