

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: SWANLOW

WELSH LANE



Many people know of Welsh Lane in Swanlow. It's the unmade track that runs down off Swanlow Lane and heads, through the fields, in the general direction of Stocks Hill and the Winsford Flash. Today it's little used save for dog walkers and those few inhabitants of the houses along its length. At one time it seems that this was a more important thoroughfare. A stroll down the lane is a pleasant experience despite its unevenness underfoot. The lane is bounded by un-kept drainage ditches and thick hedgerows with occasional oak and ash trees. One particular ash tree has such an enormous girth it is possible it has stood there for a few hundred years. Along the lane there are stiles – one on each side, about half way down.

Its name, which has changed from Welch Lane to Welsh Lane over the years, has been interpreted as being the route from Middlewich to Wales. Dodgson in his *Place Names of Cheshire* (p.175) says that it refers to a Welshman and that it “led from Smithy Bank to a now submerged ford of the R. Weaver”. Further he hypothesises that it “probably marks a route used by Welsh salters trading with Middlewich” and this seems to be the generally accepted view of the lane's origin, despite the fact that the lane does not proceed further west than Swanlow Lane. The presence in this area of an Ava Welch in the 1340s should not be ignored in considering the derivation of the name.

Nineteenth Century

On maps the lane is first indicated on Greenwood's map of 1812, though it is cut short of the river, it clearly shows a fork half way along. Interestingly he shows it as being in Weaver township with the boundary between Over and Weaver much further north than it actually was and alongside the church. Bryant's map of 1833 is a little clearer in detail showing a joining of lanes from St Chad's and from Weaver Hall with Welsh Lane, but again stops short of the river in the vicinity of Stocks Stairs. The

TONY BOSTOCK'S HISTORY NOTES

tithe maps drawn in the same decade is by far the most detailed of the early maps and shows all the field boundaries and properties along and near to the lane.



The schedule accompanying the tithe map shows that the first house [plot number 184] had been leased from Lord Delamere by John Bebbington and sub-let to Thomas Finney. Along the fork to the right stands a property owned and occupied by James Murta, now known as 'Grove Cottage' [114 & 115]. In 1851 John Lee who farmed School Bank Farm, Weaver, lived here with his wife and family. Continuing to the end of Welsh Lane we come to Stock Hill and a house known as 'Hooter's Hall' [126] owned by the Wilbraham family and occupied by Mary Holbrook.

The names of the fields alongside the lane are interesting and provide clues about the past. Starting at the top of the lane, on the north side, alongside what was James Vernon's cottage, the first field is of three acres and called 'Pit Croft' (here today stands a bungalow and a number of greenhouses). Next is 'Alder Field' of nearly five acres and then 'Big Vicarage Field', also five acres. Ten-acre 'Thistley Field' comes next and then 'Lounds Field' of nearly ten acres. Each of these were part of Mary Gresty's farm based at Church Hill and leased from Lord Delamere. Returning, the lane passes along a narrow strip field comprising of nearly eight acres known as 'Town Lane Field' and behind Grove Cottage lay the ten acres of 'Near Ropers Field' (which is still there today), each being part of Mary Gresty's farm. Next on the left were three fields held by James Leicester from the Wilbraham family and known as 'Moulton Field' of nine acres, 'Sandbach Field' of four and a half acres and the single acre 'Sandbach Croft' (these last two are today combined into one field). Roper, Moulton and Sandbach no doubt are named after local families who at some time have occupied them - names which persist in the Winsford area today.

The 1841 census records that Thomas Finney and his wife Mary were aged in their late forties and had a family of one boy and six girls. James A. Murta, a merchant in his late fifties, occupied Grove Cottage with his wife Ellen. Forty something farmer Mary Holbrook had three children in her home. Nearby on 'Stocks Stairs' lived John Highfield, a file maker, his wife and their four children.



Greenwood's Map, 1812



Bryant's Map, 1833



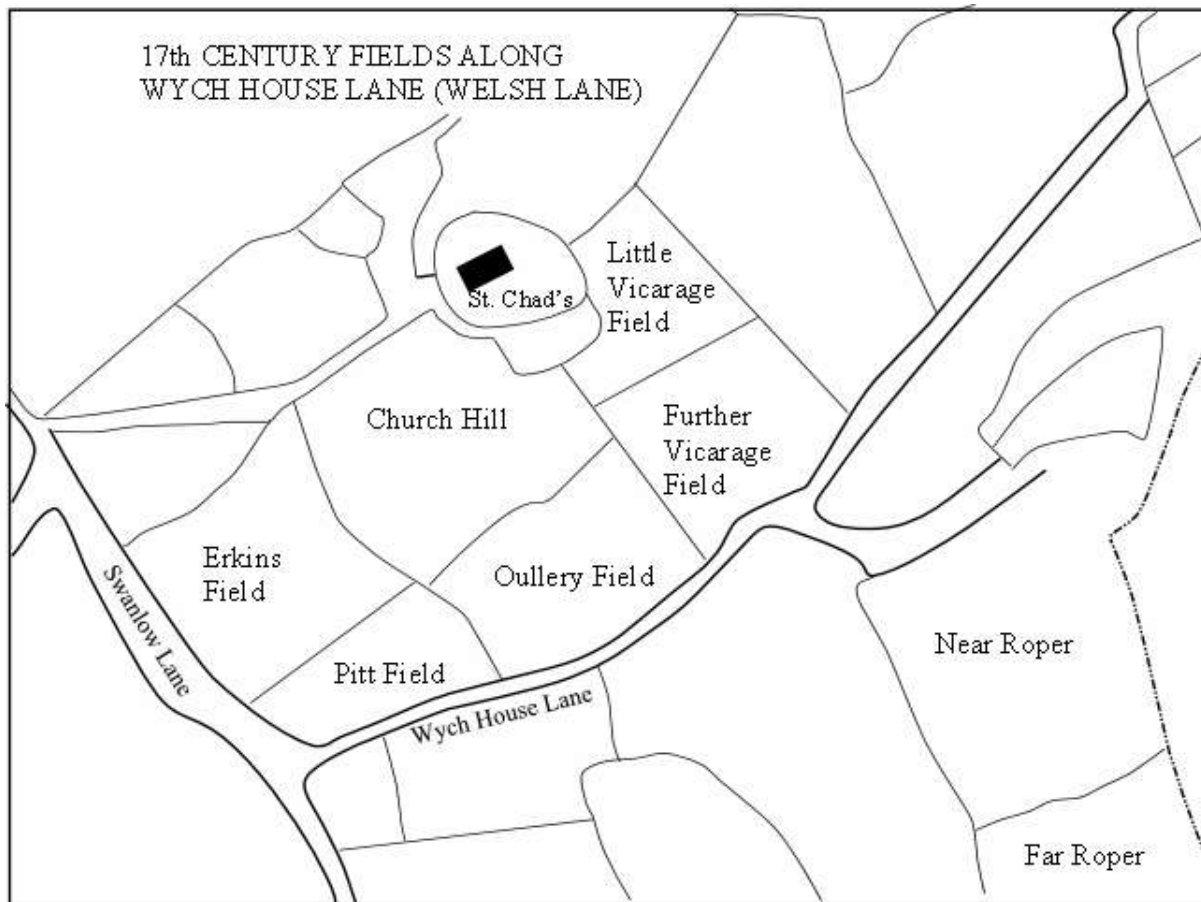
Tithe Map, c. 1838

Further Back

It is quite clear from 17th and 18th century documents that what we call Welsh Lane was also known, or then known as, 'Wyche House Lane' (a 'wich house' being the building in which brine was boiled to produce salt). This name refers to the presence of two small salt works alongside Winsford Bridge which began working about the mid to late 17th century. Any earlier reference to such a name would probably allude to the numerous ancient 'wich houses' in Middlewich where the lane eventually led.

TONY BOSTOCK'S HISTORY NOTES

In 1756 there was a land transaction involving members of the Moreton family of Middlewich (a family that originally resided at Church Hill, Over). The deeds relate to plots of land, closes and fields called 'Stock Hill', 'Pit Field' and 'Further Vicarage Field' and collectively known as 'Old Swan' all of which were in the possession of Charles Gandy. The plot known as 'Pit Field' was said to contain two Cheshire acres which is equivalent to just over four statute acres. It was located at the junction of Swanlow Lane and 'Wych House Lane' with 'Oullery Field' on the east and 'Erskins' (Heskins) on the north. This coincides exactly with the 'Pit Croft' of the mid 19th century less the area then taken up with the cottages and their gardens. The field known as 'Further Vicarage' had 2½ Cheshire acres (5½ statute) and also faced on to Wych House Lane and was bounded by 'Oullery Field' on the west and 'Marled Field' on the east, with 'Little Vicarage Field' to the north. This coincides with the 'Big Vicarage Field' of the tithe map. It seems therefore that the previous name for the 19th century 'Alder Field' was 'Oullery Field' which is itself a corruption of the medieval word for an alder tree.



17th Century Field names along Wych House Lane (Welsh Lane)

What eventually became land that formed part of Mary Gresty's farm in the mid 19th century was two hundred years earlier part of the Whittingham estate. The Whittingham family lived at 'Church Hill House' which later became the 'Old Vicarage' which stood on the hill to the south of St Chad's.

The Seventeenth century court rolls for the manor of Over frequently mention the fields which border onto Welsh Lane. The following are some extracts from the records.

In October 1664 Katherine Standley (Stanley a family who owned much of Weaver township) was ordered to make a ditch from her hemp yard to her barn 'after the lane side from the lane down after Vickars Field' and the field at her house door so that the water would 'chase from the lane'.

TONY BOSTOCK'S HISTORY NOTES

In 1665 Ralph Whittingham had to scour the ditch between the lanes and his *'pingott'* to draw the water away from James Hatton's *'carte dore'*. In 1669 there is a reference to *'Wych Lane'*.

In 1671 mention was made of a way leading from Ralph Whittingham's house (on Church Hill) to his furthest fields known as the two *'Ropers Fields'*: the lane referred to was known as *'James Hatton's Lane'* and it passed close by Thomas Egerton's house. This route probably follows the modern path from the church into Welsh Lane, if so this suggests that Egerton's house was sited at the fork in the lane; James Hatton probably had a house in the same general area. The reference to the Ropers Fields is interesting as during the 19th century there were two fields with this name on the boundary with Weaver township.



***The ditch at the southern end of
'Vicarage Field', similar to that which
Katherine Standeley had to clear.***

In April 1682 Katherine Standeley was ordered to scour her ditch from the side of *'Barn Croft'* to the side of *'Vickers Field'* to draw the water off *'ye Common Lane'* and also *'after the orchard side and end'* for the same purpose. In October 1682 Margaret Whittingham and her son Ralph were ordered to cut their hedges and crop over hanging trees in *'Wych Lane'*, whilst Richard Holland had to do likewise on the lane leading to *'Stock Staires'*. At the same hearing Richard Wilcoxson was fined for not scouring his ditch and cutting his hedge along Swanlow Lane and *'ye Which Lane'* so far as his *'Little Meadow'*.

In May 1685 Mr John Standley was fined 1s 6d for not cutting his hedge or ditching between *'Vickers Field'* and the corner of the *'Little Meadow'* and 10s for not doing the same from his yard where his *'Barn standeth'* along *'Viccars Field'* to the corner of his *'Little Meadow'*.

In October 1692 Mrs Mary Moreton was required to scour her ditch between the *'Oulrey Field'* and Thomas Egerton's garden. In October 1696 Mr Whittingham was required to scour his ditch from his *'Clough'* and Richard Holland's *'Stock Hill'* and to crop trees along the lane between *'Clough Gate'* and Richard Holland's style.

Sadly the lane was the scene of a murder. Apparently the vicar, the Rev. Joseph Lees, was returning home from Middlewich Market one day in January 1753 when, having crossed the river Weaver at the ford below Stocks Hill, he was set upon by a group of men, presumably for the purposes of robbery, and as a result of the attack he died. He was laid to rest at Over church on 26 January 1753 having been vicar for forty-seven years.

TONY BOSTOCK'S HISTORY NOTES



Possible site of 'Egerton's House'



'Vicarage Field' from Welsh Lane



'Vicarage Field' looking towards Welsh Lane and the possible site of 'Egerton's House'



Vicarage Field, looking east. Notice the dip –the site of an old marl pit. The boundary between 'Little' and 'Further Vicarage' fields was to the left of the depression



'Oullery Field' looking west



Significant depression in 'Oullery Field'- site of old marl pits

TONY BOSTOCK'S HISTORY NOTES



The location of 'Church Hill House' and the former Vicarage were to the right near the two trees



'Church Hill' from St Chad's Drive