

An Architectural Jewel Under Threat

The Police Station in Telegraph Road is being sold

by Roger Lane and Jenny McDonald



Telegraph Road reflects the evolution and growth of Heswall from a small fishing and farming community based in the Lower Village to the busy and pleasant place which we know today. Originally the road was a sandy track, mainly along the top ridge of Heswall Hill, representing a shorter route from Neston to West Kirby and Meols, if there was no cause to descend to the Lower Village. It was the obvious route to run the telegraph northwards from Chester to West Kirby and Hilbre Island. The development of the road only started in the late 19th century, with shops first being built around Heswall Cross, followed by residential development stretching in each direction, interspersed with the occasional shop, garage or other commercial premises. Nearly all these houses along the central part of Telegraph Road have now been converted into shops. In some cases the front elevations of the original residential houses can be seen behind the shop facades, in others the original houses were demolished to build purpose-built shops. Many of the shops are set well back from the road, a feature used by the many restaurants for outside dining. This setting back is a reminder of the front gardens of the original houses.

There are just a few architecturally significant and attractive buildings left along Telegraph Road which remind us of this important period in the development of Heswall, namely Lloyds Bank, the Methodist Church and the Police Station. The Children's Hospital also fell into this category until it was demolished. The Lloyds Bank building was previously under threat of demolition for road widening, but is now protected by listing. These three remaining buildings stand out as architectural and historical icons of a bygone age, adding vibrancy to the street scene in the way they are interspersed amongst modern commercial/retail architecture and blocks of flats with no significant architectural merit. Now another of these key remaining buildings is under threat, as the Police and Crime Commissioner for Merseyside has instructed a commercial property agency to place on sale the Police Station and its attached land, comprising 0.43 acres which includes the car park currently leased to Mark and Spencer. It is advertised as being both a development and a redevelopment opportunity.

The Heswall Society is very keen to see the key features of the building, the front and east elevations, the roofline and the chimneys preserved and is opposed to any redevelopment which would require the building to be demolished.

The Tithe map of 1851 indicates that the land upon which the Police Station is situated was part of a huge stretch of common land consisting of 425 acres covering much of the area of the current Top Village. The landowner was William Lloyd who was a Joint Lord of the Manor of Heswall. The development of Heswall Top Village was enabled as these common lands were gradually sold off for building. The history of the Police Station plot is still being researched. Land Registry details indicate that in 1896 a transaction took place involving the Right Honourable Caroline Anne Baroness Hatherton, relating either to the plot itself or an adjacent one. Interestingly, the Baroness was previously the wife of Edward D Davenport, of the Bromley Davenport family who were also holders of the title of Joint Lord of the Manor of Heswall.



Date Stone above side door

In June 1910 much of the plot was sold by Alfred John Elgood to the Country Council of the Administrative County of Cheshire. There are further details of sales of additional plots of land in 1920 by Elgood and by Morris and Jones Co., which together with the original land form the current plot. The latter vendor may have been the carpet company of the same name founded in 1897 which still trades in Greasby and Liverpool. Alfred Elgood at the time lived in the property known as The Wilderness in Quarry Road East. Unfortunately no evidence has been found that the land was gifted by Lord Lever for the benefit of the community (as the second Lord Leverhulme did with Whitfield Common in 1933), although this is a much repeated belief.

Harry Beswick was commissioned to design the new Police Station and submitted drawings to the Rural District Council in 1911. The Parish Council asked if fire equipment could be stored within the new building to serve Heswall parish as there was no dedicated fire service in the village. Records held by the Museum of Policing in Cheshire suggest an opening date of 1st January 1912. A stone date plaque above the entrance bears the date 1911 which was presumably the year of construction. The resulting building with its Ruabon brick façade, fine sandstone detailing to the mullioned windows and gables was a stylish addition to the local landscape.

The Police Station was an important and seemingly much-needed addition to village life. The building incorporated a sergeant's house to provide 24-hour cover in case of emergencies. Newspaper articles suggested that much of the police officers' time was spent with alcohol-related incidents and immorality. They were also the first to be called out to tackle local fires. The station became the headquarters for the Wirral division of the Cheshire Constabulary in December 1919, which is consistent with the purchase of additional land described above. It is believed that the Police Station was extended at the rear at the time, possibly including more cells, but there are no details available. The station returned to local use around 1940. Heswall became the responsibility of Merseyside Police in 1974, following local government reorganisation. The station was closed for public contact around 2011.

