

# Neston Town Trail

*A walk round  
Neston  
Conservation  
Area*



September 2019

## 1 The Parish Church of St Mary and St Helen

The Domesday survey of 1085 mentions a priest at Neston, evidence of an early church on the site. In the mid-12th century that first church was replaced with one built of sandstone by the lord of the manor, Ralph Montalt, Baron of Mold.



During the 18th century galleries were built in the church, causing structural damage and so it was almost wholly rebuilt in 1874-5 to the plans of architect Francis Doyle, only the tower remaining from the old building. Inside the church are some Viking-period grave-markers formed from sandstone carved with various scenes. These are important memorials that show that Neston must have been part of the area where the Vikings settled in Wirral in the 10th century.

*Turn to the left and walk up the High Street towards the Cross*

The first two shops in the row on the left were built in the 1860s, and a piece of land at the back was given to enlarge the church yard at the same time.

Thomas Whittell built the house at the other end of the row; it now forms two shops, and bears a date-plate of 1724 and the initials of Thomas and his wife Margery Whittell. Thomas was a prominent Neston brewer who died in



1758. In 1756 the Quarter Sessions records tell us that a thief was sentenced to be whipped “from Mr Whittell’s house to the bridge”. His brewery was on Liverpool Road near the former school building. There were several breweries in Neston, and the town was noted for the quality of the beer.

At Neston Cross (which refers to the cross-roads) is the Bushell Fountain. Christopher Bushell was a Liverpool wine merchant who built Hinderton Hall (on the A540) in 1855. He took a great interest in local activities and gave generously for the building of local schools and churches. At a time when people had problems getting clean water he sank a public well at the Cross.

In 1882 the local community of Neston erected, on his own well, the **Bushell Memorial Fountain**, made from Scottish granite. It was connected to the new mains water supply which Bushell, as the Chairman of the Local Board, had helped to organise. He died five years later.



The roadway by the Cross used to be bare rock. Neston Market was held here every Friday from 1728, when George III granted a royal charter to permit it. Here also stood Neston's whipping post, a requirement for every town. The black and white building across the road was the **White Horse public house** from 1877 to around 1970. It replaced an old thatched inn and some shops which had shutters used as market stalls.

*The next few buildings are best viewed before crossing the road*

**Jackson's Tower**, the ornate structure near the Cross, built of red Ruabon brick with terra cotta decoration, was erected in 1896 by George Jackson, chemist and postmaster, whose shop was next to it. Originally it housed a clock; the opening for it can still be seen. One story tells that its chimes clashed with the church clock, so it was removed, though a former owner said that Mrs Jackson got fed up with people popping in to tell her the clock was wrong!



Next to the tower is **Old Bank House**. The oldest of Neston's dated houses, it has a date-plate of 1703 and the initials of Samuel Griffiths, who is known to have built the house, and his wife Jane. This plate, on the side wall, can be seen only from inside the adjacent Tower.



**10 Parkgate Road**, the building with its gable-end facing the street, a little further down on the same side, bears a date-plate of 1744. It was built by Joseph Pemberton, a 'housewright', on the garden of Old Bank House.

Pemberton, who died in 1766, also built the two houses on the corner of Mill Street, nearly opposite the library, called Fern and Hawthorn Cottages, twenty years earlier.



*Cross the road by the Bushell Fountain and continue the walk along the High Street*

The Brown Horse, opposite, together with its neighbouring two shops was built in the late 1800s, replacing an earlier inn of the same name.

The next block of shops, nearer to the road, were originally two smart three-storey houses built around the 1730s. Behind the houses was a farmyard with shippens and cart sheds.

Further up on the right, is the Town Hall. The Local Board, Neston's first council, proposed to build a Town Hall to commemorate Queen Victoria's jubilee in 1887, and a private company was formed to pay for it. There were objections to the site chosen because it was in the midst



of so many public houses. The architect was David Walker of Liverpool. The design was said to be 'A free adaption of Queen Anne period in brick and terracotta'. The first function to be held there, in 1889, was a ball for the Neston Rifle Volunteers.

When Neston Urban District Council was formed in 1933, it bought the building from the private company and extended it.

David Walker also designed the inn at the end of Hinderton Road, the Shrewsbury Arms, to replace an inn that had been there for over a hundred years. It is now called the Hinderton Arms.





On the left is an **ancient sandstone barn**, itself built on the solid rock. The barn, dating from the late 1600s, is the oldest building in Neston, and is a reminder of the days when farm buildings were usually found in the middle of villages or even towns. A nuisance was caused in the 1880s by shooting galleries and an organ set up in the yard. In the 1920s the barn served as a garage for a taxi service of Model T Fords. The barn belongs to the Brewers Arms next door, also one of the oldest buildings in the town.



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*Follow the road, taking the left fork to Park Street by the Brewers Arms*

The Methodist Church, at the junction of Park Street and Liverpool Road, was built in 1908 by the architect J H Lambert. It replaced a corrugated iron chapel (below, right) which had been provided by a local tug-owner as a non-denominational Mission Hall in 1873.

His nephew Matthew Webb, the first man to swim the English Channel, spoke at the Mission Hall in 1877 in favour of temperance.

Park Street, to the left of the Methodist Church, has a number of 18th century houses. On the left, numbers 9-17 are over two hundred years old, and there is a date-plate of 1769 on number 11.



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*Continue along Park Street past the end of Cross Street onto the large central grassed island.*

In earlier times cockfighting took place here, in an old malt mill. There was also a quarry here, but it was abandoned in the 1870s after complaints about blasting, and was left to cause a nuisance by filling with water which had to be pumped out. From 1900 it was used by the Council for dumping refuse.

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Opposite the grassed area, are some early houses, the oldest of which, **Plough Cottage**, bears a date-plate of 1724, with the initials of Thomas and Lydia Johnson.

Together with the building to its right it was the Plough Inn from the early 1800s until the early 1900s.

*Retrace your steps a little and go up Cross Street on the right of the cottages*

Behind the houses in Cross Street was another quarry. In 1889 a young fisherman called Henry Peters threw himself into the water and drowned. The land became a timber yard, and an oil reclamation site later in the 20th century, and by 2011 12 houses had been built in Scholars Court.

*Turn left along Liverpool Road past the old school and turn left down Poplar Weint before the Malt Shovel pub*

**Poplar Weint** leads past the side of what was the Infant School until 1992. A sandstone building of 1859, it is now converted to apartments.



The class-rooms were designed to provide space for public meetings and lectures, in addition to their usual purpose. In 1902 the school was deemed of sufficient size for 340 children. Note the interesting roof slate pattern, which was part of the original design.

There was once a brewery in this area, hence the name of the pub, 'The Malt Shovel'.

*On leaving the weint, back in Park Street, cross the road and go down Buggen Lane, the road opposite to the right.*

A **buggen** (in Welsh, bwgan) is a ghost – a couple of centuries ago people would not walk along the lane after dark as it was supposedly haunted by an unhappy serving maid. This road was once part of the southern boundary of Neston Park, a medieval deer park which gave Parkgate its name. The lane has a sunken appearance because there would have been a ditch and a bank, with a wooden paling fence along the top.

The pedestrian gate in the wall is to the grounds of Townfield, a reminder that in medieval times and until some 250 years ago, much of the land around here was town fields, divided into narrow, unfenced strips, like allotments. Local people would have used these for cultivating crops, but by the 1730s people had begun to build smart new houses on some of the strips.



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At the bottom of Buggen Lane, on the corner opposite, stands the United Reformed Church, which was built as a Presbyterian church in 1884, designed by Francis Doyle who also built the current Parish Church.

To the right of the church stands the Manse (now a private house), which is a listed building, designed in 1899 by a distinguished Liverpool architect, T. Myddleton Shallcross. It has some notable art nouveau features.



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Until 1787 the road to Parkgate was down Moorside Lane and along the shore; there was only a footpath across the fields on the route of the current Parkgate Road.

*Cross to the opposite pavement to see a group of Neston's finest old houses.*







The first house on the right is **Moorside House**, with a handsome shell canopy over the front door. You may notice ‘Glanrhos’ carved on the gate piers; a former resident preferred the Welsh version of ‘Moorside’. This house was still being built in 1775 when its owner, a Neston butcher called John Edge, who had a shop near the Cross, wrote his will. He asked his executors to finish the

building, and left it to his two daughters. His grandson Dr John Larden lived here in the 1800s.

Further up the hill, towards the town, on the same side, the brick wall bears a **plaque**, which commemorates the old Methodist chapel, where John Wesley preached in 1762, “*in the small house they have just built*”. When the present Methodist Church at the top of the High Street was opened in 1908, many visitors to the ceremony went to look at the old chapel, which by then was being used as a barn and has since been demolished.



**Elmhurst**, the second house along on the opposite side, is one of Neston’s oldest houses, and it was probably built for Stephen Bond, the first doctor that we hear of in Neston, in the early 1700s. His widow was living there in 1732. It was a much plainer house when it was built, with no bays, nor the right-hand wing which is a later addition and now forms a separate house.



Another doctor, Stephen’s son, James Bond, lived in **Elmleigh**, the next house on the right, which was new in the 1730s. This house has also been altered, with the porch and wing at the back added in the late 1800s. An extension has also been added to the other side of the house.



James Bond had a son who was a doctor in the later 18th century, another Stephen Bond. He too lived in Elmleigh, though he also had a house and practice in Liverpool in the 1780s. Dr Stephen Bond built the large house that adjoins Elmhurst, **Elm Grove House**, in about 1800, and soon sold it to a Captain Brown who had been master of one of the Liverpool slave ships. It was described as 'A Very handsome and commodious House.' Its rooms included a dining parlour, drawing room, breakfast parlour, eight bedrooms, servants' hall, and butler's pantry.



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James Bond's second wife, whom he married in 1748, was Mary Norman, whose father was a tailor from **Dee Cottage**. We can see his date-plate referring to Benjamin and Mary Norman 1727. In the 19th century until 1855, this was an inn called the Spotted Cow.



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**Wayside Cottage**, to its right, is a later addition.

On the other side of the road is **Beech House**, built in 1847 for Charles Monk, a ship's captain from a well-known local maritime family. His initials can be seen on the fascia board above the front porch. There are two other houses in Neston of the same design as Beech House, namely Springfield which we will pass in Church Lane, and Leighton Croft on Leighton Road.



Next door is **Turzum**, another house of similar date.

Next to Turzum stands Bank Cottage, opposite the library. This is a problem house, because although it has a date-plate of 1724 on its side, we know that the house was not built till after 1811.



The date-plate, with Joseph Pemberton's initials, must have come from another house, perhaps the barn of Fern and Hawthorn Cottages, which were built around 1724 by the said Joseph, and originally had a barn next to them.

Neston Library was intended to be Neston's memorial to Queen Victoria after her death in 1901. It was not built, however, until 1907, largely with



funds provided by the Scottish-American industrialist Andrew Carnegie. Hundreds of libraries in Britain were financed by him. Carnegie made the condition that the land should be donated; Mrs Russell, the widow of Dr Russell who lived

in Vine House, gave the land. The Russells' son Frank was a partner in the firm Knowles and Russell, engineers to Neston Council, and his firm were the architects for the library building. It was greatly extended in 1973, and updated and altered in 2003.



The footpath which runs beside the Library garden down towards the Wirral Way used to be known as Doctor's Styles. It joins Old Quay Lane near the old Neston laundry where many local people worked in the first half of the 20th century.

Vine House, opposite the library, was probably built in 1747, the date on a stone on the stables behind the house, for a wealthy Neston public notary, Mr John Glegg. He was related to the Glegg family of Gayton Hall. The widow of the last Dr Bond was living in Vine House when she died in 1844, and later in the 19th century Dr David Russell lived here. He served as the Medical Officer for the Wirral Guardians during the dreadful cholera outbreak in 1866, when around 50 people died in Neston. He was given £50 compensation after the outbreak, to make up for his loss in private practice.



*Cross the road and go up Mill Street to the rear of Vine House turning right alongside Churchill Court.*

Vine House is notable for the serpentine or crinkle-crankle wall which forms two sides of the garden. Walls of this type, more usually found in East Anglia, are uncommon in this area. One of the bays contains a hearth and a flue where a fire was lit in cold weather to protect such plants as peaches from the frost.



Next to the wall is Churchill Court, an unusual design of housing built for the elderly in 1972 by Gerald Beech and Partners. It is now occupied by all age groups.

*Returning to and re-crossing Parkgate Road, turn into Church Lane (opposite Vine House)*

The line of Church Lane originally marked the limit of the town, and on its downhill side there lay another of the medieval town fields.





**Beechways House**, on the corner, of Church Lane, was built for Dr George Gunn, one of the Neston GPs, in 1913. His son, Lieutenant George Ward Gunn, already honoured with the Military Cross, was awarded the Victoria Cross in 1941 for conspicuous gallantry in Libya, where he died.

Gunn Grove, off Breezehill Road, is named after him.

This house, like the library, was built on land that had belonged to Vine House, and like the library was designed by H F Russell.



The oldest house in the lane is **Holly Tree House** (*left*) which was built before 1811. The cast iron German Imperial coat of arms (of 1889-1918) on the front of the house was installed much later.

**The Hermitage**, down the drive to the side of Holly Tree House, is of early 19th century Regency style, and has another memento of Charles Monk (whose initials appear on Beech House above the porch) – in 1823 he scratched his name and the date on a

window in the Hermitage, where they remain.



**Springfield** was the home of yet another physician, Dr James Braid. His father, a distinguished surgeon also called James Braid, experimented with the use of mesmerism in Manchester in the 1840s, and was the first person to use the term 'hypnotism'. At one time it was known as 'Braidism'. Dr David Russell, who eventually had a practice in Vine House, had lived here as an assistant to Dr Braid.



*On our left we now find the wall of the churchyard, and we can return through it to our starting point.*

In 1900 the vicar reported that the churchyard could take burials for only one more year. Neston Council bought land by Raby Park Road for a cemetery, although this was not ready until 1906.

Inside the church can be seen the Viking-period carved stones, and some notable stained glass windows by Burne-Jones, Kempe and Morris.

The original charter and rules of Neston Female Friendly Society are also kept in the church; the Society was founded in 1814 and is still active in Neston. It is now known as Neston Female Society and is probably the last remaining society of its type in the country.



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# Neston Conservation Area

The numbers refer to the points of interest in the Town Trail

