

FORMBY HISTORY WALKS 2

FORMBY IN WWI – SHORTER VERSION

About 1.8 miles circular

Start/end point: Civic War Memorial at the top of Chapel Lane

Welcome on this walk looking at places in Formby that played a part in the community's activities during WW1. *The information comes mainly from information in the FCS book "A Community in Wartime – Formby 1914-1918" by John Phillips and Tony Pawson, usually available for £5 from Derbyshire's on Chapel Lane.*

Of course, Formby at that time was a lot smaller than it is now – the census from 1911 gave the population as some 6,000 whereas in 2011 it was 23,000.

WAR MEMORIAL



You start your walk here at the War Memorial. Following the Armistice in November 1918, two leading suggestions were proposed for a memorial. One was a Cottage Hospital and the other a War Memorial. The latter was chosen and here it is – unveiled on November 12th 1922. Of course an addition was made, the wall behind, to remember the fallen of WW2 and all later modern conflicts.

Before you move off, just look down Three Tuns Lane. What is now Wetherspoon's "The Lifeboat" was, at that time, the Workingmen's Club and, being a key part of the community, played its role in supporting the war effort. For example, in November 1914 troops were billeted there (whilst being trained in the locality).

There would have been a lot of activities in the Club; for instance, in March 1915 there was a hot pot supper to support the Territorials from Formby and a total of ten shillings and sixpence, (52 pence in today's money) was raised to buy cigarettes and forward them to the Formby Boys. It was also the venue for recreational activities; for instance in 1916 the Formby Times reported on billiard matches between soldiers and 'Formbyites'.



Next to the Workingmen's Club, where the YMCA charity shop and Village Inn are now located, was Formby's cinema – 'The Picturedrome' (later, 'The Queen's'). This was a public place of entertainment with various films being shown weekly. Although initially it was not planned to show anything related to the War, this changed and

recruiting films and early documentaries such as “The Fatal Fight”, “French Victory in the Vosges” and “The Battle of the Somme” were shown. At one point during the war in 1915 it was suggested that the Workingmen’s Club and the Picturedrome be taken over for an Officer’s Training School, but this never came to fruition, much to the relief of the people as the Picturedrome was at that time the only place of public entertainment.

Further down Three Tuns Lane at Cross Green there was in 1915 - outside the Blundell Hotel (now The Cross House) a Horse Fair at which the army began commandeering horses belonging to local people for military use. As a consequence, there were times during WW1 when the Formby lifeboat could not be used due to lack of horses to launch it. In one case the soldiers, camped in Formby, had to take horses to the shore to launch the lifeboat.

WALK ALONG SCHOOL LANE

On your Right stands **Our Lady’s Church – Our Lady of Compassion, Formby**



Associated with Our Lady’s Catholic Church there was a school, now demolished and replaced by apartments. In December 1914 troops were first billeted in this end of the village, in private houses as well as the Workingmen’s Club. A large room was made available as a social hall for recreational activities such as reading, writing, games and refreshments for troops. Football matches were played between Our Lady’s men and billeted soldiers at the Catholic Young Men’s Society Ground.

Music concerts were also organised, the first was reported to be held in May 1915. In October 1916, after a second period of billeting, soldiers gave thanks for their time at Our Lady’s “it has been a pleasure after the parades and fatigues of the day to come and meet such willing workers, ever there, despite weather conditions or any other inconvenience, to give us a hearty welcome and provide us with such nice refreshments at ridiculously low prices.”

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. Outside the main door of the church is the War Memorial, thought to have been raised in 1917 although we have found no written record of this. It is a beautiful and well-maintained cross recording the names of members of the R.C. members of the parish who gave their lives in the War.

At the start of the war there were meetings here to make arrangements for Working Parties to produce and provide goods to support the troops. Facilities for leisure and recreation were set up as soon as soldiers began flocking in to Formby in 1914. A large room belonging to the Formby Catholic Schools opened in December as a social hall for soldiers billeted in and around Three Tuns Lane. Helpers from the

church congregation provided facilities for reading, writing, games and refreshments from 5 p.m. to 9.30 p.m. on weekdays and even longer on Sundays.

The first soldiers' music concert took place at the hall on a wet Thursday evening in May 1915 organised by Private Neath of the Manchester Regiment. It included piano solos, 'stirring recitations' and the humorous songs of Private Jones and Private Parkinson including "I parted my hair in the middle".

Sport was also offered to the visitors. One football match was played between the boys from Our Lady's against a team of visiting soldiers, and won 8-2 by the home team.

Formby Times: "The game proved to be interesting to a fairly good number of spectators, and during the second half a collection was made, the proceeds of which will be forwarded to the soldiers' cigarette fund."

GO LEFT ONTO CHURCH ROAD

Contemporary maps show that on your left was open field and on the right only a few houses before Whitehouse Farm was the **Gild Hall**. It was known at the time as the '**Queen's Jubilee Hall**'. In 1914, when troops were first billeted in Formby the Jubilee Hall was designated as the detachments HQ, and the soldiers used the "adjacent field for drill".

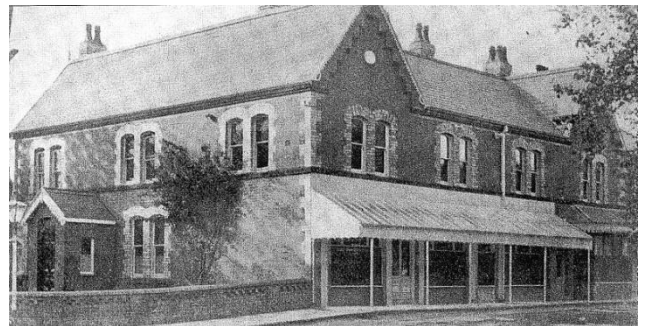


One of the most iconic photos of Formby during WWI is that of a parade passing by the Gild Hall. It was an ideal central location for the Army Recruiting HQ and the Formby Recruiting Officer, Captain William Bindloss, a solicitor, had an office here though he lived not far away in College Avenue. Soldiers were billeted in local private houses and also in the Golf houses and in Victoria Hall,

As you walk up Church Road today it is nice to know the road surface is much better than a hundred years ago. In 1915 it was reported that a horse pulling a trap slipped on the poor surface and fell, seriously injuring itself. The three passengers tumbled out of the trap and sustained severe bruising. 'Formby Times': "...it was the local road surface that caused a problem. Councillor Dickenson and two friends were driving along Church Road in a trap. The road was slippery and known as an accident black-spot ... On this occasion, the horse pulling the trap slipped and fell opposite Whitehouse Farm, causing itself serious injury. The shafts of the vehicle were broken and all three passengers were thrown into the roadway, sustaining severe bruises. The horse and trap were taken to the Forge in Church Road."

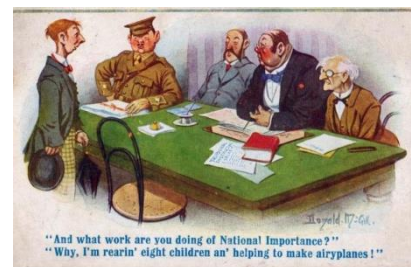
MOORHOUSES BUILDINGS

Next you come to the site of the Council Offices of the Formby Urban District Council during WWI. If you look up, above the frontages of the current shops and businesses you can see the original building. This was the “seat of power” of the Council at the time!



The Formby Roll of Honour was introduced in September 1914, to list all those men who had joined up for active service: it was posted here as well as in various churches and Post Offices.

In these offices the Military Tribunals were held every Friday evening, the first being in November 1915. The Tribunals reviewed the cases of men who wished, or whose employers wished them, to be excused military service.



It was from these offices that people would come to collect and return registration forms for rationing when it was first introduced in 1917. Wartime cookery classes and demonstrations were also given in these offices.

CABLE STREET

In Cable Street you can pick up some threads of Formby life at the time.

In the initial rush to enlist, the Formby Times reported a number of the Freshfield Band – which practised regularly at a house in this street – had joined up already. Thomas Halliwell, a cornet player who lived in no.14 soon joined them. Alice Cross lived at number 10 Cable Street and had married another member of the Freshfield Band, cornet player James Marshall. James took a job as a saloon waiter on board the Lusitania and tragically lost his life when it sank in 1915 after being torpedoed. .

The Freshfield Band have lost another instrumentalist. Thos. Halliwell, cornet player, has joined the Royal Engineers, and left Formby on Thursday morning for Aldershot. Albert Waddington, Cable-street, who feared rejection on the eye-sight test, has “got through,” and hopes to be “in the ranks” shortly.

Albert Waddington of number 4 was soon to also go. Sadly, Albert died on the Somme. Formby Times: “Private Waddington was, perhaps, one of the best known youths in Formby He was in the company that was formed of ex-members of Church Lads Brigades ... He also served the St. Peter's Church as a bell ringer.”

**TURN LEFT AT THE CORNER WITH OLD MILL LANE.
WALK DOWN OLD MILL LANE AND TURN RIGHT INTO GORES LANE.
CONTINUE UNTIL YOU TURN LEFT INTO OLD TOWN LANE.**

At the top of **Old Town Lane** you can find the former homes of two of the fallen soldiers from the Somme.

Archie Smith-Maxwell lived at 'Old Town Lodge' and was a student in Edinburgh when he joined up. He was the first Formby man to die on the Somme in 1916. Living next door was England Test cricketer Kenneth Hutchings, one of the men commemorated by the wooden Battlefield Cross in St. Peter's Churchyard: He lived at 'South View'.

The two houses are adjacent to each other next to the Chemist.

WALK DOWN OLD TOWN LANE AND TURN LEFT AT FRESHFIELD ROAD

There are a number of people who are linked with the war years along Freshfield Road.

At the corner of Old Town Lane and Freshfield Road, on your right, was the home of Professor John Garstang, at number 70 called 'Hilbre' He was involved with official receptions within Formby and communications with visiting dignitaries. He was an Egyptologist remembered for his work in archaeology at Liverpool University and gave his name to the 'Garstang Museum'.

George Thompson is another young man commemorated by the wooden cross in St. Peter's Churchyard. He lived with his family at number 54 Freshfield Road ('Parkfield').

There was a house, now demolished, called 'Thurlestone' that stood at what is now the entrance to Formby High School. This was the home of the architect John Havelock Sutton and his wife who was one of the leading organisers of Working Parties for the troops. Their son George was awarded the Military Cross but died in hospital in 1920.

WALK SOUTH AND TURN LEFT INTO ROSEMARY LANE

Rosemary Lane was a favoured residential area in the early 20th century. When the initial rush to enlist volunteers began to slow down in 1915, a local Recruiting Committee agreed with the Military to organise a Recruitment March with bands and speakers on 22nd June. Two external Bands arrived, Lord Derby's Recruiting Band and the Piper' Band of the Liverpool Scottish Regiment. They marched through Formby and ended by going along Rosemary Lane to a nearby field for a half-hour set of speeches.

Recruitment was still voluntary at this point of time so there was great emphasis laid on patriotism and loyal and national duty.



Holy Trinity Church is on your left as we walk East and then South along Rosemary Lane.

The Parish Hall (built 1908) was used as a YMCA canteen till June 1917.

Thursday evening concerts began in November 1914 and continued throughout the war when soldiers were billeted in the Village.

A good example was a December 1914 Formby Local Relief Concert. It began with the singing of the National Anthem and the Russian National Hymn. Eighteen-year-old Marjory Wilson played piano and her mother the cello whilst serving troops offered their singing, dancing and comedy.

Within the Church there is a Memorial in the form of four small stained-glass windows in the porch to Harold Bennett Beardwood, one of the sons of the Postmaster, who died in May 1917. Another son, Edward, died a mere four months later, also in the trenches. A third son, **Fred**, lived on into his 90s and Fred became a well-known historian within the original Formby Society.

TURN LEFT INTO BROWS LANE WHICH LEADS TO CHAPEL LANE

On your Right can be found **Elbow Lane** where, a little way down to the left, stands the **Wesleyan Chapel** (today the Methodist Church).



This was used as a Soldiers' Institute as well as for regular Concerts.

Local Wesleyan musicians such as Lucy Beesley and Hope Christophers would prepare musical evenings and farewell concerts for troops here.

FROM ELBOW LANE YOU CAN RETURN TO THE WAR MEMORIAL VIA CHAPEL LANE