

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: DARNHALL

Chapter One:

Medieval Over and Darnhall

In medieval times the name of Over (variously spelt as *Ovre*, *Ufra* and *Huure*) referred to a manor, a borough and a large rural parish. The ecclesiastical area included the villages and hamlets of Over, Swanlow, Darnhall, Wetenhall, Oulton Lowe, Little Budworth, Woodford, Blakeden, Little Over, Marton, and Bradford. Anciently, the parish may have included Oakmere before it was subsumed into the wastes that were the great forest of Mara (Delamere) in the twelfth century. This large tract of central Cheshire was sandwiched between the River Weaver to the east, the Ash Brook and Wetenhall Brook to the south and south-west, the high ground of the Central Cheshire Ridge to the west, and the manor, lordship and parish of Weaverham to the north - an area of about 38 square miles.

Over as a place does not occur on the map, metaphorically speaking, until it is mentioned in the Domesday Book. The name is certainly of Saxon origin and would have been taken into use with their arrival in these parts during the sixth and seventh centuries - about four centuries before it was first written down. The name derives from *ofer* meaning a hill, ridge or slope, over or above. Indeed the majority of the township does in fact sit on the top of a sandy ridge which runs parallel to the river Weaver and is noticeable when viewed from Little Budworth, Oulton Lowe and Wetenhall, and of course from the other side of the river. Experts in philology would suggest that purely topographical place-names are perhaps the earliest.¹ Other locations in the parish, although again topographical, seem to be of a secondary-settlement nature and are perhaps chronologically later than that of Over. Merton means the boundary farm (from *mer* and *ton*).² Swanlow is the 'swine-herders hill', though a personal name and a tumulus could be considered. Woodford - the 'ford in the wood'. Hebden - the 'hip-thorn valley'. Blakeden - the 'dark valley'. Bradford the 'broad fording place'. The meaning of Darnhall is derived from the Old English *derne* and *halh*. The first element is normally said to mean 'hidden' or 'secluded' and the latter element can mean either a 'nook', 'valley' or 'water meadow', but more on this shortly.³ To the west were the townships or manors of Wetenhall - the 'wet nooks or narrow valleys'; Oulton- the 'old farm' or 'Alda's farm'; Lowe - the 'hill' or 'tumulus'; and Budworth - 'Budda's enclosure'.

In interpreting these local place-names there is an apparent anomaly. If Over is a Saxon word for a hill or ridge and if, as would be expected, the original focus of settlement is the area around the church, which is situated in a wooded hollow, then why is the church and settlement called Over. There are problems too with the interpretation of the area we know as Darnhall which is situated on a large stretch of flat land. Admittedly, the Ash Brook cuts through a narrow valley here, but almost every valley such as this, running low down through an expanse of flat land, would be hidden from view and therefore the 'hidden' element is more likely to refer to something more specific. In this area a more likely place-name



The remains of a Saxon cross in St Chad's church

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: DARNHALL

element for a valley would be *-den*. What is more likely is that Darnhall refers to the area around St Chad's church, and that originally Over was a name given to the whole district and therefore refers to a collection of settlements on a ridge or hill and not the name of any one settlement in particular. Medieval documentary evidence tends to support this hypothesis as we shall learn later.

I now wish to hypothesise further as regards the meaning of Darnhall. If the second part of the name is *-hall* then the full meaning could be 'a secluded manor house' and this would be appropriate as manor houses are often in close proximity to the church. However, the Anglo-Saxon words *alh*, *hærg* or *weoh* mean a 'heathen temple', 'heathen shrine' or 'sacred place' respectively.⁴ Thus Darnhall may in fact be *Derne-alh* meaning 'the hidden temple' or *Derne-hærg*, 'the hidden shrine'. On this same theme the word *weoh* means a 'sacred place'. According to the rental in the *Vale Royal Ledger Book*, near to the St Chad's church there were locations called *Wewes* and *Halewes*, which were probably to the east and north-east of the church. This first is likely to be the area between the church and the river Weaver which today is called Ways Green. Dodgson suggests that *wewes* was the name of a grove belonging to the abbey, probably 'the yews'.⁵ However, there is an alternative. *We* may be a corruption of *weoh*, and *-wes* may come from either *weg* meaning 'way' or else *wæsse* 'a wet place' or 'swamp'. Thus this location might be either 'the ways at the swampy place'. The neighbouring location was *Halewes* which Dodgson interprets simply as 'the nooks'. But, if the first element is a corruption of *alh* and the second element is as previously discussed, then we have a place-name meaning 'the way to the holy place' or 'the swamp at the holy place'. So, Darnhall, as the old name of the manor and estate centred on the church of St. Chad's, may in fact be the *derne-alh* - the hidden temple. I shall have more to say about this later when we mention the church again.

Whilst we have no way of knowing which of the ancient meanings of Darnhall is correct the association of springs and a circular churchyard and the religious meanings may be more than coincidence. Today, this rather secluded location may represent continuity of a sacred place stretching back at least one millenium and perhaps, based on the above hypothesis, as much as two thousand years.

We may presume that there were people living on the ridge at a much earlier time than the Saxon arrival. The locality certainly bears evidence of Dark Age settlement. Close by the western edge of the parish is the lakeside Iron Age fort of Oakmere and the Bronze Age barrow cemetery, known as Seven Lows, could mark an ancient boundary.⁶ Flint arrow heads and tools have been found at Marton and in the Swanlow Lane area. The rim of a Roman pot has also been found in Swanlow.⁷ Of course we know that the Romans were settled not far away in Northwich and Middlewich and even closer at the villa site in Eaton by Tarporley. Roman roads also make their appearance: the road south from Warrington forms part of the medieval western boundary and Watling Street, passing through Sandiway, is close to the northern boundary. But a Roman road may have come even closer.

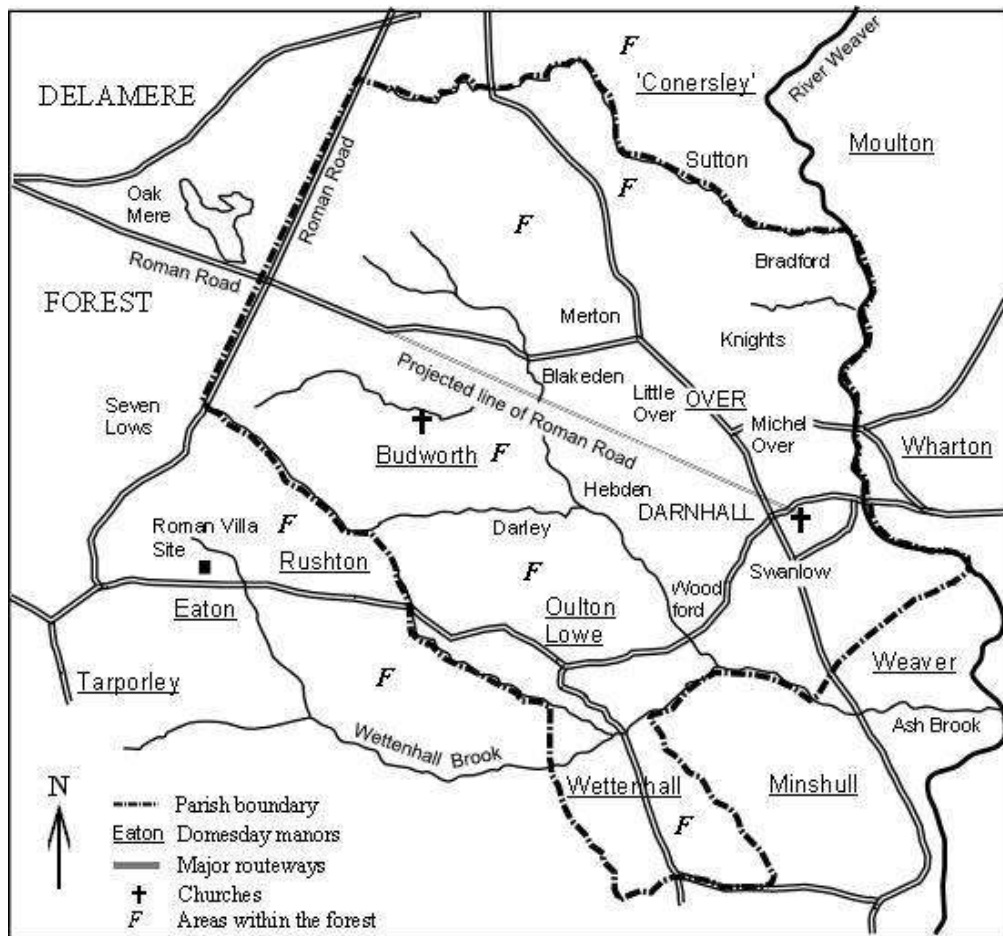
In Nettleford Wood, Kelsall (alongside Morrey's Nursery) there is a junction of two Roman roads. From Chester the road forks in the general directions of Northwich and Middlewich. Traces of the Middlewich road, which follows a similar line to present A54, have been discovered at a number of locations - through the Abbey Arms Woods, skirting Oakmere just east of Valley Farm, crossing the A49 (another Roman Road), passing under 'Bruce Haven' and finally just north of York Hill Farm.⁸ No certain evidence of the route further towards Middlewich has been found. However, if the line of the road from these four points is projected on a map the line of the road is not on a direct heading for Middlewich but straight to the very centre of Over Churchyard! A mere coincidence or was there a Roman settlement here? Certainly any Roman Road would have had to cross the River Weaver, and the ford below the Church at Ways Green, below Stocks Hill, was an ancient crossing place. Even with a slight change of direction the line of the Roman Road would reach the Weaver at this

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: DARNHALL

point. Here, or nearby, in the seventeenth century, several Roman coins were found by men digging a salt-pit.⁹ From this crossing point the route would have then continued on towards Harbutt's Field, the site of a Roman military settlement on King Street (another Roman Road) in Kinderton, Middlewich.

Returning to the Saxon/Norman period and the first written reference to Over. Whilst many know of the year 1066 when Duke William of Normandy conquered King Harold at the Battle of Hastings, fewer know when the famous Domesday Book was compiled. The year was 1086 and this year is particularly important to historians for this is the first time we are able to glimpse into the medieval world of Norman England. The book is not as some might think a complete gazetteer of the villages and towns of England at that time, rather it is a survey of who held what land, how much it was worth and, more importantly for the king and his royal officials, how much tax could be levied. At this time the unit of land holding was the 'manor' – a district held by a particular individual or institution, such as the church, who had both fiscal and judicial control. Within its bounds there may have been one or more settlements, be they towns, villages or hamlets, whose inhabitants were the property of the lord of the manor.

Although England was conquered in 1066 it was not for a further three years that Cheshire, then a part of the Saxon Earldom of Mercia, was overawed and made subject to Norman rule. Much has been said, debated and written about the exact nature and consequences of the 'invasion' of Cheshire in the winter of 1069/70, suffice to say here the Norman army



Projected line of the Roman Road from Chester to Middlewich

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: DARNHALL

arrived, following a devastating raid through Yorkshire, and that the Saxon lords of Cheshire lost their manors in favour of new Norman lords. William the Conqueror granted the city of Chester with its county, as an earldom, to a Flemish nobleman and relative named Gherbod with the responsibility of controlling the North-West of England and North Wales. For some reason he soon relinquished his command and returned home, to be replaced by a powerful Norman nobleman named Hugh d'Avranches. The Earl then divided up the county into a number of fiefdoms which he granted to his friends, relations and supporters, retaining for himself the city, the salt towns, important and valuable manors, such as Frodsham and Weaverham, and other smaller manors, such as Over, as his demesne.

The entry for Over is tantalising.

*I*psē com̄ ten³ *ORRE*. Quattuor libi hōēs tenuer̄ p. 1111. *M*.
Ibi . 1 . hida geld. Tra . ē . v . caŕ . Ibi . 1 . radman cū . 1 . caŕ . Silua
ibi dimid leuua l̄g. 7 tntd laf. Valb . vi . solid . m̄ . v . solid.
*The same Earl holds Ovre. Four freemen held it as four manors.
There one hide pays tax. There are five ploughlands.
There one radman has one plough. The woodland is half a league
long and as wide. The value was six shillings, now five shillings.*¹⁰

The entry informs us that the manor of Over was, prior to the Norman Conquest, composed of four manors held by four men, but neither the constituent manors nor the freemen who held them are named. Was Over the name of a specific settlement in the late Saxon period? Was it a name conjured up by the Norman officials to collectively describe the four manors on or about the sandy ridge? Darnhall is almost certainly to be one of the four unnamed manors and one may speculate that Marton (or Merton) was another but what of the other two? In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the manor of Over contained a number of dispersed settlements - Swanlow, *Mers* (perhaps the Moors Lane area of Swanlow), Woodford, Hebden, Littler (Little Over), Michel (or Greater) Over, Blakeden, Bradford and *Helewes*.¹¹ The other manors in the parish - Wettenhall and Budworth - are specifically mentioned in the Domesday Survey, as is *Conersley* (now Whitegate) on Over's northern border, then a part of the Weaverham lordship.¹² If I were a betting man I think I would put money on the four being the two Overs (Little and Greater), Darnhall and Woodford. Though I have to say that Marton is a distinct possibility and could replace either one of the Overs or Woodford. But a little more on this later.

Considering the physical appearance of the manor we are told that 'one hide pays tax' which suggests, according to some authorities, that the area in modern terms covered about 120 acres, however this may be too simplistic as the unit of tax presumably included assets other than land. More important as regards area is the number of 'ploughlands' – land available for cultivation. Here there were five ploughlands, if, as later, such a unit contained about sixty Cheshire acres (126 statute acres) then we have about 300 acres of arable land (630 statute).¹³ Such an area when marked on a modern map would seem wholly appropriate. However the next sentence tells us that only one ploughland was in fact being worked. There was a large area of woodland. A league is normally taken to about a mile and a half in length but we cannot assume that the area was a pure square. Rather the figures of length and breadth are an estimate of the total extent of woodland, which may have been in separate portions. To the north-west of the township there is today an area known as Bradford Wood which may be the location of one area of woodland. Also, the name Woodford, on the south western edge of the township, suggests a crossing point over a stream which was near to a wood.

Over's population at this time is something of a puzzle. In the descriptions of most other manors in Domesday mention is made of 'villeins' - peasants with a small amount of land and some freedoms; 'bordars' - peasants with a smaller amount of land; and 'serfs' - unfree labourers who were tied to the manor. Each of these made a contribution to the working of a

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: DARNHALL

manor, but not here in Over. If there had been four manors in King Edward's time this would suggest a small population on each manor – so where did they go? If there was church here, and as we shall learn there had been for some time, it would be reasonable to presume that there would have been a small settlement nearby with a small population, if so where were the villagers? Perhaps they were there and for one reason or another, probably tax exemption, they were not mentioned. Or are we to believe that there was only one man, presumably with his family, living here at this time? I don't think so. A 'radman' was an individual who performed service on horseback for his lord, presumably in this case the Earl of Chester. Could he alone, or with members of his family have worked the single ploughland in addition to serving the Earl? It may be that he had a number of servants and their families within his household who were not counted as individuals by the Domesday commissioners.

The value of the manor suggest that it remained viable despite the trauma of the Norman arrival. In the days of King Edward the Confessor it had been worth a modest six shillings but by 1086 had only lost a shilling in value. Not bad when one considers the number of manors described as being 'waste' when the Normans took over in 1070, or were still in such a condition when the Domesday Book was compiled sixteen years later. This term 'waste' has attracted much debate. It was once an expected fact that the term denotes manors ravaged by the incoming Norman army, others have suggested that it means that the manor was unproductive due to economic fortunes or the lack of manpower, recent opinion is that it simply means that a manor was producing no profit for the lord's benefit. Whatever, it does not seem that the term applied to Over. Unless the writer has missed the intervening time when Earl Hugh first acquired it – was it then 'waste' and had recovered?

What of those facts about which Domesday remains silent? If there were more people living in Over than Domesday suggests, where and how did the people live? Where did they worship?

The lord of the manor of the Saxon period would have lived in the 'hall', which would have been, apart from the church, the largest building in the township. This would have been a single-storey building of timber, wattle and daub with a thatched roof. A few windows may have been inserted into the walls to allow for some light, a basic board floor strewn with rushes, and probably a simple chimney structure in the roof to let out the smoke of the central fire. Apart from the central hall there may have been a room at either or both ends. Associate with the hall there may have been some outbuildings for animals and storage. As to those less fortunate, they would have occupied a simple cottage of wattle and daub with a roof of branches and straw. A single room with no windows, chimney or floor, save for the ground – a hovel in other words. They probably shared their accommodation with their pigs, sheep and chicken if they had any. Their personal belongings would be meagre and consist of home-made items of furniture and home spun clothing. Food would consist of bread and gruel, vegetables and very occasionally meat all of which they would have produced for themselves. For liquid refreshment the inhabitants would have drunk ale rather than water which was likely to be heavily polluted.

Whilst there is no reference to a church or a priest at Over in the Domesday Book, this does not mean that it did not exist at that time. Quite simply, there is no mention because it paid no tax. In fact there are a number of factors indicative of an early church here. The church's situation in a quiet secluded glen is unusual in that many churches elsewhere in Cheshire are situated in prominent positions, or at least on a level with, and close to other buildings. In the case of St. Chad's the location may be of particular significance in the clues it holds concerning what may be the original name of the locality and the antiquity of this place of worship as I have already alluded to.

Although there is no architectural evidence in the fabric of the present church earlier than the fourteenth century, there are remains of a Saxon cross of the Mercian style, c.750-900. On

one side of this piece of stone which is now positioned in a niche in the north wall of the chancel, one can make out an interwoven lattice work similar to a stone at St. John's, Chester. The Saxon church was probably no more than crude timber or stone 'shed', or even simply an uncovered standing cross within an enclosure. Here the local priest would have preached, celebrated mass and other church rites, and buried the dead in grounds around. The dedication of the church to St. Chad is one that is often associated with Anglo-Saxon churches reflecting early traditions surrounding the Saints missionary work in the area and may indicate a long-standing episcopal link.¹⁴ Chad, or Caed, was a seventh century missionary who was educated at Lindisfarne and sent by St. Columba to preach Christianity to the peoples west of the Pennines. In 667, he became bishop of the Mercian people and died in 673. Other churches in Cheshire which have the same dedication are: Chadkirk, near Stockport; Farndon, where two priests are recorded in 1086; Tushingham, near Malpas, and Wybunbury, where a priest is also recorded in 1086. In the early tenth century, Farndon was a royal estate and the church at Wybunbury may have associations with the Mercian royal house as it belonged to the diocese based on Lichfield, Chad's episcopal seat, close to the royal residence at Tamworth.¹⁵ It may be that Over too was originally a Mercian royal estate or one of the bishop's holdings.

If there was a Saxon church here then may have been a 'minster' church. An *ad hoc* network of such churches covered the country in the seventh and eighth centuries. These 'minsters' - the word is simply the Anglo-Saxon translation of the Latin *monasterium* - were localised, collegiate churches, staffed by a team of peripatetic clergy who travelled into their 'parochiae' (larger precursors of the parish) to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments. Such churches were founded by kings, queens, bishops or members of the Saxon aristocracy, and sited close to the caput of the manor with the territory of the lord's estate determining the extent of the parish. At these *monasterium* a priest, or a collection of clergy, part of the bishop's *familia*, would share a communal life and be responsible for the cure of souls within the lord's estate and the parish. Although in the post-Conquest era, with the exception of Wettenhall, the whole parish area was in the hands of the Norman earl of Chester, so far as is known, there was no royal or noble ownership in the area prior to the Conquest.¹⁶ This could be an argument against Over being a minster church and parish, unless it can be shown that Over formed part of a larger comital estate, such as Weaverham, or was itself owned by the Saxon Earls. It is entirely feasible for Over to have been a comital estate before being split into the four manors; the divisions being the result of grants to certain individuals as rewards for military service. The fact that Over and neighbouring manors were held in demesne by the new Norman Earl of Chester certainly suggests that they had been once part of the demesne lands of the Earls of Mercia. Apart from a few exceptions, all of the Saxon Earl Edwin's lands became the demesne lands of the Norman Earl Hugh, and those other manors, such as Over, which Earl Hugh had from Saxons of lesser status may have in fact been held by them directly from Earl Edwin who certainly had interests in this part of Cheshire. He held the important salt towns of Middlewich and Northwich, the nearby manor of Alpraham, and the important manor of Weaverham immediately to the north.¹⁷ If St Chad's was indeed the heart of a minster parish then its origins may date back to the early days of Christianity in the area: the eighth century.

The circular churchyard at Over may be indicative of its being the site of a very ancient Celtic church.¹⁸ In fact the altar of St. Chad's church, prior to the extension made in 1926, was located exactly in the centre of the circular churchyard. Such early churches were often established on pre-Christian religious sites. The early Christian missionaries under Abbot Mellitus in A.D.602 were exhorted by Pope Gregory to utilise pagan sites to found new churches. *'The temples of the idols among that people (the English) should on no account be destroyed. The idols are to be destroyed, but the temples themselves are to be aspersed with holy water, alters set up in them and relics deposited there'*.¹⁹ This was so the local people could continue to use, for religious purposes, those places they were accustomed to frequent.

Proximity to significant springs or wells may also indicate use of an early site.²⁰ One of the most popular and widespread religious cults in the pre-Christian era was the worship of the goddess of water. Springs, wells and rivers were the focal points of cult practises and rituals, with precious goods being cast into the water as an offering.²¹ The site of St Chad's church would be most appropriate for such worshippers as there are several wells and springs in the immediate vicinity of the church and around the churchyard. Many Celtic religious sites were situated in woodland groves and at this time the area around the church was probably well wooded. Over church may in fact be sited in a Celtic *nemeton* - a sacred grove.

The earliest reference to the church is in a charter made by Earl Ranulf III during the 1190s in favour of the nuns of St Mary's, Chester, which makes reference to a grant made by Ranulf's father, Earl Hugh II, of the church of Over to the nuns some forty years earlier.²² The purpose of the grant was to give the nuns income from the tithes of the parish: a tenth of all the produce from the land. Tithes were normally divided between those termed 'great' which were from corn, hay and wood, and which were normally granted to the rector, in this case St. Mary's, and those termed 'small' which covered everything else and paid to the vicar. The nuns also had the 'advowson' of the church, that is the right to appoint the vicar, which they did throughout the Middle Ages apart from a time when the convent was temporarily seized into the king's hands in the 1340s. Later the nuns granted the tithes of the townships of Little Over, Merton (Marton) and Bradford to the Abbey of Vale Royal.²³ These townships, which were contiguous with the site of the abbey and its demesne lands of *Conersley* (later known as Whitegate), may have marked the original northern boundary of the original ancient parish. If so, then the twelfth century bounds of the parish, prior to the foundation at Vale Royal, may have run along the Petty Pool Brook, down to the river Weaver.

Before moving on I ought to sum up what has been said so far. Over is a name given by the Domesday Commissioners to four Saxon manors which in the interest of administrative expedience were grouped together under a single lord – the Earl of Chester. Of the four manors one was almost certainly Darnhall which encompassed the church with the lord's dwelling close by. The circumstantial evidence would seem to suggest that the site of St. Chad's church is a very ancient place of worship that may stretch back into pagan times.

The Manor of Darnhall

Darnhall was during the time of the Norman Earls a settlement of high status as their manor and hunting lodge were located here. John le Scot, the last of the Norman Earls, died here in 1237, and it was as a result of his death without male issue that the earldom became annexed to the Crown by King Henry III and was vested in his eldest son, the Lord Edward, Prince of Wales.²⁴ In September 1241 King Henry was in residence at Darnhall and his son visited the manor in the summer of 1256 and on a number of other occasions.²⁵ In medieval times the earl's manor was known as *Ovre et Dernhal* and visa-versa and occasionally Over is referred to as '*a member of Darnhall*' suggesting the prominence of the latter.²⁶

A century after Domesday the manor is mentioned in the Pipe Rolls (the Great Rolls of the Exchequer) for the year 1184/5 when it was recorded that the manor had was let to farm for seventy shillings: who the tenant was at that time is not stated. At this time the earldom of Chester was being administered by the Crown during the minority of the sixth Norman earl, Ranulph Blundeville.

Fifty years later the manor was again under royal administration following Earl John's death. This time the records are more detailed concerning the income derived from the manor. The treasury at Chester received £17 17s 6d. from the rents of thirty-six 'bovates' of land held by the local villeins; a further £5 from the lease of the demesne lands; 25s 2d rent from eighteen customary cottagers; 23 shillings from newly cultivated lands; £8 from the mill; 5 shillings

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: DARNHALL

from Robert de Woodford's lands; 13s 4d from honey sold; 7 shillings from *avowry*, which may either mean money from distrained goods or else money from outsiders who had come to live on the manor under the earl's protection; and finally 29s 6d from the pleas and perquisites of the manorial courts.²⁷ This makes a total income of about £36, a value that rose to £40 three years later and remained constant throughout the mid-13th century. Later accounts also include an amount for the feeding of pigs in the woods.

The account for the year 1237/8 is particularly interesting for a number of reasons. First we now have some idea about the number of people who lived in Darnhall and Over. There were a number of villeins who farmed the 'bovates', eighteen 'cottagers', a tenant of the demesne land which would have included the lord's hall, a miller, a man named Woodford (of whom later) and perhaps a couple of people living under the earl's protection. Each of these individuals will presumably have had a family suggesting a population of around one hundred. Later accounts mention a bailiff, a parker, a gardener, and a chaplain as resident on the manor and perhaps suggestive of a number of other officials. Next is the reference to the number of bovates. These were not of a fixed areal measure, rather they were an estimate of subsistence capacity, sufficient to support a villain family, and therefore fluid. In this area it seems that a bovate was equivalent to about nine Cheshire acres (19 statute). The total area of about 320 Cheshire acres (670 statute) accords with the total available arable land of 1086 and would suggest that by this time it had all been taken into production. It seems that it was the cottagers who farmed the thirty-six 'bovates' of land: i.e. each having two. However, on the neighbouring manor of Weaverham there were only four cottagers and thirty-four 'bovates' and at Frodsham there were thirty-four bovates and an unknown, though large, number of cottagers. The mathematics of the situation at Over seems to be a coincidence.

Another source of income came from renting out the lord's own lands – the demesne – though the names of the tenants is never given. Later the whole manor was set to farm and there is a reference to a man called Randle de Darnhall who may have held the lease at that time. In some years there is mention of money coming in from the payments made by various people for the right to feed their pigs in the woods of the manor – pannage. There was a mill which provided a source of rental income – but where was it? Probably on the Ash Brook rather than the Weaver, and in the area of today's Darnhall Mill.

A regular source of income for the earl was the lease of lands to the Woodford family. These generated an annual income of five shillings and a 'reasonable' pig: the money was paid in equal instalments at Christmas and on 24 June, and the pig was given on 11 November. It is interesting to note that there are references in the Pipe Rolls to the Earl of Chester renting, for his own use, two salt houses in Middlewich which were owned by Robert de Woodford. The Woodford's it would seem were not an insignificant family. Robert seems to have died after completion of the 1240/1 account for in the following year the account refer to his heirs as recipients of the rent.²⁸ About the same time as we have the Woodford family there was another family of similar status mentioned in the Pipe Rolls as living on the manor in the year 1240/1. William Stockhall paid five shillings for his tenement that year but is not mentioned in any other account. His name would suggest he lived in the 'Stocks' area of the township to the east of the church, but nothing more is known. Either of these estates may be the one carucate held by the anonymous 'radman' in 1086, which with the small tract of woodland were valued at that same amount.²⁹

Lands at Woodford feature in two of Earl Ranulph III's (1181-1232) charters. The first dated c. 1220, or perhaps earlier, records the grant of a croft called Woodford to Robert de Woodford, which his father Thurstan had held. The bounds are given as:

*'in length from Assebroke as far as the ditch of Bruere and in width from the ford of Vernun as far as the cultivated lands of Smaldene'*³⁰

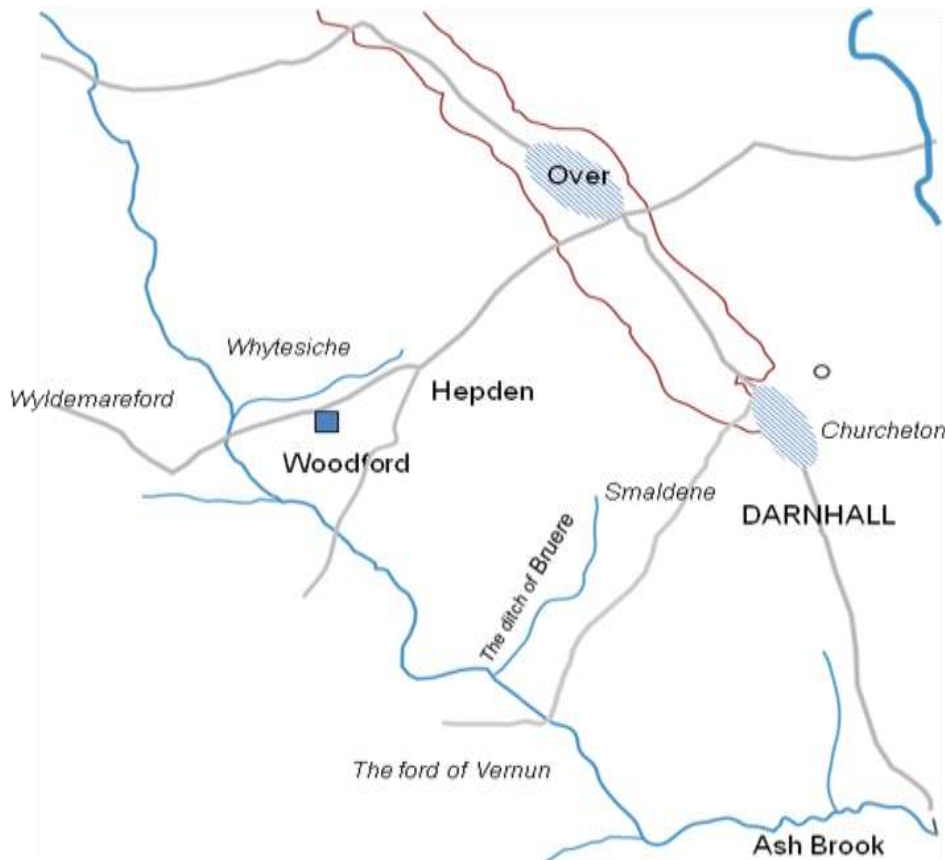
TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: DARNHALL

Generally medieval charter boundaries work by giving the length from south to north followed by the width from west to east. If this is so then the croft has the Ash Brook to the south, a ditch or stream to the north, a water course with a crossing point to the west and arable land to the east. This can only refer to what was in recent times known as Darnhall Park – an area surrounded on two sides by the Ash Brook, by a stream to the north which flowed through a series of medieval fish ponds. The ford is now represented by the bridge at Darnhall and the fields of ‘Smaldene’ were probably part of the larger arable of the manor in the vicinity of Knobbs Farm an area once known as ‘Holdene’ or else it refers to the stream that descends into the Ash Brook from behind the Raven Inn.

The second charter, dated about a decade later than the first, granted lands to Robert de Woodford in compensation for the loss of his meadows which had been used to create a *vivarium*, a deer park, for the earl. The bounds of the land are:

*‘from Wyldemareford as far as Heppedene in length and from Heppedene as far as the wytesyche in width, and from wytesyche as far as the road of Wyldemareford’.*³¹

With reasonable certainty we can locate this parcel of land to the present Woodford and Hepden area. The ‘Wylemareford’ is the crossing point on the Ash Brook, now with a bridge, at Woodford along the lane to Little Budworth. From here the boundary followed the brook north to Hepden, then went across to reach a small stream which was then followed south to the lane leading to the ford, now known as Woodford Lane. The occupier of Woodford Hall farms the fields that lie within these bounds.



In considering these the two charters it seems that in what we now call Darnhall, Earl Ranulf III created a deer park for himself and those who would follow him as Earls of Chester. This area had once been known as Woodford and the previous occupants of the lands were

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: DARNHALL

relocated a little further north in the region of the present-day Woodford. The earl would then have removed his residence from the manor house, at its traditional place near to the church, to this more remote and suitable place where he had his hunting lodge, his place of sport and entertainment and from where the manor would have been administered for him. Thus the focus of the manor shifted from the area of the church to the 'new' Darnhall - a place of high status.

At the newly emparked part of the manor the lord had a house, servants including hunters, a parker, a gardener, and a chapel. In 1246 orders were issued for the appointment of a chaplain to perform divine services at Darnhall, but whether this was at a private chapel in the park area or a chapel within St Cahd's church we do not know.³² Beyond the demesne, in the area which comprised of a confederation of small hamlets to the east and north of Darnhall, lay the cultivated lands of the bond and free tenants. The majority of whom still lived near to the church in what was then known as *Churchton*.³³ This rather simple name may indicate local confusion or indecision over the old name for the manor, Darnhall, and that of Over by which the manor had then become known. From entries in the *Pipe Rolls* the available evidence seems to indicate that Darnhall was the *caput*, the headquarters, of the manor and that Over was the larger area about.

There were of course costs associated with the running of the manors. In 1237/8 John Gardener had 13s 4d for his care of the gardens at Darnhall, and 5s for repairing the park. The following year 17s 2d was spent on the park and repairing its fence, and £6 11s 5d was spent on buying oaks for timber to repair the mill pond which cost and £4 7s 9½ the following year. Repairs to the mill itself cost 35s in 1239/40 and £18 10d for repairs to the fish ponds. In 1240/1 John the Gradener was paid 30s 5d. From time to time payments were accounted for keeping the king's animals in the park and Adam the bailiff of Darnhall paid the king's hunters £9 18s 4d in 1240s. Twenty-five animals were carried from the park to the King at Lilleshall. During the same period £14 18s 9d was spent on repairing the hall and in 1245-7, £35 10s 2d was spent on repairing the mill pond.

Importantly for the lord here at Darnhall was the manor court: the judicial, fiscal and governmental focus of the manor, which demonstrated his position and rule over the community - the instrument of social control. Whilst we have no direct information about the services owed by the villeins to their lord, it does seem that their lack of freedom was of a personal nature, in respect of their families, their right to land and the payment of certain dues, rather than being totally servile. If labour services were required they were probably limited in degree and to a small representative group. During the Norman and Plantagenet reigns the people of Over and Darnhall probably enjoyed a period of weak manorial control due to their land-lord being an 'absentee' and with the crown's reliance on administering the manor through its ministers at Chester. The situation led to fourteenth century tenants regarding themselves as being inheritors of what was known as 'Ancient Demesne' which, if true, meant that they held their tenements from the crown, freely, or at least without onerous labour services to the lord, that they might transfer their land-rights to whomever they wished, and that their rents would be stable and fair. This claim was to have a great significance somewhat later when the manor was in the hands of the Cistercian monks. Following the disastrous demonstrations made by the bond-men of Over and Darnhall, against the abbot of Vale Royal during the first half of the fourteenth century, the only services then set down were attendance at the manorial courts and guard duties at the hall of Darnhall.

From what has been said so far it seems that during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries there was both a shift of population and settlement focus. Originally there was a small settlement centred on an ancient place of worship in the secluded glen of Darnhall; this then expanded and subordinate settlements were established up on the higher ground around the valley and on the ridge - Over. Then, in the late Saxon period, this collection of hamlets were grouped together as four manors, but when the Domesday Commissioners carried out their work, these

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: DARNHALL

were brought together for administrative purposes as a single unit with the name of Over. Under the lordship of the Norman Earls of Chester, the Domesday manorial name was retained and linked with that of Darnhall, the predominant site. The church was referred to by the name of the whole area in which it was situated, so that when Earl Ranulf confirmed his father's grant to the nuns of Chester, St. Chad's is referred to as *ecclesiam de Huure*.³⁴

As a royal manor, Darnhall regularly had money expended for repairs to gates, bridges, buildings, fences, the park and dams. Repairing the king's hall and chambers are specifically mentioned in 1241 and the 'stew' or mill-pond at Darnhall received particular attention as it was causing a few problems. Following instructions for its creation in 1238 it seems to have always been in need of repair. In 1251 Brother John de Waverley was commissioned to advise on the repairs; if his name is indicative of his home abbey he had certainly travelled far to act as a consultant and may have been regarded as something of an expert in the field.³⁵ Interestingly, Waverley was the first Cistercian abbey to be founded in England so here is an early association with the Order and monks who were to eventually reside at Darnhall. Repairs to the fish-ponds, traces of which are still evident today, are referred to in the 1238/9 account. There was also a chapel at Darnhall, for in 1246 orders were issued for the appointment of a chaplain to perform divine services.³⁶ There were gardens here too as payments were regularly made to John the gardener and his son.

The main feature of Darnhall was its large deer park. It was quite common for great lords to establish such parks on the waste lands on the fringes of their manors and for these to extend to a few hundred acres and be bounded by streams, ditches and fences. In 1237/8 and the following year payments were made for repairing the fence. A century later there is further mention of a perimeter fence, which started at Ash Brook and curved round to finish on the bank of the same, then said to be 309 rods (2500 yards) long which would contain an area of about eighty-five acres.³⁷ The park was stocked with both swine and deer and there are records of payments for keeping of the 'king's beasts' and for a parker's wages and 'robes'.³⁸ In 1245 twenty-five boars and sows were required to be sent to Lilleshall in Staffordshire so that the king might celebrate the Feast of All Saints. Three years later another twenty-five boars were ordered for delivery to the same location. In 1246 Adam the Bailiff was paid for supplying game for the queen whilst her husband was in Wales and, six years later, one hundred bucks were required to be taken by the huntsmen, salted and sent to Westminster.³⁹

Clearly Over and Darnhall together formed a viable and reasonably valuable manor with a mixed agrarian and pastoral economy. Here in Darnhall there was a manor house, out-buildings, and a mill surrounded by park lands and crofts that formed the lord's demesne which was supervised by a reeve. From time to time the demesne was let to farm probably by a member of the local free tenantry. Beyond the park and demesne lay the fields of the villain tenantry and their settlement of cottages grouped near to the church.

The Cistercian Abbey

In the late 1260s, Prince Edward, son of King Henry III, granted the manors of Over and Darnhall to Cistercian monks at the Abbey of Dore in Hereford for them to establish a new abbey at Darnhall using the manorial buildings. A little later, following the grant to the abbey of the manor of *Conersley* the abbey was transferred to land there and the Abbey of Vale Royal was founded.

The tradition of the founding of the abbey is well known but worth repeating here. On 2 August 1270 the future King Edward I issued a charter to the abbot and monks of the monastery of St Mary of Darnhall in fulfilment of a vow made following his miraculous escape from a ship-wreck in the winter of 1263/4. On the occasion of a journey across the English Channel Edward promised to found a religious house should he fall into difficulties

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: DARNHALL

and be rescued. When a disaster did occur Edward prayed to the Virgin Mary and survived. In May 1264, during the Barons' War, Edward was imprisoned by the supporters of Simon de Montfort at Hereford and during his sojourn there he was attended to by Cistercian monks from Dore Abbey. These monks somehow were somehow aware of Edward's promises to found a religious house in honour of the Virgin Mary and reminded him of his insurance policy. The result was that he granted them his manor of Darnhall on which the monks might establish a daughter house to Dore.⁴⁰

Although the charter of 1270 is generally believed to be the foundation charter, the wording of the only known copy suggests that it is in fact a confirmation of an earlier grant.⁴¹ Tanner in *Notitia Monastica* (1695) gives the foundation date as 1266, the year in which the General Chapter of the Cistercian Order authorised an inspection of the site at Darnhall.⁴² The abbots of Buildwas (Shropshire), Neath (Glamorgan), and Flaxley (Goucester) were ordered to view the proposed location and report back to the next session of the Chapter General. Presumably, the next step would be for monks to be dispatched from the mother house at Dore to take formal possession of the lands, if so monks were probably resident at Darnhall from as early as 1267/8.

The 1270 charter granted and confirmed to the abbot and monks the place 'where the abbey is situate'. The grant gave the convent the manors of Darnhall and Over, together with all enclosed lands, whether in woods or fields, all men and animals and anything else that pertained to the manors just as freely as the grantor had held them. In addition the monks received a woodland in Yorkshire, and the advowsons of the churches of Frodsham, Weaverham, Ashbourne (Derbyshire) and 'The Peak' (Castleton, Derbyshire). The tithes and advowsons of Frodsham and Weaverham had been originally granted by Hugh, the first Norman Earl of Chester, to St Werburgh's Abbey, Chester, so that in consequence of the abbot of Darnhall had to pay to the Abbey £4 for each church in compensation.⁴³ The convent at Chester also lost out. Prince Edward granted the new monastery the tithes of Over and Darnhall for which the nuns received £4 17s 0d (£4.85) in compensation and then later, after the transfer of the abbey to Vale Royal, the nuns lost the tithes of the hamlets of Little Over, Bradford and Merton for which they received a further £5 5s 11d (£5.30). The nuns retained the advowson of St. Chad's.

It was soon realised that the original endowment was insufficient. Certainly not is the intention was to establish a monastery for one hundred monk, even if this included their lay brethren, the *conversi*.⁴⁴ During the next two decades a number of additional grants were made by the king and some local lords.

In 1275 the manor of Weaverham, which included several dependent townships, was seized from its former holder, Roger de Clifford, and granted it to the abbey.⁴⁵ Similarly, the following year, the manor of 'Conersley' (now Whitegate), a sub-ordinate manor of Weaverham, held by Walter de Vernon, was granted to the abbey.⁴⁶ It was this gift that precipitated the community's move to the site known as Vale Royal where, in 1277, King Edward himself laid the foundation stone of what was intended to be the greatest abbey church in Europe. In 1280 the manor of Gayton on the Wirral was gifted to the monks.⁴⁷ Five years later a series of land grants were made of freehold property in Little Over, Over Marton, Bradford and Sutton, which all lay between Over and 'Conersley'; the previous holders were granted land elsewhere in compensation.⁴⁸ Next grants of land in Stanthorne, Lach Dennis, Moorsbarrow and Twemlow were granted by members of the minor gentry.⁴⁹ In 1312, probably more for the sake of convenience than finance, the contiguous manor of Marton was obtained from its holder in exchange for the more distant Gayton.⁵⁰

Urban property was also obtained by the abbot and his monks. The manor of Weaverham gave them houses in Bridge Street, Chester and a few salt making houses in Northwich.⁵¹ Further advantages in the salt town were obtained in 1277 when Geoffrey de Byrun, the

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: DARNHALL

lessee of the town, took religion and joined the community at Vale Royal from whence the abbey took the revenues of the town until the early fourteenth century.⁵² Two salt houses in Middlewich were bestowed in November 1275 for which compensation was given to the 'good men' of the town.⁵³ In the suburbs of London the abbot received houses and rents.⁵⁴ The main series of grants, those made between 1270 and 1285, with that of Marton in 1312, were such as to create a large, single block of territory, some nine miles by four, along the river Weaver Valley with the site of the abbey occupying a central position. Across the whole of this territory the Abbot of Vale Royal was lord – he controlled the land and its people along with the financial and judicial functions.

Chapter Two:

The Rule of the White Monks

The creation of the abbey at Darnhall meant that the people of the manor became tenants of the abbot rather than the king or his son. This change of lord had a profound effect on the ordinary people who were now ruled over by an ever present and avaricious ecclesiastical organisation, rather than a more lax absentee landlord. In not welcoming the change of landlord the tenants of Over and Darnhall rebelled against the abbot and tried to withdraw their labour, rents and other customary services - disputes between the local population and the abbey continued throughout its history for the customs of a manor, entrenched in tradition, were law and not easily put aside. If a lord tried to make changes to the customary arrangements, to the villeins way of life, to their ancient rights and to the old order of society he would be presented, quite naturally, with serious problems and hostility: for the customs of a manor largely meant security to its inhabitants. This seems to have been the case at Darnhall. Despite any claims to the contrary, the new lord, the abbot, sought to extract every detail of his lordship to make as much profit as possible. The Cistercian practise of consolidating their holdings, whether manors, parcels of lands or strips in the fields, and of enclosing large areas for the pasture of sheep and cattle, meant the abandonment of ancient rights so far as the peasantry were concerned. Life was certainly not easy for the parishioners of St Chad's.

What we know of life in Over and Darnhall under the rule of the 'White Monks', so named from the colour of their habits, comes from the *Ledger Book of Vale Royal Abbey*. The original version of this source has been lost for over three hundred years so that we have to rely on a seventeenth century copy which was printed and published in 1914.

It is now impossible to state the nature of the villein's conditions under the earls of Chester, but it would seem that their obligations were of a personal nature in respect of their families, their rights to land and the payment of certain dues, especially death duties, rather than being purely servile.⁵⁵ If labour services were performed they were probably limited in degree, seasonal and performed by a small representative group. An undated reference in the Ledger Book refers to 'suit of court' and 'guard at the hall of Darnhall'. On the same page there are the names of ten bond tenants having to perform carrying services 'with sack and pack throughout Cheshire' and then a list of five cottagers as though they held their tenements under different conditions.⁵⁶ These conditions may have been those which had pertained from the days of the Norman earls and seem to be in marked contrast to a later detailed account of the customs of the manor once the White Monks were established.

The customs, or rules, of the manor were recorded in the *Ledger* along with a list of conditions that the bond tenants endured and these are recorded in full in following appendices. They probably date from the early 14th century years and, in view of the clarification about sheep, were written down following a challenge by the tenants. It is highly likely that following the disastrous demonstrations that occurred (*see below*) the abbot would have re-defined the customs of the manor, re-enforcing some and adding to them in order to prove the servile status of his people. Whether or not these rules existed prior to the arrival of the monks we do not know. They may well have been, and but it may also have been the case that the officials did not always exercise the lord's rights for whatever reason, perhaps incompetence, though seemingly due to a bride in Grosvenor's day.

With the change of lordship from lay authority to ecclesiastical there may have been some changes in the conditions of tenure, though perhaps only subtle. Or, it may be that the abbot

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: DARNHALL

was simply insisting upon every detail of the original customs, some of which had been allowed to lapse. Whichever, the abbot and convent, strapped for cash in establishing a new monastery that was to be Vale Royal, were keen to exploit their lands and its population. Perhaps the newcomers, used to the harsher manorial systems of the south and other Cistercian houses, sought to impose those traditions with which they were accustomed upon the local population. From the complaints laid against the abbot it seems that he required the people of Darnhall and Over to be his 'bondmen', that they grind their corn at his mill and that he determine how they should dispose of their land and property.

During Walter de Hereford's reign as abbot of Darnhall (c1294-c1308) he was sued by local people in the county court before the justiciar, William d'Ormesby. The abbot was successful in proving that the people of his manor were bondmen and they as a result, and for 'bringing a false claim' suffered the forfeiture of a number of oxen. The sheriff of Chester, Richard Fouleshurst seized the animals and drove them to the abbot's grange at Moorsbarrow.⁵⁷ The dates for the officials would suggest *circa* 1307/8.

A challenge was made in 1328. The peasants argued that they were not bondmen; that they did not owe 'suit of mill'; that court fines should be levied based on their neighbour's assessment rather than at the lord's will; and that they should be able to lease their lands to any free man for up to three years without permission. Their challenge went unheeded and led to the first known revolt.

In 1328 a number of peasants, of whom it was said 'had plotted against their lords', assembled at 'Cunbbestyl'.⁵⁸ With some degree of certainty we may place this location at Knobbs Farm along Darnhall Lane which would have been on the boundary between the lord's demesne, the park, and the common fields of the manor. Their protest resulted in a court appearance before the abbot's steward, Thomas de Erdswyke, on Friday, 6 May: Abbot Peter (c.1322-1337) was present. Frustrated the men caused an armed affray within the court but were overpowered. Whilst submitted to the abbot's pardon ten were specifically identified as rebels: Henry, son of Roger, Pynperpoint; John, son of Richard Parker; John Christian, Robert Janekoc, Waren Horne, William Horn, Geffe Dony, Adam Lychekyn, Richard Holden and Robert his brother. These were all put in shackles in the court at Weaverham, until they acknowledged their fault. All their goods were seized and their cattle were driven to the abbey. Then a week later all the bondmen came together at Darnhall, in the presence of Abbot Peter, Thomas de Erdeswyke, the steward, John de Oldynton, sergeant of the peace, his son Randolph, and Randolph de Bradeford. The men pledged all their goods to the lord abbot and offered him £10. The abbot, 'being moved to pity', reduced this to £4 to be paid on 1 August and 8 September in equal portions. Hondekyn, son of Randolph de Holden, not willing to obey the lord, fled with all his cattle but was soon afterwards taken and confined in the prison at Weaverham. He eventually pledged 100 shillings, out of which the abbot took forty shillings in two parts, on the 8 September and 11 November.

Discontent rumbled on. Eight years later a number of villeins met with the justiciar of Chester, then Sir Hugh de Fren, at Harebache Cross (probably the cross roads at Sandiway, a location on the northern border of 'Conersley', along the old Roman Road), and made complaints, including false imprisonment, against the abbot. The abbot on learning of this meeting arrested Richard de Holden, William Bate, William de Heet, Henry Pymmessone, Adam Hychekyn and John Elkyn and handed them over to Badecock who placed them in custody, in shackles, in his prison in Over. Following payments of fines and a sworn promise not to complain again they were released. A little while later they again plotted to make complaints against the abbot this time to a higher authority – the king. On the pretext of a pilgrimage to St Thomas' shrine at Hereford a number of villeins set off to find King Edward. In February 1336 the king was at Berwick on Tweed, Knaresborough, Pontefract and other parts of the north-east following a winter campaign against Scotland: the following month he returned to Westminster.⁵⁹ It seems that the 'band of pilgrims' had some knowledge of the

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: DARNHALL

king's movements and intended to intercept him in the East Midlands. Whilst in Nottinghamshire some of them were accused of robbery and ended up in Nottingham gaol and narrowly escaped being hung for their offences. Henry Pymmessone, Adam Hychkyn, John Christian and his wife Ages, all spoke up for their fellow villagers in court.

The delay in Nottingham meant that the adventurers had to divert to Westminster where they presented a petition to parliament setting down their grievances. As a consequence the king wrote to Sir Henry de Ferrers, then justiciar of Chester, ordering him to 'do ample justice' to the men of Darnhall. The outcome of Ferrers enquiry was that they were bondmen and the abbot was given leave to punish them as he sought fit. They appealed and argued that in the manor there used to be just ten 'bondes' to whom belonged and pertained all the villain services and asked that an enquiry be held to establish just who these people were. Their argument was rejected as a malicious fraud and the abbot was again charged to punish the men. Again they appealed to the king, who by this time (during May) was at Windsor, and accused the abbot of bribing the justiciar and others to find in his favour. This time the king ordered his son, Edward, then Prince of Wales and Earl of Chester, to enquire into the men's plight. Relieved by this the men returned home to Cheshire. A trial was held in the county court at Chester but once again the abbot won the day.

They appealed yet again. This time the focus of their attention was the Queen. She seemed to have some sympathy and wrote directly to the abbot ordering him to leave the men in peace and return their goods. This resulted in the abbot travelling to see the king and queen who, in June, were travelling north to Berwick. At Kingscliffe, Northamptonshire, he set out his claim to the manor of Darnhall and his authority over the villain tenants, and again was successful. On returning home through Rutland, at Exton, on 24 June, the abbot's party was attacked by the men of Darnhall who were accompanied by William Venables of Bradwall and his men: Venables had a score to settle with the abbot over his brother's fishing rights in the pond at Darnhall. William Fynche, the abbot's groom was slain with an arrow which prompted Venables and his men to take flight and abandon the villagers. A section of the abbot's party that was some way behind came to the rescue which caused the Darnhall men to flee. The skirmish resulted in both parties being rounded up by local officials and taken before the king at Stamford. Once again the abbot won his cause, as allowed to leave for home whilst the men of Darnhall were left in prison in chains. Their involvement in the death of William Fynch was heard by Geoffrey de Scrop who on hearing all the circumstances freed the men into the abbot's custody. In submission the 'rebels' were required to stand before the whole convent in the choir of the abbey church for many Sundays, with bare heads and feet, and to offer a wax candle in submission.

The names of those who attacked the abbot's party are given as: John Waryng, John Parker, Henry Pym, John Blakeden, Richard Blakeden, Richard Bate, John Christian the younger, William Bate, John Christian of Over, Agnes his wife, Randolph de Luteour (Littleover?), and William de Luteover. At least three men, another Henry Pym, Adam Hychekyn and William del Heet managed to evade capture and the abbot had to obtain warrants for their apprehension. Eventually the abbot's bailiff, Henry Doun, and his colleagues captured them at 'Hokenplat' and took them to the stocks at Weaverham. These men suffered the same punishment as the others, but Henry Pym, as ringleader, was required to offer a candle to the Virgin Mary, for as long as he might live, on 25 March each year during the service of High Mass. Another man who had been present was William Horn who attempted to sue the abbot and Walter Wash, the abbot's cellarer because 'they had violently despoiled him of his goods at Exton'. The actual outcome of this case is not known, but the probable outcome is perhaps obvious.

The situation at Vale Royal was by no means unique for similar events occurred elsewhere in England. The manor of Halesowen, near Birmingham, was a manor with several scattered hamlets and a small market town at its heart. In 1214 King John granted the manor to the

bishop of Winchester for the purpose of establishing a religious house and four years later the abbey of Halesowen was established. Almost immediately the abbot attempted to extract as much as he could by way of services and money from his tenants. The tenants appealed to the king against the arbitrary changes in the level of rents and services and especially the requirement to grind their corn at the abbot's mill. Throughout the century there was much litigation between the tenants and the abbey. The main thrust of the tenants' argument was that the manor had been 'ancient demesne', i.e. ancient crown lands, which entitled them to royal protection against any increases in rents and services. Further the status of 'ancient demesne' would mean that the tenants were free of bondage and that any former villein would be free after a year and a day on the manor. They also claimed the privilege of being able to transfer land in whatever fashion they chose, and that land could be devised by will. The issues between the parties ended up in the court of the King's bench at Westminster in 1278 when the abbot won his claims that the land was not 'ancient demesne' and that the tenants were 'villeins at the will of the lord'. As in the Darnhall case there were armed conflicts and on returning from Westminster the abbots' men were assaulted by the aggrieved tenants. Those responsible were imprisoned or placed in the stocks and one, a Roger Kettle, was singled out as their leader and received harsher punishment than the rest.⁶⁰

In 1348 a group of villein tenants of the manor of Badbury in Wiltshire attempted to go to court in order to prove that their manor was of 'ancient demesne' status. Although the peasants' claims against the Abbey of Glastonbury were unsuccessful, they tried again in 1377.⁶¹ There are many other instances of peasant rebellion elsewhere in the country and the claim of 'ancient demesne' was often cited. In Wiltshire, the tenants of Ogbourn had repeatedly and unsuccessfully claimed 'ancient demesne' status against the Abbey of Bec. In neighbouring Hampshire on the manors of Titchfield Abbey similar actions involving claims to 'ancient demesne' status have been observed dating back to the late thirteenth century. In 1377 about forty villages in Wiltshire, Hampshire, Surrey, Sussex and Devon within the short space of a few months in summer all purchased exemplifications of Domesday Book to prove 'ancient demesne'.⁶² In Cheshire such a claim was made by the peasant's on the Earl of Chester's manor of Macclesfield.⁶³

Whether or not the Darnhall villeins used the same argument we do not know – it is highly probable. Like the other cases elsewhere we can say that the peasants were highly organised and not without the financial resources that enabled them to seek justice in the royal courts – perhaps as seems likely they were assisted by aggrieved members of the local gentry.

What then of the characters involved? On the 'official' side we have the abbot. Abbot Peter began his rule in 1322 and remained in post until 1340. He was perhaps the most noteworthy of the line of abbots and occurs in several incidents and disputes. He and his servant, Walter Walsh, came to a violent end at the hands of Thomas Venables, William Bostock and others.⁶⁴ The steward, Thomas Erdswick, came from the hamlet of that name in Minshull Vernon and was a close cousin of the Oldington family of Oulton Lowe, near Little Budworth. John Oldington was the abbot's sergeant and a Randle Oldington was sheriff of Chester in 1341. Two justiciars (judges) of Chester are mentioned in the second story. The first was Sir Hugh Frenes who served for only a short time in 1336 and was followed in that year by Sir Henry Ferrers.⁶⁵ John Badcock served the abbot as his keeper of Over gaol. His family were tenants of lands in Badcock Darnhall, Badcock Riddings and Michel Over. John may have been succeeded as gaoler by his son Randolph who in the 1340s held property in Michel Over by serjeanty, i.e. by performing some special service or duty.

On the other side we have the bondmen and their associates. Principally there is Thomas Venables a junior member of a significant family who were the barons of Kinderton, a township in the Middlewich area. Thomas lived at Little Budworth and held lands which bordered onto those of the abbey and as a consequence he was often in dispute with the abbot

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: DARNHALL

over disputed lands and fishing rights. Thomas's brother, William, lived at Bradwall, Sandbach and probably became involved out of family loyalty.

Of the bondmen there is little information. In the first episode we have: Henry Pynperpoint; John Parker; John Christian, Robert Janekoc, Waren Horn, William Horn, Geoffrey Dony, Adam Lychekyn (or Hychekyn), Richard Holden, Robert his brother, and Hodekyn son of Randolph de Holden. The leader of the rebels seems to have been Henry Pym. Men with this name, spelt variously as Pym, Pymme, or Pimme, occur frequently in the *Ledger Book* – e.g. Henry and Roger sons of Pym, Henry son of Richard Pym, and John Pym. Roger son of Pym held about thirteen acres of land in Swanlow during the 1340s at an annual rent of 11s 10d. Earlier, in the late thirteenth century we find 'Pym the Clerk' and 'Pym the Harper' carting stone twice a day for forty days during November and December 1278 between Eddisbury and Vale Royal for which they were paid 2d each time. They continued in this employ for the next three years. During the summer of 1278 'Roger son of Pym' was also paid for carting stone for building the new abbey at Vale Royal. In 1330 Henry, son of Richard Pym of Swanlow offered the abbot a sheep as his contribution towards the New Year gifts supplied to the abbey.

The Holden family seem to have been 'wealthy' peasants holding a large amount of land in Little Over, Swanlow, Mers, Churchtown, Michel Over and Blakden. The family name comes from an area of Darnhall known as 'Holdene' – the hollow valley. The majority of their lands bordered the abbey's demesne lands in Darnhall, probably the area behind Knob's Farm, which contains a narrow valley that runs down to the Ash Brook. The earliest reference we have to a member of this family is Honde de Holden who on 24 April 1278 was one of the many local people who were paid for carting stone from Eddisbury. William and Richard de Holden performed the same duties in July that year and Randolph de Holden likewise in December. In 1330 Hondekyn de Holden is listed as one of those who sent New Year's Day gifts to Abbot Peter: he sent three geese and three pullets to a total value of 6d. In the rental of *circa* 1334 the following are listed as tenants: Richard Holden of Little Over, his sons Randolph, William and Robert, Adam Holden and Meykn Holden of Marton. Richard Holden had held a field known as 'Holdensfeld' which he was required to surrender to the abbot in return for a number of scattered plots which he shared with his sons.⁶⁶

The Parker family may have been descended from those who performed such a service for the Norman earls: they held lands in the 'Churchtown' area. John Parker carried stone in the 1270s and presented two geese and two hens to the abbot at New Year 1330. In the 1340s Richard son of John Parker held about sixteen acres at a rent of 12s 3d a year. His daughters Emma and Amice each held a few acres in Swanlow.

The names which appear in the second rebellion are similar. Richard de Holden, William Bate, William de Heet (Heath), Henry Pymmessone, Adam Hychekyn, John Elkyn, John Waryng, John Parker, Henry Pym, John Blakeden, Richard Blakeden, Richard Bate, John Christian the younger, William Bate, John Christian of Over, Agnes his wife, Randolph de Luteour (Littleover?), and William de Luteover. Of these it is worth mentioning the Blakeden family who were seemingly fairly well-off and held lands in Blakeden, Hepden and Little Over. The Littleover family held lands in that hamlet whilst the Christian family had lands near to the church and in Swanlow.

Of the tenant families mentioned in the rental of *circa* 1334, not all are mentioned in the revolts. Perhaps those that are mentioned had a particular axe to grind and more to lose; were they previously free holding tenants under the earls and had they lost that status under the abbots? Were they like Richard Payne who in 1307/8 complained that he was not the abbots' 'native' but a freeman whose ancestors had come from Shropshire in Earl Randle's time, at a time when people from other parts were actively encouraged to settle in Cheshire. He claimed that his possession of 'villein' land did not necessarily make him a villein.⁶⁷

Chapter Three

The Fields and Borough of Over

What did the Darnhall and Over area look like in the medieval period? Where did the people live? Where did they work? Where were their fields? Why and where was the borough established? In this chapter I hope to be able to answer these fundamental questions about life in Over during the middle ages, particularly the fourteenth century. The answers to these questions come from an interpretation of the *Ledger Book* and in particular from a rental of abbey property which appears within it and allows us to have a vivid picture of the area.⁶⁸ From the several folios the topography of mid-fourteenth century Over can be described in some detail.

Before examining the rental in detail it is worth considering the overall value and extent of the manors of Over and Darnhall at the beginning of the fourteenth century. There are two sources for this both dated 1291. The first of these is the *Taxatio Ecclesiastica* which is a national survey of ecclesiastical property.⁶⁹ The background to this document is that Pope Nicholas IV granted to King Edward I the right to levy a tax for six years upon church property for the purpose of financing a crusade. The assessments then became the basis for all ecclesiastical taxes throughout the medieval period, though as a taxation return it is likely to have been something of an underestimate.

The *Taxatio* reveals that the largest single estate in the abbey's possession was the manor of Darnhall, including Over, which contributed three-quarters of the abbey's income. It contained six 'carucates' of land worth £6. This figure, which only relates to productive arable land equates to about 180 Cheshire acres (380 statute): if pasture and meadow had been added the figure would be substantially higher. To the north, at Bradford, there were a further three 'carucates' worth £1 10s and two more at 'Conersley', worth £1. Clearly the value of the 'carucates' varied depending upon the condition of the soil which was poorer on the undulating sandy soils of Bradford and 'Conersley'. However, the main source of income for the abbey was the rent paid by the villeins for their tenements. In Darnhall and Over these raised £27 10s, which at a shilling an acre represents 550 Cheshire acres (1,155 statute) a significant increase on the £17 raised from about 320 (670) acres in the 1230s. Other income came from the charges paid by the peasantry for the right to feed their pigs in the woods, from the fines paid in the lord's court, the profits of rearing stock in 'Conerseley' and from the mills.

The next financial return is an extent made at the king's behest by the justiciar of Chester who was a local man – Adam de Wettenhall.⁷⁰ This return, which is likely to be more reliable, also makes Darnhall the most valuable source of income for the abbey. At Darnhall there was a messuage and a garden with six 'carucates' of land and two acres of meadow, altogether worth £11. At neighbouring Over there was a further carucate of demesne land and a further nineteen held by the villeins for a total rent charge of £28 5s 10d. A further 47s came from 'free' rents (i.e. free-holding tenants). The total of twenty-five 'carucates' gives an overall area of 825 Cheshire acres (1730 statute) in Over and Darnhall. To this was added income from the two 'carucates' at 'Conersley, the three at Bradford along with a messuage and some meadow land, and a further two, held in demesne, at Little Over and Sutton. There was also some income from woodland pasture and fishing.

In the sixty years between the detailed entries in the Pipe Rolls of the 1230s and the extent of

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: DARNHALL

1291 the manor of Darnhall and Over had seen dramatic increases in land use. From lands worth a modest £5 this had been enlarged to an area of 210 Cheshire acres with a meadow, a house and a garden, all valued at £12 13s 4d. The lands held by the tenants had been extended from about 280 Cheshire acres worth £17 17s 6d to about 570 acres worth over £28. Other assets too showed an increase so that the value of the manor doubled to about £68 a year.

Let us now return to the rental in the *Ledger Book*. The account is arranged by listing the various hamlets or locations as headings with a list of the tenants either living or occupying land there, followed by a total income from each section. The hamlets recorded are 'Little Overe', though this is an interpretation based on the content of the section, 'Halewes', 'Muchel (Greater) Over', 'Mers', 'Chyrcheton', 'Blakeden', 'Heth', 'Stochall', 'Wro', 'Merton', 'Overe', 'Asfeild', with 'Littlecroft' and 'Ganel'. I am certain that there is another hamlet. The section headed 'Mers' has a total value inserted after the first several lines and then continues with the names of those holding lands in 'le Riddings' and then a final total. It seems therefore that the heading Riddings is missing. Using the clerk's lists of these various hamlets and locations we can take a journey around the manor of Over, though not in the order given. I say just Over because there does not seem to be any reference to Darnhall which suggests that that part of the whole manor was still held by the abbey as demesne lands.

Between the modern High Street and the border with Weaver township to the south there were four small valleys running down to the river Weaver, each with a small stream emanating from a spring on the side of the sandy ridge. These were 'Denelden', 'Schotwallden', 'Chyrchden' and 'Olreden': it was in the third of these that the church stands. On the ridge itself and on the spurs between the valleys lay the fields divided into strips which were held severally by the tenantry.

The road layout was probably much as we know it today with a main highway running along the line of the modern Chester Road, Delamere Street, Swanlow Lane. Joining this was a lane coming up from the 'Wynesford', a name which I think means the carter's ford – the ford where waynes might cross the river Weaver. From the west a lane from Wettenhall through Darnhall and known in the middle ages as 'Dernelenes' joined Swanlow Lane near the church. A lane from Middlewich ascended the ridge from a crossing point on the river below Stocks Hill and passed north of the church. In part this lane was probably known as 'Bradestrete', the 'broad street'. This name is interesting as the use of 'street' in medieval language often refers to the line of an ancient routeway, often Roman, and may therefore allude to the line of the Roman road linking Middlewich and Chester (see earlier). Off this routeway a lane turned down the valley crossed the stream and then rose up again, along the line of the modern lane which provides access to the church, to join the highway opposite 'Dernelenes'. Another lane from Middlewich forked on Stocks Hill, at Ways Green in the vicinity of what was known as 'le Wewes' and 'Halewes', crossed the stream and then ascended the ridge near to the 'Olreden' and along what is now Welsh Lane, which was probably alludes to a man named 'Walens' who lived in 'Chyrcheton'. Another route may have gone from Stocks Hill northwards towards the 'Denelden' and then on towards Mucel Overe.

In the area of the present Old Star public house on Swanlow Lane was the hamlet of 'Chyrcheton' - the village by the church - the largest area of settlement in the parish. In the mid fourteenth century there were thirty-three known messuages and fifty-two tenants of either messuages or plots of land. The concentration of the population will undoubtedly have been along Swanlow Lane between what is now the Old Star Inn and Welsh Lane for the area immediately around the church would have been unsuitable. Beyond this village, if we may call it that, were small settlements at 'Mers' (in the Moors Lane area) with four tenant families, 'Riddings' with nine families and 'Halewes' with ten tenant families. In all the number of dwelling properties suggests a population of over 200 people in the area around the

church.

The church, as now, was certainly surrounded by fields. Strips and plots were held by the local people in the 'Chyrchefeld', in the 'Chyrcheden', 'next the Chyrchestoc' (the church place) and the field of 'Chyrcheton' itself. In the valley with its steep sides and boggy terrain there was only a little over a quarter of an acre (about half a statute acre) of useful land and that was held by Robert the Cowherd, possibly for pasture purposes. Close by the church there was a field of about seven acres which in all probability was somewhere just south of the church and alongside the vicarage was another field. In 'Chyrchefeld' there were about four acres of land. The town fields of Chyrchton consisted of about forty-four Cheshire acres.⁷¹ Beyond these fields there were also arable lands at Halewes, about twenty acres; Mers (near the junction of Moors Lane and Swanlow Lane) about ten acres with a further acre and half in 'Merslone' and seven in 'Littlemor'; 'Ruddings' had about twelve acres, 'Wewes' had about seven acres; and in 'Olredenfeld' there were thirty-three acres. In this part of Cheshire the arable strips were known as 'loonts', a word which persisted through to the nineteenth century. The tithe map of 1846 clearly shows strip fields along each side of Swanlow Lane, and the term used still survives today in the residential area called 'The Loont'.⁷²

Journeying around we pass through Hepden, which had only one or two residents, and come to Blakeden a hamlet on the banks of the Ash Brook. Both Hepden and Blakeden are areas which we still recognise even with the same spelling. At Blakeden there were twenty-one tenants and fourteen messuages.

Travelling across the fields in an easterly direction we come to Little Over a hamlet that contained eight messuages and had sixteen tenants listed. Continuing south along the ridge we come to 'Muchel Over', meaning Greater Over. Here there were twenty-two tenants but only two messuages and four 'cottars' plots. These latter would have been cottages with an associated croft whose occupants would have had certain rights on the common lands of the manor. Down by the River Weaver we come to the hamlet of 'Stochall' in the area we know as Stocks Hill. Here Elcock de Stochall, his son William, and Adam de Stochall each had a small holding for which they each paid five shillings a year rent. Another area mentioned is the 'Heth', the Heath, with a single tenant called John Horn.

All the tenants referred to held small plots of land scattered about within the large open fields of the manor. We have already mentioned those near to the church but we also have 'Heppedenefeld', with about twenty acres, 'Blakedenfeld', with about twenty-four acres, 'Burifeld' (the borough field) with about twenty-one acres, 'Stonefeld' with about twenty-one acres and 'Asfeld' (known until recent times as 'Ashfield') with eleven acres. At 'Muchel Over' there seem to have been just over forty-three acres.

Away to the west and north of the fields lay the common pasture lands which merged with the territory of the Forest of Mara (Delamere). Within the bounds of the forest special laws pertained imposing on the inhabitants and those who ventured there, measures and obligations designed for the protection and management of deer. The manors of 'Conersley' (Whitegate) and Budworth were wholly within the forest jurisdiction and Merton was on its very edge.⁷³

The people of Over will have produced a variety of cereal crops and legumes on their holdings which for some would have been for subsistence purposes. Some will have produced excess which they could sell at the local market: men such as Richard son of Richard of Muchel Over who farmed nearly twelve Cheshire acres (twenty-five statute) and paid nearly twelve shillings a year; or Henry le Dunne of Riddings who had about the same amount of land and two houses; or John Valentyn of Riddings who paid fourteen shillings a year for as many acres; or Roger son of Pymme and Richard son of John the Parker, both of Chyrcheton, who each had a dozen acres. Production of cereal crops necessitated the operation of mills to which, as we have already learned the tenants owed suit. In the 1290s there were three mills

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: DARNHALL

worth £11 13s 4d a year, plus a further twenty shillings paid to the heirs of a Gilbert Salomon the original grantee of the mills. In the rental four men have the appellation 'the Miller': John of Mers, Randolph, William and Richard of Chyrcheton. We may speculate that one of these mills was close by the present mill site in Darnhall, one was at the site of the mill in Bradford and the third on the Weaver near to the parish church.

Pastoralism was as important as arable farming, if not more so. The economy of the area was mixed, but in different areas one or other facets would predominate; for example cattle rearing was better suited to the sandy soils of Marton. The abbot of vale royal certainly had a great deal of cattle and its possible that two men who had the name Cowherd worked for the monastery: David and Robert of Chyrcheton. In 1283 the abbot was allowed to purchase cattle from the king's manors of Burn and Stanstead in Essex.⁷⁴ Twenty years later the abbot was fined twice for allowing 220 head of cattle to stray into the forest of Mara. The people of Over were also fined for allowing their cattle to stray also. Adam Cointrell of Little Over was fined four pence for six cattle and on another occasion the same amount for five cattle; John son of Malle of Blakeden paid twelve pence for fourteen cattle; Hugh del Heth for fifteen cattle was fined two shillings; and Thomas son of Gregge of Blakeden ten pence for as many cattle are just a few examples. Other animals escaped into the forest. Henry le Dunne allowed two horses to stray and Adam Cointrell had three; Hodekin de Little Over had twelve pigs that strayed on more than one occasion.⁷⁵

Sheep farming was an important activity for the White Monks and many of the fields around Darnhall and Over would have seen many flocks of sheep. The wool from the sheep could be used to make the monks' habits and the milk was good for making cheese. Surplus wool was used as a cash crop and the Cistercians earned an international reputation as sheep farmers and traders of fleeces. In 1275, Abbot John had a contract to supply twelve sacks of 'good wool' to Belgium for which he received a cash advance of £80.⁷⁶ By 1297 Vale Royal Abbey was producing six sacks a year for export and as it has been estimated that to fill a 340 pound sack required about 250 sheep this suggests that the abbey's flocks numbered in the thousands.⁷⁷ For some reason villeins' wool was not considered of sufficient quality to be sold along with the fleeces from the abbey's own flocks.

A corollary of sheep farming was fulling. The earliest reference we have to a fulling mill is in 1341 when the farm of the mill and suit of the tenants at that mill were granted to William del Heth and Richard Hurlere.⁷⁸ Similarly one can deduce that the presence of large herds of cattle meant the presence of tan yards and certainly by at least the fifteenth century tanning was being carried out at the aptly named Bark House Farm by a family named Barker.

On 24 November 1280 King Edward granted the abbot and convent of Vale Royal the right to hold a weekly market every Wednesday in their town of Over, and to have an annual three-day fair on 13, 14 and 15 September.⁷⁹ Twenty years later the abbot, Walter, in order to acquire a regular income from the trade attracted to the town by its market and fair, freed the town from some of the restrictions imposed by the manorial customs and created a borough. This meant that the townspeople, the burgesses, had the right to an assembly, a free brotherhood, in order to manage their own affairs and appoint their own officials which included the election of a mayor. The townspeople were also allowed to have their own court, their own prison in which to confine those who broke their regulations and a cuckstool and pillory. If an offender fled then they had the right to pursue and arrest him or her as far as either as the Ash Brook in the direction of Woodford or Minshull; if they fled in any other direction they would have entered the abbot's or some other lord's jurisdiction. The burgesses also had the right to pasture their animals in the usual places and to feed their pigs in the woods upon payment of pannage. They also had the right to dig turves for fuel on Blakeden Moss and to use the 'North Well' (could this be Salterswell?). They could also brew ale for sale so long as they paid 'stallage' for the right, though at Christmas and the time of the fair brewing was free. The people of the manor, those born there, were required to make sure that

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: DARNHALL

any goods they had for sale were sold within the borough and none them were allowed to have a tavern in which to sell ale unless it was within the borough, thus ensuring that the burgesses had a monopoly on local trade. For their privileges the burgesses were to pay the lord abbot one shilling a year in two instalments in March and September.

A significant consequence of the creation of the borough on the top of the ridge was that the focus of settlement shifted from the area around the church to this centre of business, the route from Middlewich to Chester being diverted through this 'new' town.

There are only a few references to burgages in the ledger Book. In 1329 Randolph son of John, known as 'Horlepot' had his burgage taken from him on the grounds that bondmen could not hold 'free land'. However, the abbot relented and awarded him ten shillings and allowed him to keep his burgage at four shillings a year. Roger le Dunne also lost his burgage because he was a bondman.⁸⁰ A little later Richard son of Ralph de Bradford surrendered his 2½ burgages to the abbot in return for a daily corrody of bread and ale. Unfortunately the only known borough official during the medieval period is Thomas Bostock who was mayor *circa* 1420, a time when his brother John was vicar of St Chad's.

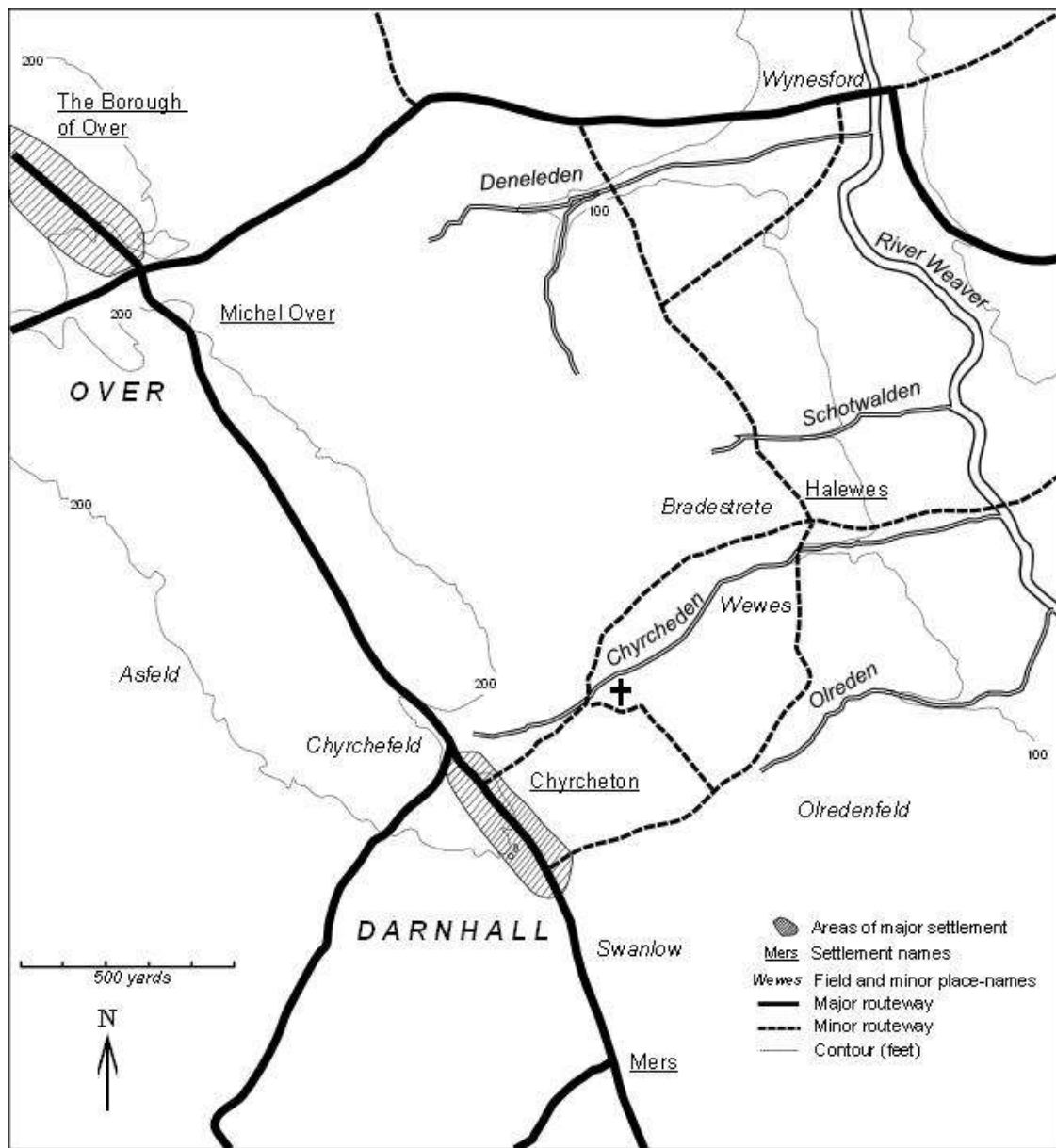
The creation of a borough may have been as a result of the consequences of the Black Death. The effects of the pestilence of 1349 had a significant effect on the population of Cheshire and it may be that as many as fifty per cent of the abbey's tenant families, who numbered around one hundred and fifty, perished causing the abbot serious financial concerns. The creation of a borough would bring trade and attract new people to the area and, importantly generate much needed income.

The Borough of Over is as we know along what is now Delemere Street.. At the time of its creation the borough was established oin land known as 'Murifield', infact when Bradford surrendered his burgages they were said to have been in the 'vill of Muriffeld'. A reference in the Ledger Book refers to an 'oxgang of land of the burgage of Murifeld' and another 'in Murifeld a burgage'. In 1332 three men are escribed as being 'of Murifeld': Robert Albud, Adam Fox and Henry Broun.⁸¹ Dodgson believes that the name 'Muri-' means 'merry' and alludes to a place where merry-making took place – the location of the fair perhaps.⁸² However it seems to me to be a corruption or mis-spelling of 'Buri-' for borough, hence the 'Borough Field'. According to the rental some villeins held strips of land in the 'Burifeld'. Interestingly the Tithe Map of 1840 show fields called Berry Field and Berry Croft, another corruption of borough, just west of Delamere Street and the heart of the old borough.

Chapter Four

The Black Death and the Later Middle Ages

It came in 1349. The Black Death, that is, what we now call bubonic plague originated in eastern Europe and spread rapidly across the Continent reaching south-east of England the year before. To medieval people it was known as 'the pestilence'. Its effects were inconsistent, in some places the population was practically wiped out whereas other places remained untouched by it; though even some of those places were effected when it returned in 1361 and again in 1369. It has been estimated that one third of England's population perished in 1348/9.



Medieval Over and Darnhall

Cheshire suffered considerably that spring and summer. In Macclesfield about half of the tenants of the earl's estates suffered and died from the plague. On another of the earl's estates,

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: DARNHALL

at Drakelowe on Rudheath seventy-five male tenants fell victim to the plague leaving no one to succeed them. At Northwich the revenues from the town's ovens were down due to tenants dying from the pestilence; at Middlewich houses stood empty for twelve months; at Rushton and Cholmondeston lands lay uncultivated. There was certainly a considerable drop in population which meant that large areas of arable land were left untilled and rents were left unpaid. Tenancies became vacant and the few who survived could not cultivate all the arable that remained and it was turned to pasture. Other consequences, which were significant, were that rents for property tended to drop to encourage new tenants whilst the price of labour rose and peasants seized the opportunity to demand higher wages.

Exactly how it effected the tenantry of Over and Darnhall the Ledger book is silent. There is mention of a famine and a plague in 1316, and of Abbot Thomas dying of the 'third great pestilence' in 1369. John de Newenham, vicar of Over was appointed in the 1349 and died the same year, following on from another vicar also named Thomas who had died that year: both it seems had died from the effects of the plague. If catastrophe struck in Macclesfield, Drakelowe and in places in central Cheshire around Over we may, I think, draw the conclusion that the people of the manor were also affected. Perhaps as much as fifty percent of the local population were lost.

Whilst the Middle Ages lingered on there is little recorded of events in the area or the people of Over and Darnhall. What follows are the facts that I have been able to acquire.

Acts of violence were certainly played out in the area often as a result of feuds between local lords and the abbot of Vale Royal. During the 1370s there were instances of fueding between the abbot and members of the Bulkeley family from Eaton, Davenham, whose lands lay on the other side of the River Weaver from Vale Royal. In 1394, Abbot Stephen was accused of giving refuge to the murderer of a member of the Bostock family and in the following year Adam Bostock in his feud with the abbot was bound over twice in the sum of £200 to keep the peace: the abbot likewise. On one of these occasions the incident involved the Bostocks attacking the abbot's mill at Darnhall. The other involved the Bostocks leading a mob to halt a visitation to Vale Royal by the abbots of Oxford, Croxton and Dieulacres.

In 1395 an inquisition was held into the mis-handling of the abbey's affairs at which evidence was given on oath by jurors headed by the Bostock family. It was alleged that over a nine years period the abbot had leased, sold, granted or otherwise destroyed much of the abbey's property in Over and Darnhall including at the granges of Darnhall, knights and Bradford. The abbot was also accused of harbouring members of his household who had committed criminal offences and of allowing prisoners to escape and taking bribes.

Matters did not improve in the next century. In 1424 one of the abbey's servants was accused of an armed attack on the prior. Twelve years later the abbot was accused of a rape committed at Over three years earlier and harbouring an outlaw at Marton.

Another incident involved Hugh Venables, baron of Kinderton and his men. During Easter week in an unknown year, but probably in 1449 or 1450, Venables' gang attacked the mill at Darnhall and destroyed the cogs and other working parts of it, drove away 160 cattle and 'bette and maymed' William Young, one of the abbot's bailiffs, leaving him for dead. Venables was also accused of constantly lying in wait to ambush the abbot in order to kill him.

Orders were issued by the king for the arrest and imprisonment of Venables and his associates for 'Th'oreible and cruel murders that the have doon unto the officers tenants and servants' of the abbey.

In 1437 Abbot Henry suffered a violent death at the hands of an armed band of men from Lancashire, Derbyshire, Staffordshire and Cheshire. They were led by George Wever of

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: DARNHALL

Weaverham and included the vicar of Over, then Richard Asthull, who drove a sword through the abbot's neck several times. The following year, Robert Brodefeld, a monk, was killed at Marton. It seems that the offender was not caught and so the township was fined six pence, the value of the staff that killed him.

Not all disputes ended in violent confrontation. A settlement made in 1475 between Abbot William and Elizabeth, prioress of the convent of nuns at Chester is particularly informative. The agreement was about which lands in Over paid tithes exclusively to Vale Royal. The first aspect is the names of the jury of twelve men for it includes names which were to be associated with Over for centuries to come, even to the present day: William Fisher, Edmund Darlyngton, Henry Slaver, Warin Sompnour (Sumner), Richard Young, William Glaseour, Richard Glaseor, John Darlyngton, Thomas Garnett, Roger Nicson, Richard Domelawe and Thomas Bekensawe. In addition within the text of the agreement the following names occur: Thomas Bower, Richard Bower, Richard Coke (Cook), Hugh Gregory, William Young, Thomas Helsall, Thomas Prykett, Thomas Henryson, Robert Fisher, and Parkin Barker. When compared with the rental of just over a century earlier, with the exception of Cook, Gregory, and Henryson, these are new names and may suggest that many names did not survive the Black Death and that many tenants of the fifteenth century were relative newcomers to Over.

The other interesting aspect is the names of fifty-three parcels of land in Over. These were generally located in the areas of Blakeden, Chester Lane, Ellwallfield, Winsford Bridge, Knights Lane and Roehurst, around the church and at Gale Green.

In 1487 Abbot Stephen and the vicar of Over, then Ralph Larden, came to an agreement about who should receive the small tithes of the parish. It was agreed that the vicar should have the tithes of hemp and flax grown at Foxwist and that all the rest should go to the abbey.

In November 1500 John Ward did homage to the abbot for his lands at Woodford that he held at an annual rent of six shillings.

APPENDIX ONE

The customs of the Manor of Darnhall

[The Ledger Book of Vale Royal Abbey (1914), pp. 114-124.]

Here begin the customs of the bond-tenants of the manor of Darnale.

One is that they ought to do suit of court at the will of the lord, or of his bailiff, upon being summoned only, even during the night, and they ought all to come the next day.

And whereas some of them have been accustomed to give part of their land to their sons, so that it came about that after their death their sons have by the carelessness of the bailiffs of the place been received as holding those same lands without doing to the lord anything for their seisin in their father's time; those sons who hold land ought to do suit of court, or obtain the lord's grace to redeem the suit at the will of the lord, on account of the great loss which has by this means been suffered by the lord.

Also they all owe suit to the mill under pain of forfeiture of their grain, if they at any time withdraw suit; and every year they owe pannage for their pigs.

Also they ought to make redemption of their daughters, if they wish to marry out of the manor, at the will of the lord.

They will also give leyrwithe for their daughters, if they fall into carnal sin.

Also, when any one of them dieth, the lord shall have all the pigs of the deceased, all his goats, all his mares at grass, and his horse also, if he had one for his personal use, all his bees, all his bacon-pigs, all his cloth of wool and flax, and whatsoever can be found of gold and silver. The lord also shall have all his brass pots or pot, if he have one, because at their death the lord ought to have all things of metal. Abbot John granted to them in full court that these metal goods should be divided equally between the lord and the wife of the deceased on the death of every one of them, but on condition that they should buy themselves brass pots.

Also the lord shall have the best ox for a "hereghett," and holy Church another. After this the rest of the animals ought to be divided thus, if the deceased has children, to wit, into three parts—one for the lord, one for the wife, one for the children; and if he leaves no children, they shall be divided into two parts—one for the lord and one for the wife of the deceased, equally. Also if they have corn, in grange or in field, then the wife of the deceased ought to choose her part, to wit, half the corn in the grange or the field, as she chooses. And if she choose her part in the field, then all the corn in the grange shall remain wholly to the lord; and if she choose her part in the grange, then all the corn in the fields shall remain wholly to the lord, together with his moiety and share in the granges; always provided that, wheresoever the wife shall choose her part, whether in grange or in field, the lord shall have his moiety and part, with her and against her; and all the other corn, in the place where the woman does not choose, shall remain to the lord; and if he has children, or a child, the division shall be made in the same way into three parts, to wit, among the lord, the wife of the deceased and his children; also if there are many children [their share shall be divided] among them.

Also it is not lawful for the bond-tenant to make a will, or bequeath anything, without licence of the lord of the manor.

The lord shall choose the best ox by his bailiffs, before the "hereghett" be given to the church. Then, out of the common goods of the deceased, vigils ought to be made round his body, and exequies, according as shall seem good to the lord's bailiffs and the friends of the deceased reasonable and suitable to be done; and the debts of the deceased, if he have any, ought to be paid by the view and discretion of the same people, or assignments made for payment, before the above said division and sharing of the goods of the deceased is made; and then let the division be made, as is above said.

And as to the sheep, let them be divided like all the other goods of the deceased which ought to be divided. But this is inserted in this place by itself, because, when the convent first came to Darnhale, the bond-tenants said that no division ought to be made of the sheep, but that all the sheep ought to remain wholly to the wife of the deceased. Which is quite false, because they always used to divide them without gainsaying it at all, until Warin le Grantuenour was

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: DARNHALL

bailiff of Darnhale; and while he was bailiff he was corrupted with presents, and did not exact the lord's share of all things in his time; and afterwards the bond tenants endeavoured to make this a precedent and custom, which they by no means ought to do, because they have been accustomed so to do according to the customs of this manor in the times of former lords. Moreover, the whole land of the deceased shall be in the hands of the lord, until he who is next, that is to say, he who ought to succeed the deceased—whom, according to the custom of the neighbourhood, they call the heir—shall make such a fine with the lord as shall correspond with the value of the land and the will of the lord.

Also be it remembered that, if there is war in the neighbourhood and watches are kept at night at Chester, then they ought to keep armed watch at night round the court of Darnhale by turns, or in order, six, eight, ten, twelve, or more at a time as may be necessary, as they shall be ordered, or to redeem their watches from the lord.

Also be it known that, if any one wants to buy a hen from the lord, for a good hen he ought to pay 1d.; for a good goose 2d.; for a younger goose about Whitsuntide, 1½d.; because this is the lord's price. Also, if the lord wishes to buy corn or oats, or anything else, and they have such things to sell, it shall not be lawful to them to sell anything elsewhere, except with the lord's licence, if the lord is willing to pay them a reasonable price.

Also it is to be known that it is the custom of the manor to pay assize rents equally at the four terms of the year, to wit, at Christmas, the Annunciation of the Blessed Mary, at the feasts of St. John the Baptist and St. Michael. This is to be observed that, if halfpence or farthings are at the end of the rent of any term, which prevent the rent being paid equally at every term, then the halfpence ought to be paid in the rent of St. John the Baptist or Christmas, at the will of the lord or his bailiff.

Amercements of courts ought always to be levied within a fortnight after the holding of the court, or sooner, if the lord will; because the fortnight is here called "the lord's day"; and the lord's mercy [i.e. fine] is according to his will or the will of his bailiff, so that they can take according to the amount of the trespass and measure of the offence.

And it is to be noted that, if any of the goods of a person deceased have to be sold for payment of his debts, or on account of vigils kept round his body or expenses connected with his burial, it is not lawful for them to be sold until the lord's bailiff has refused to buy them, or has given permission for them to be sold elsewhere, etc.

They ought also to keep the lord's pigs and mares and horses of the woods (silvestres), and to be bee-keepers and parkers, and to feed the abbot's puppies (catulos).

These are the conditions (fn. 3) by reason of which the abbot of Vale Royal and the convent say that the people of Ouere are their bondsmen (neiffez).

APPENDIX TWO

The conditions of serfdom suffered by the people of Over and Darnhall

[The Ledger Book of Vale Royal Abbey (1914), pp. 117-124.]

1. *First, if any woman of their condition may be married outside the manor of Ouere to any person whomsoever, or within the manor to any person of free condition she shall make (fra) redemption for her marriage at the will of the lord.*
2. *If any woman of their condition be pregnant by any one, directly she be pregnant (pqu) she shall give leyrwite at the will of the lord.*
3. *And if any man or woman be summoned to the chapter for any sin they have committed, they must do corporal penance, and if they give nothing for release of this penance, they shall be punished in the court of Ouere at the will of the lord.*
4. *And none of their condition may work for any man within the manor or without, without special permission from the lord, but all must work for him at his will, and he will pay them for their work at his own will.*
5. *And if any one of their condition may hold or cultivate land outside the manor of Ouere, he must give chevage to the lord at his will.*
6. *And no one of their condition can advance his son to holy orders without the especial permission of the lord.*
7. *And the said lord may make any one of them whom he may choose his parker, and retain him in that office as long as he may think fit; and if he commit any offence in that office, he can punish him by imprisonment or by ransom at his will.*
8. *And if any one of their condition commit a trespass for which he ought to be amerced, the lord can amerce him at his will without any manner of assessment.*
9. *And if any one of them trespass against the lord or any of his people, the lord can put his body in prison, and there punish him and keep him at his will.*
10. *And for keeping the said prison and guarding their bodies therein one man holds his land, Badekoc.*
11. *And no one of their condition shall make any will nor dispose of anything, nor have or give anything of all their goods, but all their goods shall remain wholly to the lord except a penny, which is called Massepeny, and a "principal" to the parish church.*
12. *And if any one of their condition have foal or horse, he must not sell or give it to any one without especial permission from the lord.*
13. *And that they are truly bondsmen the King has fully proved by his charter, by which charter he enfeoffed the abbot and convent with the manors of Darnahale and Weuerham, with the bond-tenants and the profits thereof. And to prove that they are truly bondsmen, in the beginning, when our lord the King Edward, who is dead (whom God assoil), enfeoffed the aforesaid abbot and convent with the manor of Darnahale, the bondtenants aforesaid, on account of certain grievances which they were told the abbot made them suffer, went to complain to the King aforesaid, carrying with them their iron plough-shares; and the King said to them: "As villeins you have come, and as villeins you shall return." And after this the abbot threw them out of their houses, and took their goods and kept them in his hands until they had made acknowledgment of their bondage, and done his will in all things. And touching their bond condition, Abbot Walter was impleaded concerning the same in the time of Sir William de Ormesby, justiciar of Chester [c. 1307], and they were so adjudged by inquest and by recognizance of their neighbours, and for the seisin thereof Richard de Foulushurst, then sheriff of Chester, took five oxen to the grange of Moresbarwe.*
14. *And none of them may give, lease, or farm his land to his own children nor to any others, nor grant nor exchange nor sell the same, without the especial permission of the abbot; and if they do so, the abbot may take the land into his own hand, and grant it out at his will.*
15. *And no woman may have or claim any dower after the decease of her husband.*

¹ Gelling, M., *Signposts to the Past*, London (1988)

² Not as Dodgson suggests 'the farm at a mere' as the large pool there only appeared as a result of subsidence during the last century

³ Dodgson, J.McN., *The Place Names of Cheshire*, part iii (1971), pp.169-175

⁴ Gelling, M., p. 158; Cameron, K., *English Place-Names*, London, 1988, p.120

⁵ Dodgson, p.177

⁶ Cheshire County Council, *Sites and Monuments Records*, Records 840 and 848; Bonney, D., 'Early boundaries and Estates in Southern England' in P. Sawyer (ed.) *Medieval Settlement*, 1976, pp.77-82

⁷ C.C.C., Records 770-773.

⁸ Waddelove, A.C. and E., 'Roman Roads in Delamere Forest', *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, 83 (1985) pp 162-184

⁹ Ormerod, vol ii, p.2

¹⁰ Morgan, P.(ed.), *Domesday Book: Cheshire*, 263d. Hereafter *D.B.*

¹¹ *Ledger*, pp.92 -109

¹² *D.B.*, 263d, 267a, 263c

¹³ In the late thirteenth century, lands in Darnhall were said to be measured at thirty Cheshire acres to the ploughland ('carucate'). See Brownbill, J (ed.), *The Ledger Book of Vale Royal Abbey*, Rec. Soc., 14 (1886)

¹⁴ Lander, S.J., 'The Church Before the Reformation', *Victoria County History, Cheshire, III*, p 2. Thacker, A.T., 'Anglo Saxon Cheshire' in *V.C.H., Cheshire, I*, pp. 239/40, 266, 269. Bu'lock, J.D., *Pre-Coquest Cheshire 383 - 1066*, p 45

¹⁵ Gelling, M., *The West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 95-7

¹⁶ *D.B.*, 263c,d, 267a, 267d.

¹⁷ *D.B.*, 268a,b, 267a, 263c.

¹⁸ Thacker, A.T., *V.C.H., Cheshire, I*, pp. 239/40; Blair, J., 'Minster Churches in the Landscape', in Hooke, D.(ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Landscapes*.

¹⁹ Sherley-Price, L. (trans.) *Bede's: A History of the English Church and People*, London (1968), p.86

²⁰ M. Aston, *Interpreting the Landscape*, London, 1985, p.50

²¹ Ross, A., *Pagan Celtic Britain*, London 1967, pp. 20, 218

²² Ormerod, G., *History of Cheshire*, i, p 346; *Cal. Pat.R. 1272-81*, p 247; Barraclough, G., *The Charters of the Norman Earls of Chester*, Record Soc. Lancashire and Cheshire, cxxvi, (1988), pp 223/4, 227

²³ Brownbill, J.(ed.), *The Vale Royal Ledger Book*, Record Society of Lancs and Cheshire, LXVIII (1914), pp.43, 91 Hereafter *Ledger*

²⁴ Christie, R.C. (ed.), *Annales Cestrienses*

²⁵ *Lib. Rolls 1240-45*, p.59. Edward is known to have visited the county seven times between 1254 and 1272.

²⁶ G., Stewart-Brown & M.Mills (eds.), *Cheshire in the Pipe Rolls 1158-1301*, pp. 35, 43, 44, 51, 56, 65, etc.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p.51

²⁸ Pipe Rolls, p. 38, 46, 51, 56, 65, 78.

²⁹ *D.B.*, 263d. *Pipe Rolls*, p.35

³⁰ *Cal. Inq. Misc., I, 1219-1307*, p.330

³¹ Barraclough, G., *The Charters of the Norman Earls of Chester*, p. 420-3

³² Stewart-Brown & Mills, p 99

³³ *Ledger*, pp. 93-96; Dodgson, p 176

³⁴ Barraclough, p.224

³⁵ *Lib. Rolls., 1245-51*, p.350

³⁶ *Pipe Rolls*, p. 58

³⁷ *Ledger*, p. 27. The measurement is assumed to the ancient Cheshire rod of 24 feet which gave rise to the Cheshire acre.

³⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 38, 46, 58, 78, 82.

³⁹ *Lib. Rolls., 1240-45*, pp 20, 21, 59; *1245-51*, pp 1, 9, 246; *1251-60*, p 62.

⁴⁰ *Ledger*, pp. vii, viii, 2, 3; *Ann. Mon. Rolls Series*, iii, p. 227; J. R. Studd, 'The Lord Edward's Lordship of Chester, 1254-72', *T.H.S.L.C.*, 128 (1978) pp 16/17 suggests that the ship-wreck occurred in December 1263. The tradition of it occurring whilst Edward was on a crusade cannot be accepted from his known movements.

⁴¹ W. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, v. p.709; W. Smith and W. Webb (Daniel King) *The Vale Royal of England* (1656), p. 108; *C. Ch. R., 1257-1300*, p. 151; *Ledger*, pp 129-131.

⁴² The reference to Tanner is from D. Knowles and The remains of a Saxon cross *uses: England and Wales*, p. 127; Kettle, 'The Abbey of \'

⁴³ Tait, J. (ed.), *Chartulary of the Abbey of St. Werburgh's, Chester*, ii, p. 282

- ⁴⁴ Knoles and Hadcock. On the numbers originally intended there seems to be some doubt. Ormerod, ii, p. 147, cites 100, and on p.150 says thirty, which would seem to be a reasonable number. In 1336 there were twenty-one monks, eighteen in 1381 and nineteen in 1509. As to lay brothers there are no references to numbers, though a Robert de Mapelderhem, *conversi* of Vale Royal was Escheater of Chester in 1283, *Fine Rolls 1272-1307*, p.182.
- ⁴⁵ *Cal. Cl. Rolls, 1272-9*, p.220; *Cal.Ch.Rolls, 1257-1300*, p.197245
- ⁴⁶ *Cal. Cl. Rolls, 1272-9*, p.292; *Cal.Ch.Rolls, 1257-1300*, p.199
- ⁴⁷ *Cal.Ch.Rolls, 1257-1300*, p.225
- ⁴⁸ *Cal. Inq. Misc, i*, pp 382, 436
- ⁴⁹ *Cal.Ch.Rolls, 1257-1300*, pp.282, 283
- ⁵⁰ *Cal.Ch.Rolls, 1257-1300*, p 225; 1300 – 26, p 204; *Ledger*. p 130; *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, xvii, p 13
- ⁵¹ *D.B.* 263 b, c.
- ⁵² *Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1272-82*, p 246; *Cal. Inq. Misc, ii*, 1308 -48, p 7
- ⁵³ *Cal. Inq. Misc,i*, p 303; *Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1272-82*, p 111/2
- ⁵⁴ *Cal. Anc. Deeds, i*, A1538; *Cal. Chanc. Writs, i*, p 319/20; *Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1292-1301*, p 437
- ⁵⁵ Booth, P.H.W., *The Financial Administration of the Lordship and County of Chester 1272 – 1377*, (1981) pp. 4/5
- ⁵⁶ *Ledger*, p. 27 There names are given as: Avard le Bykere, Baldewyn Sabyn, Elynor Emmesone, Wille de Lytell, Inge Howell, Hille le Fremon, Ric' temere Wyt, Joh' fil' Emmesone, Hugh Falke, Dony de henhull. These are the 'cotyeres' of dernehale: Gibbe Laveroc, Wilke Ackornedocke, Ric' Crowebryd, Will' de Rowede, Aubyn Fyllesone.
- ⁵⁷ *Ledger*, p.122
- ⁵⁸ In the *Ledger* the year of the first story of revolt is given as 1329, 'the third year of the reign of King Edward'. However, mention is made of a court hearing on Friday, 'the Feast of St John before the Latin Gate' which is 6 May and in 1329 this was a Saturday: in 1328 it was a Friday. Later in the same account it says that the court met in the 'second year' of the reign, i.e. 1328.
- ⁵⁹ The king's itinerary is taken from *Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1334-38*, pp. 220–378; *Cal. Close Rolls 1333-37*, pp. 588-594
- ⁶⁰ Razi, Z., 'The Struggles between the Abbots of Halesowen and their Tenants in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries', in Aston, T.H., Coss, P.R., Dyer, C., and Thirsk, J., (eds.), *Social Relations and Ideas: Essays in Honour of R. H. Hilton* (1983), pp. 51-67.
- ⁶¹ Mueller, M., 'The Aims and Organisation of a Peasant Revolt in Early Fourteenth-Century Wiltshire', *Rural History*, 2003 14, pp. 1-20
- ⁶² *Ibid*, p. 2
- ⁶³ Booth, p. 113
- ⁶⁴ *Ledger*, p.21
- ⁶⁵ Ormerod, i, pp, 67, 70
- ⁶⁶ *Ledger*, p. 97
- ⁶⁷ *Ledger*, p. 20
- ⁶⁸ *Ledger*, pp. 92-113
- ⁶⁹ A summary is given in Ormerod, ii, pp 171/2
- ⁷⁰ *Ledger*, p. 61
- ⁷¹ A Cheshire acre is equivalent to about 2.1 modern statute acres. Cheshire acres will be referred to unless otherwise stated.
- ⁷² CRO: EDT 314/1 & 2. The apportionment refers to the strips as 'loonts'.
- ⁷³ Hence the appellation 'Budworth en le Frith' to distinguish the township from the other Budworth (Great Budworth).
- ⁷⁴ *Cal. Fine Rolls, 1272-1307*, p.183
- ⁷⁵ Stewart-Brown, R. (ed), *Accounts of the Chamberlains and Other Officers of the County of Chester, 1301-60*, Rec. Soc. Vol x., pp 26-9
- ⁷⁶ *Cal. Cl. Rolls, 1272-9*, p.254
- ⁷⁷ Williams, D.H., *The Welsh Cistercians*, vol 2, p.310; Denholm-Young, N., *Seignorial Administration in England*, p.57
- ⁷⁸ *Ledger* pp. 31, 118
- ⁷⁹ *Cal. Cl. Rolls, 1257-1300*, p.237; *Ledger*, p. 187
- ⁸⁰ *Ledger*, p.31
- ⁸¹ *Ledger*, pp. 29, 181.
- ⁸² Dodgson, p.177