

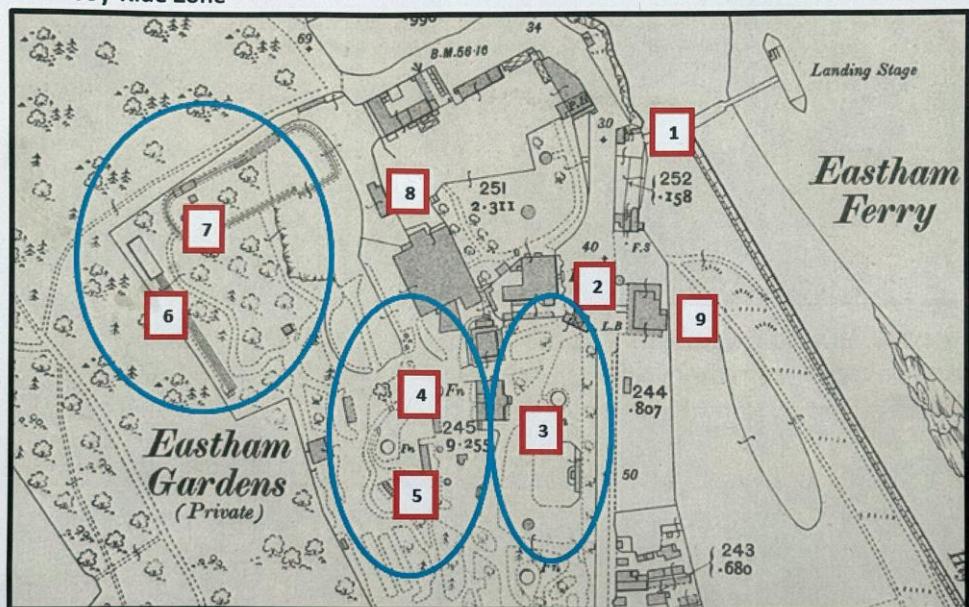
Eastham Victorian Pleasure Gardens

This Tour will take you on a journey back in time, to the period between 1847 and the 1920s, when Eastham Woods was transformed into an extensive Pleasure Gardens to entertain people from both sides of the River Mersey. The map shows 9 locations where we will stop to hear about the attractions of the Gardens at that location and to identify what remains. There are 3 zones:

Entertainment Zone

Botanical & Zoological Gardens

Joy-Ride Zone



Position 1 The Ferry Landing Stage. Historical introduction to Eastham Woods and Eastham Ferry.

Before the Norman Conquest of 1066 "Estham" stretched from Ince to Wallasey and was owned by **Earl Edwin** (Brother-in-Law to Harold of Hastings). From 1071 **Hugh Avranche (Hugh Lupus)** was awarded the land and became the 1st Earl of Chester.



In **1086**, Eastham was listed in the Domesday Book. It had a recorded population of 79 "households", putting it in the largest 20% of settlements recorded in the Book. These household comprised: "36 villagers; 21 smallholders; 4 slaves; 1 priest; 8 other population; 5 other".

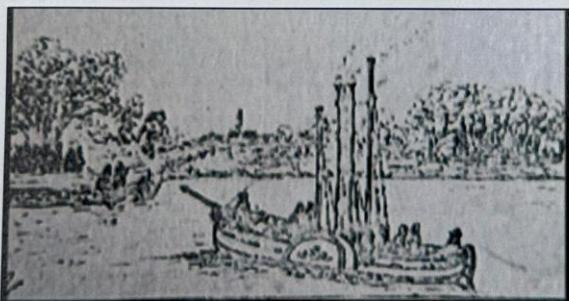
In **1150** a church was established in Eastham. In **1152** Earl Ranulf de Gernon (4th Earl of Chester) donated Eastham to the Benedictine Monastery of St. Werburgh in Chester, for "the atonement of his sins".

Since **1357**, a ferry had operated between Eastham and Liverpool, when the monks of St. Werburgh's were granted a licence to run a ferry by the then Earl of Chester (The Black Prince, later King Edward II).

Moving on to **1754**, Eastham Ferry House (The Bote House) was built. It is one of the oldest public houses on the Wirral. The ferry boat men lived in this house. Now The Tap.

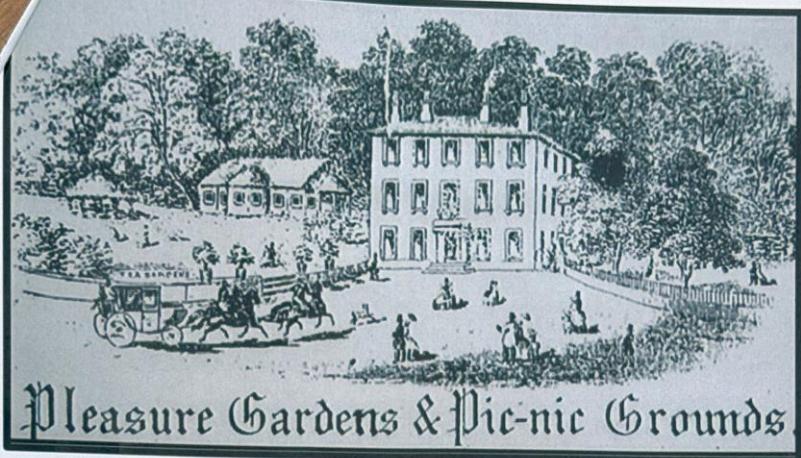


In the **1770s**, up to 40 stagecoaches a day carried passengers and goods for the ferry. Eastham Woods was beginning to provide a place of pleasure and entertainment for ferry travellers.



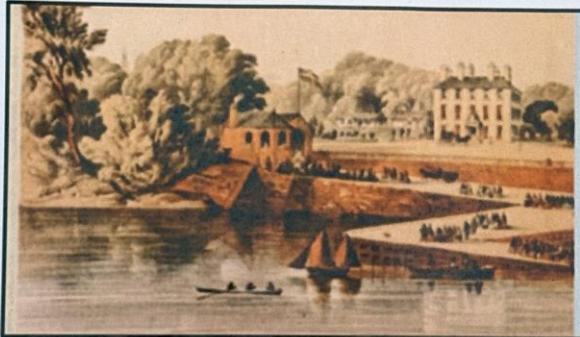
In **1816** the first steam-powered ferry boat, **Princess Charlotte**, began operating from Eastham. By **1821**, Eastham had become a focus for day-trippers. Report from the Liverpool Mercury: "*Parties of pleasure will find Eastham delightfully situated for summer excursions, combining an extremely pleasant sail with the beautiful landscape and scenery about the Ferry-house*"

In **1840**, the Chester to Birkenhead Railway opened, therefore demand for the Eastham Ferry declined. However, Eastham Woods remained a popular day resort. In **1843**, the **Stanley Arms** was built. The **Eastham Pleasure Gardens** era had begun.

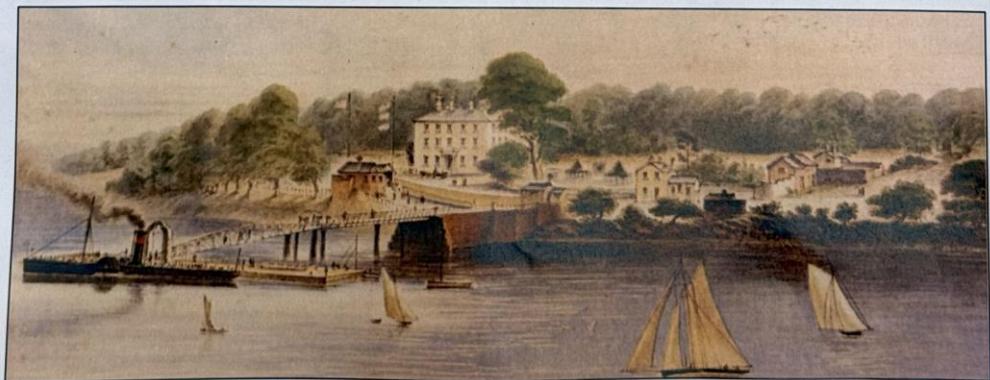


Pleasure Gardens & Pic-nic Grounds

In 1849, a new zig-zag pier was constructed and in 1857, a ticket office was built. You can see evidence of the slipway at low tide. The ticket office exists as a café.



In 1873, a "State-of-the-art" floating landing stage was constructed to accommodate vessels at all stages of the tide. By now Eastham Pleasure Gardens were being referred to as "The Richmond of the Mersey".



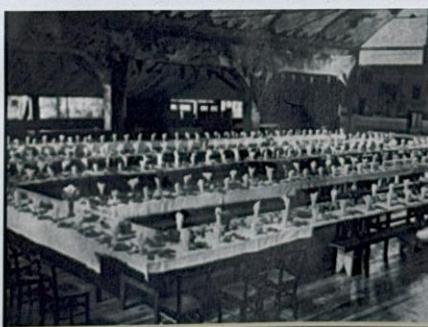
The 1890s was a boom time. Boats arrived every 15 minutes. You could hire a horse-drawn cab to visit Eastham Village. The sign "STAND FOR 5 CABS" can still be seen.



Position 2 The Eastham Ferry Hotel has not changed much, although a veranda was added in 1898, but demolished in the 1970s.



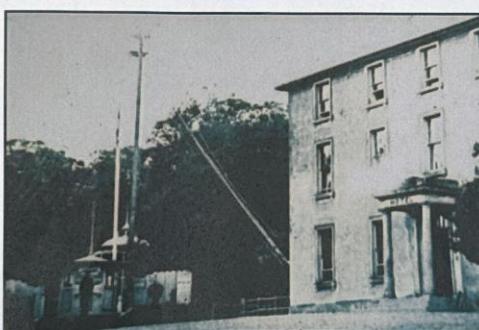
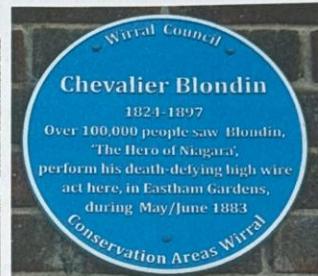
In 1843 an advert for the new hotel stated "*The pleasure garden on the north side, with its arbours, rustic seats, and flower beds, retains all its former beauty, and will be principally used by residents at the hotel.*" "*For visitors of limited means, the grounds on the south side of the hotel have been laid out and planted as garden. In a large refreshment room, sixty feet long by thirty feet wide "creature comforts" will be dispensed on much lower terms than in the hotel, or in the north garden. A band of music will be constantly stationed there and occasionally vocal and instrumental concerts will be given.*" If you fancied lunch in 1889:



A large Ballroom was located behind the Hotel. It could accommodate up to 1,000 people and was used for: dancing; concerts; theatrical performances and tea parties. Between May and August, 33,405 children from 89 Sunday Schools in Liverpool paid one shilling each to be conveyed by ferry to Eastham, admitted to the Zoological Gardens for the day and provided with an athletics sports field to play in and provided with the well-known "Eastham Tea"

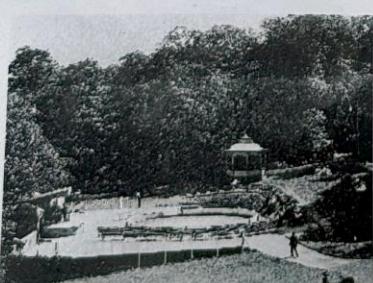
iloaf, Bread and Butter and Tea). The Teachers had a better class of tea for one shilling and pence !

Next to the hotel was the entrance to the Pleasure Gardens. In 1887, an arch was constructed to commemorate **Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee**. It was modelled on London's Marble Arch but its construction was only stone cladding on a wooden frame. It was demolished in 1934. By the entrance to the gardens there is a **Blue Plaque** on the wall.



The plaque commemorates the tightrope walker **Chevalier Blondin**, "Hero of Niagara Falls". He performed at the Gardens in **1883** (Aged 60). Blondin performed many tricks including: **Standing on his head, Dancing, Lying down and pretending to sleep and cooking omelettes half way across. He also transported a local boy across the wire in a wheelbarrow.** During 19 days of performing, 102,000 people visited Eastham to see Blondin. In 2019, Blondin's great nephew attended the blue plaque ceremony. You can see him holding a section of his rope.

Position 3 - The entertainment area. In the Victorian era this entertainment area had a stage, a circus ring and a bandstand.



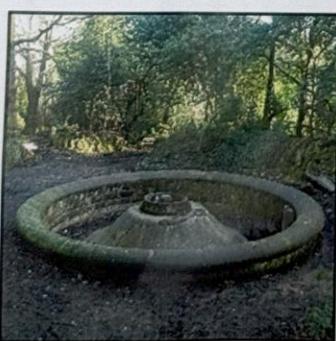


Performing acts included: "The Merry Madcaps" and "Fred Brookes' Vaudeville Troupe". Circus acts included: "Dunedin Troupe of Australian Cyclists; The Donegan Family in Exhibition of Roller Skating and Skate Pedestal Dancing and Mr. E.H.Dainey and his Wonderful Trained Dogs, Ponies and Educated Monkey "Smiler". Dancing was accompanied by a full military band playing in the bandstand.

Position 4 - The Floral and Zoological Gardens



The Floral Gardens, in the Victorian era, were described as "*An extensive collection of ornamental trees and plants displayed in raised sandstone beds surrounded by a maze of pathways lined with red tiles*". You can still see the stone walls that supported these raised beds. "*Sandstone fountains, rustic arbours and "Italian Parteers" provided an area of peace and tranquillity and for "private canoodling and troth-plighting*". The site of 5 fountains can still be seen today. The one below is near the Bear Pit.



sition 5 - The Bear Pit



EASTHAM ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS,
Situated on the Cheshire Banks of the Mersey, embowered in a
Magnificent Wood,
40 ACRES IN EXTENT,
Stocked with a fine and Unique Collection of
WILD ANIMALS
Rare and Tropical Birds, Costly Arctic Seals and Polar
Bears, African Lions, Indian Leopards, Zebras, Elks,
Argali, Camels, Ocelots, Cassowaries, Black, Brown,
and Silver Bears, Large Lion House, Aviary, and
Monkey House, Seal Tanks and Bear Pits, Rustic
Arbours, Italian Parterres. All kinds of
Holiday Amusements.

The Zoological Gardens began in 1860. This report in 1881 stated: "*These beautiful Gardens are stocked with the choicest specimens of WILD ANIMAL LIFE, have Lion Houses, Bear Pits, Seal Tanks, Polar Bear Cages, Aviaries, Apiaries & Monkey Houses.*" We do not know where they were exhibited. The photograph, below, shows animals, such as lion, leopard and wolf in portable cages. Therefore there may not have been a permanent site for the zoo.

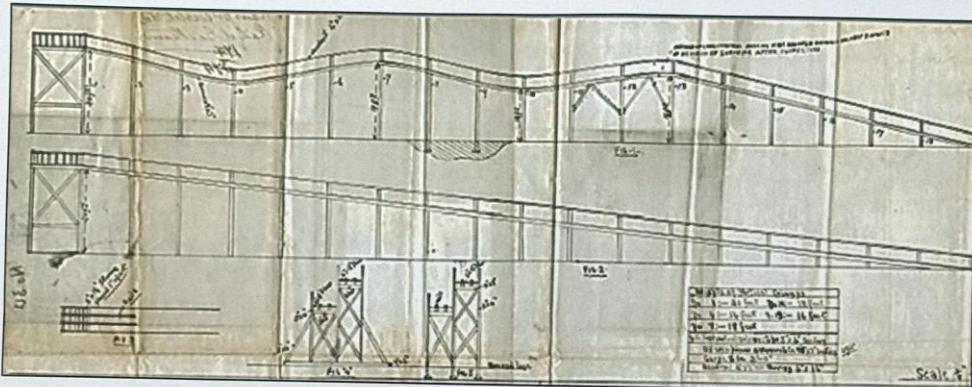
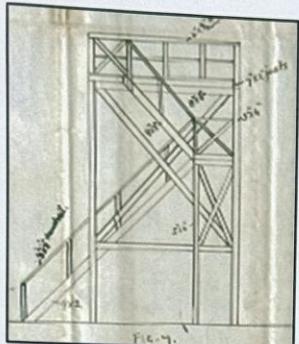


Most of the animals were sold in 1890.

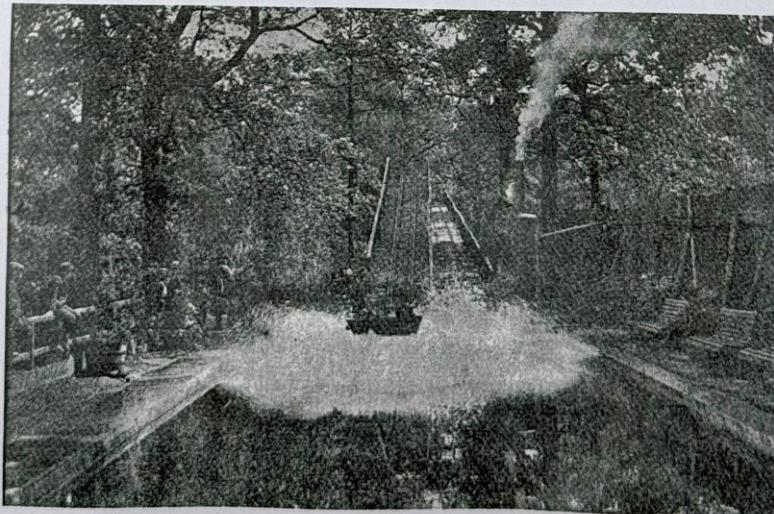
Another entertainment was the **Transvaal Shooting Range**, as described in a report in the Cheshire Observer, in 1900. "*as the war (Boer War in South Africa, 1899-1902) had attracted so much attention to shooting" they proposed to provide the amusement of a Transvaal Shooting Range*". The Range was 150ft long and gave people the opportunity to shoot at moving figures of Boers, using Winchester Rifles! If the figures were hit, white flags appeared.



Position 6 - The Water Chute



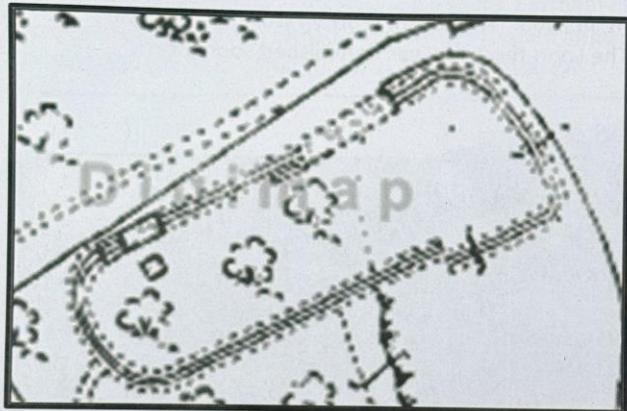
"This attraction involved walking up steps on a wooden tower. At the top was a platform on which sat small wooden boats supported on flanged railway wheels. A steep wooden chute led to the small rectangular lake below. The boat descended at a great rate to enter the water with a splash." "The boats were then hauled up on rails on the adjacent slope, the mechanism for which was driven by a steam-powered engine.



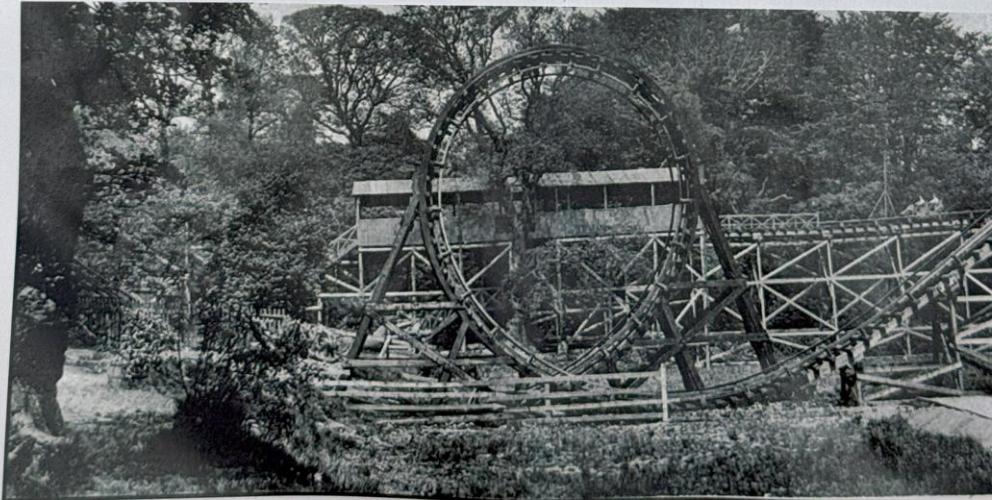
There was an interesting report in the Manchester Evening News, in 1901. "Yesterday afternoon a serious accident occurred at the Water Chute at Eastham, which is a great source of amusement to many visitors. A boat containing 11 persons came shooting down the wooden "fall" with the customary velocity, but unfortunately it appears that the flat-bottomed craft did not right itself in the ordinary way. The occupants were thrown into the pool and the boat seems to have closed over them much like an umbrella which has suddenly slipped the catch. Considerable alarm prevailed but fortunately help was promptly at hand and the imprisoned chutists were quickly released. They only sustained a good soaking".

Position 7 - The Loop-the-Loop Railway

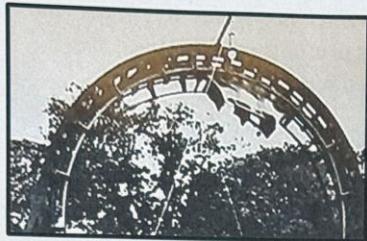
This stone base is from one of the support towers for the Loop-the-Loop, sometimes referred to as the **Topsey-Turvey Passenger Railway**.



"Cars were hauled up a steep incline to a height of 44 feet then carried round a curve at the top to rush down the slope and around the egg-shaped loop. After the loop, the cars ran along a further 200 feet before swinging up to the platform to take on the next load of daring passengers."

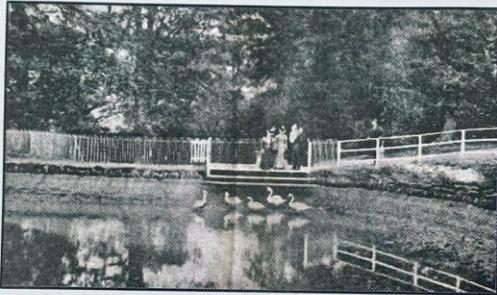


In a report in the English Illustrated Magazine, in 1901, we read that "**By means of a loop, persons with sufficiently strong nerves are able to ride with their heads downwards at a speed that, at the crucial moment, is said to be 95 m.p.h.**" This may have been an exaggeration. Nevertheless, if you survived the experience, you were presented with a certificate to confirm the fact!



There was only one recorded accident, in 1905: "**A Swedish seaman was hurt after he stood up, having been warned not to..**" . The Loop-the-Loop was demolished soon after.

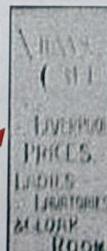
Position 8 - The Boating Lake



An advert of 1897 noted that: "**The Gardens have a lake, 5 acres in extent, with electric and other launches. It may be added that electricity is to give upwards of a thousand lights on the grounds and the woods.**" Electric launches in 1897! Where the water came from to top up the lake is a mystery. Perhaps it was pumped up from the river. The lake was later converted to a bowling green.

Position 9 - The river bank & Vienna Cafe

Opposite the hotel was the **Vienna Café**. The sign states "**Liverpool Prices; Ladies Lavatories; Glory Room**". The café no longer exists, but the lime trees survive.



In 1887 to 1894 the Manchester Ship Canal was constructed

1887 to 1894 – Construction of the **Manchester Ship Canal**

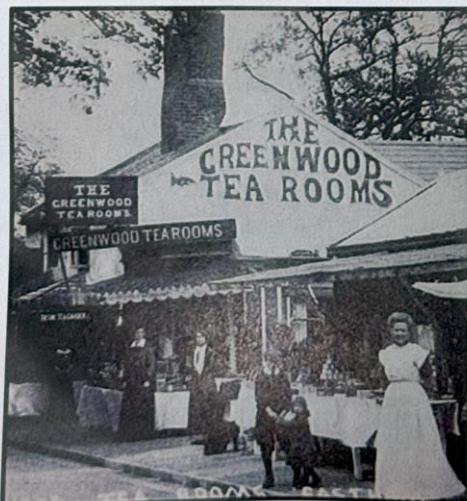


It was an added attraction for sightseers at the Eastham Pleasure Gardens, both during construction and after the canal was opened, when large ships headed past the Eastham Ferry Terminal to the Ship Canal Locks, as we still do today!



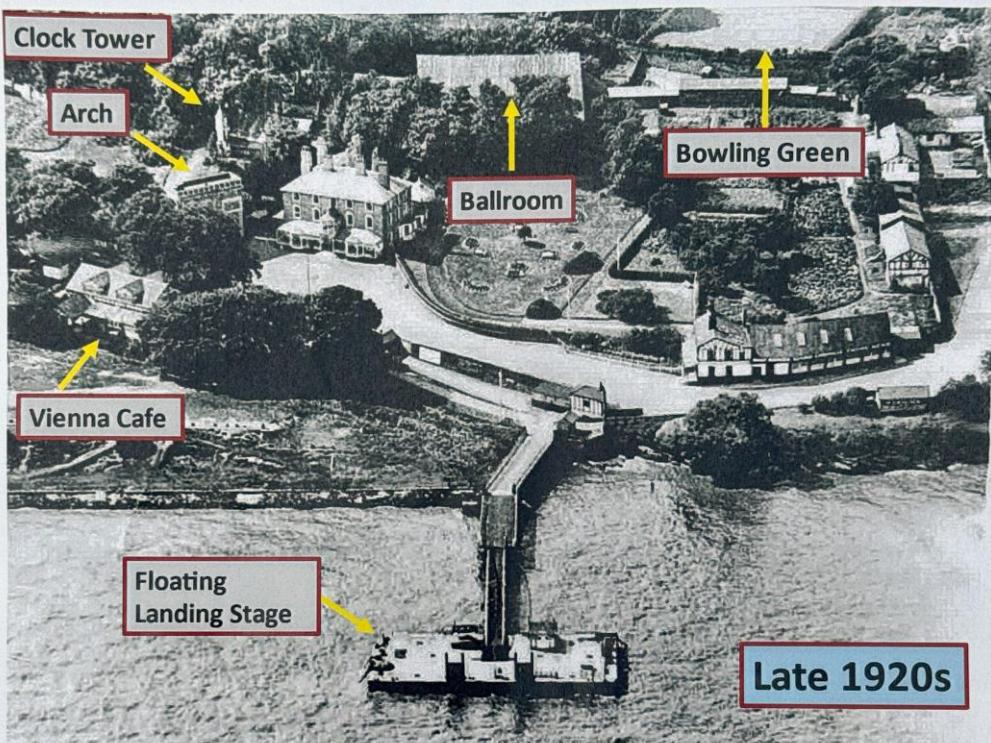
Time to go home

Queues for the return voyage to Liverpool could stretch 4-people wide from the ticket office to half way up Ferry Road. However, this was an opportunity to buy a cup-of-tea or a souvenir.



Unfortunately, In the 1920s, Eastham declined as a "Day-Tripper Resort" due to a number of reasons including motorised charabanc outings to other attractions. The ferry services were stopped in 1929 and the Pleasure Gardens fell into disrepair.

This aerial photograph, from the late 1920s shows some of the attractions of the Eastham Victorian Pleasure Gardens.



Eastham Woods was taken over by Bebington Council in 1934. The woods are now owned by The Metropolitan Borough of Wirral.

I hope that you have enjoyed your tour and were able to imagine what it must have been like to take part in the attractions of the Victorian Pleasure Gardens. I will leave you with the reflections of someone from that era:

"People did not have many of the good things in life, but a day out at Eastham was something I remember with pleasure"