

Wirral Area Statement for Local Heritage Listing project

BACKGROUND:

There is evidence of settlement on the Wirral Peninsula in the Domesday record, with the key historic centres in Birkenhead, West Kirby and Heswall. Most of the land was wooded then eventually agricultural in nature, but through the 19th and 20th centuries, changed with the expansion of Liverpool, the introduction of the rail network, first with the Birkenhead to Chester line, opened in 1840 and then the Mersey railway tunnel opened in 1886. The Wirral offered a retreat for wealthy merchants seeking respite from the grimy city, and for day-trippers to the new resorts at New Brighton.

Some of the earliest gridiron terraced housing for factory and dock workers, built 1850s-60s can still be found on Cannon Hill in Birkenhead. Victorian Villa housing, the majority of which is from mid-19th Century was built emanating from the established historic cores in Birkenhead, West Kirby and Heswall. There are examples of early 19th century villas in Italianate or Picturesque Gothic styles planned with trees, garden railings and low walls to create picturesque groupings. Later villas were more eclectic in style, of irregular composition and features. Art Deco architecture can be found at Hoylake, New Brighton and Caldby. Arts and Crafts architecture is exemplified in the early Garden City of Port Sunlight where the natural materials of the Wirral (mudstone and red sandstone) are brought to life in considered design.

Notable persons include; James Atherton, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Sir Joseph Paxton, William Hesketh Lever and William Laird all of whom played a part in the development of the area.

This rich variety and quality of housing types and styles has been recognised and acknowledged for its significance through the designation of 26 conservation areas across the peninsula, many of which currently have listed buildings within the boundaries. However, the local listing project seeks to identify those historic assets that are not currently protected, so they may be afforded consideration in the planning process.

There is a strategic regeneration programme being developed for Birkenhead and nominations for assets in this area are discouraged at this stage. However, heritage and design policies are being drawn up for the programme and management of the heritage environment may be dealt with under these.

ASSETS OF INTEREST:

Early vernacular buildings would be considered.

Victorian and Edwardian villas of high architectural and/or artistic significance that are not currently listed or within a conservation area.

Excellent examples of Art Deco, Arts and Crafts of high architectural and/or artistic significance that are not listed or within a conservation area.

Buildings associated with early leisure and social activity (e.g. pubs) may be considered if they align with the selection criteria.