

TONY BOSTOCK'S HISTORY NOTES: THE ORIGINS OF WINSFORD

FROM RIVERSIDE HAMLET TO URBAN CENTRE

Today Winsford is a town in the very heart of Cheshire. Known perhaps as the home of the car supermarket that bears an appropriate name, and also as home to the rock salt mines whose product is spread on our nation's roads to combat the perils of ice and snow. Historically Winsford is a relatively new town, having been formed in 1894 when the Winsford Urban District Council was established. This was an amalgamation of two townships that lay on opposite banks of the River Weaver: on the east the township and parish of Wharton, formerly part of the ancient parish of Davenham, and on the west Over, divided between the two ancient parishes of Over and Whitegate. Between them a river crossing and hamlet named Winsford, the name of which the council then adopted. In 1974 the Winsford Urban District Council became subsumed into the Vale Royal Borough and more recently, in April 2009, the area became a part of the new Cheshire West and Chester District.

The town of Winsford rose from being a simple rural hamlet to an urban and industrial centre in the middle decades of the nineteenth century as a consequence of the salt industry which developed in and around the town. A description of Winsford written in 1848 says 'On the banks of the river Weaver, which bounds the parish [of Over] on the east, are numerous brine-pits; and across the stream, between the parishes of Over and Davenham, is Winsford bridge, where the [Weaver] navigation ends, and on each side of which houses have been built, in consequence of the extension of the salt manufacture in the neighbourhood.'¹ This paper will examine the origins of Winsford and its rise to become the heart of an industrial district.

Origins

The name Winsford was originally applied to a crossing point on the river Weaver and to the small hamlet on either side, though mainly that part on the eastern side within the township of Wharton. The name is most likely to derive from either an Old English personal name *Wine* or else a Celtic name *Wynne* linked to the familiar word 'ford'. However it is possible that the name derives from *wayne* meaning a cart or carriage and therefore indicating a convenient crossing point for heavy vehicular traffic in preference to the old ford a little further down stream behind St Chad's church at Ways Green. The earliest record of the name occurs circa 1230 in the form of *Wynesfordheth* – 'the heathland by Wynn's ford', and *Wynesfordstrete* – 'the street leading to Wynn's ford'.² The crossing itself is mentioned in 1255 and again in 1350 and the bridge is first recorded during the reign of Edward I when men deserted the king's army in North Wales and travelled east across Cheshire by way of Winsford Bridge taking with them a large quantity of cattle and sheep.³ The bridge is also mentioned in 1334 as *Wynesford brygge* and again in 1400 as *Wynffordbrugge*. Alongside the bridge on the Over side there were a number of plots of land for which tenants paid rent to the Abbot of Vale Royal. In 1334, Henry le Dunne had a piece of meadow land in these parts known as *Wyneseye* for which he paid 4*d.*, John le Fletcher had three acres for which he paid 3*d.*, a further 2¼ acres of newly tilled land for 2*s* 3*d.*, and a further acre on the other side of the highway at 1*s*.⁴ Somewhat later, in 1475, there are again references to the lands in the vicinity of the bridge. Roger Nickson had a field and meadow here; William Glaseour had a piece of meadow; and Richard Coke had a field and meadow.⁵

It may be no coincidence that the bridge is first mentioned in 1334 for this was a little after the time when the Abbot of Vale Royal created a borough within his manor of Over on the ridge, along where Delamere Street is today. As a consequence the old route between Chester and Middlewich was perhaps improved and a bridge constructed at the ford. Alternatively, and I believe more likely, the ancient route was diverted to pass through the new town by crossing the river at a new point by means of the bridge. If we accept the latter proposition where was the original crossing of the river Weaver? And what evidence is there for an alternative earlier crossing point?

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There was an ancient crossing a little further upstream below what is now Stocks Stairs, where the modern caravan park is located. Prior to the late nineteenth century the Flash, which was caused by subsidence, did not exist and that on each side of the river there were level stretches of land and people crossed the river by means of a series of stepping stones. It is here that the ancient Roman Road from Chester, by way of Kelsall, crossed the river on its way to the fort and salt town at Middlewich. Whilst there is no trace of the road in this particular area it is worthy of note, and surely no coincidence, that the projected straight line from the remains of the road near Kelsall meet the river Weaver at precisely this point. At this location Roman coins were found by workmen during the 19th century. On the east side the Roman road will have risen up the bank to follow the line of Rilshaw Lane, which in part follows a projected straight line to the fort in Harbutts Field, Middlewich. The reference in 1230 to *Wynesfordstrete* is perhaps significant in this respect as the place-name element *-strete* is often associated with the line of a former Roman road: *Wynesfordstrete* may in fact refer to Rilshaw Lane.

Above Stocks Stairs is the area is known as Ways Green a place-name that suggests a junction of routes. From here those who had crossed the river travelling west could take the road through Swanlow towards Nantwich; towards Wales, along Welsh Lane; follow the old Roman road towards Chester; or turn north to follow the line of the river.



Figure One: Winsford in the 1720s
(a detail from the map of the Weaver Navigation)

In 1616 the constables returning a report and survey on the bridges in the county stated that 'Winterford Bridge' was partly maintained by the townships of Wharton in Davenham parish and the township of Over.⁶ Mention is made of Winsford Bridge in a case heard in the Chester Exchequer in 1660 concerning a will where the parties concerned had met in Thomas Hayes' house at Winsford Bridge, and in 1666/7 repairs were made to the bridge.⁷

In 1721 the River Weaver was surveyed mapped for the purposes of the newly established Weaver Navigation. This clearly shows the hamlet of Winsford with its few buildings on each side of the road on the west bank, that were perhaps salt works, the bridge, the open area of what was later to become the market place on the east bank, and a large house which is probably the forerunner of the 'Cock Inn' (later the 'Royal Oak' and now 'Bees Knees').⁸ Whilst the boundary of the township is delineated on the Over side this is not so on the Wharton side which perhaps suggest that Winsford was concentrated on the west bank at that time. It is reasonable to say that during the first half of the eighteenth century Winsford was a small salt producing enclave alongside a crossing point on the River Weaver.

Early Salt Making in Winsford

When exactly salt production started at Winsford is uncertain. An old source refers to a salt spring flowing into the river Weaver just north of Winsford Bridge and that by 1671 there were two small salt works here on the Over side of the river.⁹ The land tax return for the year 1704 refers to Francis Cholmondeley's (1636-1713) salt works for which he paid £10 for the year and also names Humphrey Ogle as the 'salt officer at Winsford'.¹⁰ An indenture dated July 1705 made by Richard Vernon of Middlewich refers to his salt house in Over in the hands of Francis Cholmondeley at a rent of £5 a year.¹¹ The map of the river Weaver surveyed and drawn in 1721 indicates salt works, perhaps two, both perhaps occupied by Vernon, either side of the approach to the bridge: a note on the map says: "*Mr Vernons land and salt works up to Winsford Bridge*".¹² Richard Vernon, attorney of Middlewich, one of the gentlemen appointed as 'undertakers' by the virtue of the Weaver Navigation Act, 1721, is known to have owned a salt-works in Winsford which he stated produced 40000 bushels of salt a year.¹³

On 25 March 1724 an agreement was drawn up between Charles Cholmondeley of Vale Royal (1685-1756), William Toft, apothecary of Middlewich, and George Wilkinson, 'late of Middlewich and now of Winsford', yeoman. For the price of a guinea in gold paid by Toft and Wilkinson, Cholmondeley agreed to a year long lease of "*All that and those the Wych House and Salt House Wych Houses and Salt Houses Brine pitt and Brine pitts Brine and salt water....commonly called or known by the name of Winsford Salt Works*". This also included the land with rights of access and the use of "*Salt pans, Barrows Seeths Tubbs Lounts Ffleeters Grates Bearers Hatches Ginns wheels Engines and other Implements and Utensils*". It was declared that Cholmondeley would provide the bricks for supporting the pans, that he would pay any taxes or other dues laid on the premises, except for salt duty, and would pay for the maintenance and upkeep of the works, unless damage was caused by the negligence of workers. Exempt from the lease was the '*Smith's shop*' where the iron pans could be repaired, though the partners had access to the pan smith's expertise at the usual rates. For all this Toft and Wilkinson agreed to pay £80 in two instalments. The grant also makes it clear that there were four pans in operation at this site and that the tenants were to do all they could to encourage trade during their tenure.¹⁴ It seems that George Wilkinson continued to operate the site on lease from Cholmondeley until at least 1733 when he is recorded as having a salt works of four pans and a brine pit.¹⁵ Calvert considered that this works was located on the banks of the river below Knights Grange in Over.¹⁶ However, given the name 'Winsford Salt Works' it is far more likely that the site was at the foot of Winsford Bridge on the Over side and just north of the bridge. In 1741 Charles Cholmondeley himself is shown as a shipper of salt suggesting that the tenancy previously held by Wilkinson was in abeyance at that time.¹⁷ By the 1840s James Muspratt occupied these works, though according to the tithe map and its apportionment they were 'waste salt works'.

The history of the salt works on the flat land just south of the bridge is more apparent. Following his death in 1726 Vernon's property and salt works in Over passed to John Crewe of Crewe Hall and Christopher Appleby of Middle Temple, London, with instructions that they sell the same "with all convenient speed" to pay of his debts.¹⁸ An indenture dated June

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1730 made between Richard Vernon's executors and trustees, including John Crewe, on the one part, and Thomas Patten of Warrington and John Dickinson of Manchester on the other, refers to Vernon's brine spring and salt works near Winsford bridge consisting of "a wych house, storehouse, stables, outhouses, a smithy, utensils, and a field, part of Wayes Green Farm, called Clovers Croft".¹⁹

Messrs Patten²⁰ and Dickinson then leased these works in 1733 to Eyre & Company who had a pit and six pans at work.²¹ Thomas Eyre had originally been involved in the linen and silk trade in East Cheshire but had gradually increased his business activities to include the production of salt from brine along with the operation of wharfs, warehouses and barges in Winsford. He and Thomas Patten of Warrington had advanced the scheme for building the Weaver Navigation and it is suggested by Foster that the purchase of the works may have been to minimise any opposition to their proposals.²² Patten succeeded in the running of the salt works following Eyre's death in 1735. In addition Patten & Co. had wharfs, salt works, warehouse and barges. Their accounts survive in the Arley MSS²³

In 1744 Isaac Wood, a merchant of Over²⁴ took out an eight-years lease on these works for £200 a year. He also had the use of the brine pit and a number of flats (barges for conveying salt) from Patten and became the leading salt producer in the area, having a virtual monopoly on the trade until his death in 1782 when he was succeeded by his widow Jane. He also traded in pig iron, pottery, pipe clay, stone, and other commodities.

During his lifetime Isaac Wood was shipping about three-quarters of the total tonnage of salt down the Weaver. He also traded in pipe clay, flintstones, earthenware, pig metal, slate and calamine and had about 85% of river trade in his hands. His barges or flats, of which he had between six and eight, and his wharfs and warehouses were realising a profit of over £1000 a year.²⁵

By November 1757 Wood, then the chief river trader, was wealthy enough to purchase Patten's works with its salt houses, brine springs, dwellings, buildings and lands for £3,700.²⁶ The details of property referred to in the deeds of transfer are:

1. A salt house near the bridge called Winsford Bridge, and all engines, wheels, pans, crates, bearers, cisterns, ladders, baskets, salt barrows, wheel barrows and implements.
2. A messuage, or dwelling house, adjoining the works, which was the home of Isaac Wood.
3. A messuage, which had been occupied by Robert Pownall for several years.
4. A messuage occupied by William Croxton once used as a smith's shop and then converted into a house.
5. A messuage by the bridge known as 'the Watch house'.
6. Land by the River Weaver divided into three parts and occupied by Isaac Wood: Welch Pasture, a garden, a wharf or timber yard. On the last of which has been erected the wich-house buildings and through which there was a passage for horses and carts from Winsford to the lands of Mr Cholmondeley and Mr Crewe. Also the wharfs and quays that were part of the same parcel.
7. Land on the other side of the river in Wharton called Done's Meadow and Joynson's Meadow which lay to the south of the Bridge. This land had been purchased by Patten from the Joynson family and were also occupied by Wood, and used for 'graving' or repairing boats.

There are three interesting aspects of this deed. Pownall refers to Robert Pownall who was employed as Wood's clerk who from 1744 was paid £15 a year along and had the house worth £5 a year. Fourteen years later he was employed by the Weaver Navigation as their inspector and superintendent of navigation and cashier at a salary of £70. The mention of a road leading through to lands owned by Cholmondeley and Crewe refers to what is now

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Weaver Street which leads through Cholmondeley's property towards Ways Green where Mr. Crewe had property and therefore confirms Woods salt works as the one to the south of the bridge. The lands referred to as being on the eastern bank, or the Wharton side, of the river and directly opposite Wood's salt works were to become the heart of Winsford. In September 1769, Wood extended his interests on this side of the river by purchasing lands known as "the Banking and Croft upon the Hill" for £1050.²⁷ In his will dated 31 May 1780 he mentions the estate he had recently purchased from the representatives of the late Thomas Tomlinson in Wharton. The importance of salt making is perhaps emphasised in his will when he specifically exempts his "*fflats, vessels, Boats and Tackling and the Pans, Crates and other Instruments and Implements for making salt*" from being sold to cover any debts and expenses.

Following his death in 1781, Isaac's widow Jane Wood continued to work the salt here in Winsford and was eventually joined by John Roylance in the business: she was succeeded by her son Isaac and his wife Annabella. The family continued to produce salt until the end of the century but remained in possession of some property for a little longer.

Whilst salt was the catalyst of Winsford's change the navigation of the River Weaver facilitated it.

The Weaver Navigation

One of the most important and controversial issues of the early 18th century was the improvement of the River Weaver to make it a navigable waterway from Frodsham Bridge upstream as far as Northwich. Inland white salt making in the eighteenth century grew with rising home demand and the expanding export market stimulated by Liverpool's involvement with the slave trade. A major event of the century, supported by the Liverpool merchants, was the passing of the Weaver Navigation Act. For those who supported the idea this would support the rock-salt mining industry by making it more viable, whereas those in opposition saw the move as being counter to the interests of the brine boiling industry and the reciprocal trade in coal to the salt boilers. The initiative had been proposed as early as 1663 following which there were some unsuccessful attempts in 1670, 1710 and 1715 to obtain an Act of Parliament. Finally a Bill was introduced in January 1720 which successfully passed through both Commons and Lords to receive Royal Assent in March 1721, having had a majority of twenty votes in the Commons. The preamble to the Bill says it all: "Whereas the making of the river Weaver alias Weever, alias Wever, navigable for boats, lighters, and other vessels, from Frodsham Bridge, in the county of Chester, to Winsford Bridge in the same county, will not only be very beneficial and convenient as well for the carriage of salt and cheese (the great manufactures and produce of the said county) as of other foods and merchandises to and from the town and parts adjacent, but will employ the poor, and be a means to preserve the highways in the said county and will very much tend to the employing and increase of watermen and seamen and be for the good of the people...."²⁸ Supplements to the Navigation Act confirmed the course of the waterway as far as Winsford Bridge. Two other extensions, one along the Weaver as far as Nantwich, and another to improve the River Dane as far as Middlewich never materialised.

The Weaver Navigation Act appointed three Cheshire gentlemen to be 'undertakers' of the project: John Egerton of Oulton, Leftwich Oldfield of Leftwich and John Amson of Lees. Associated with these men was the Middlewich attorney named Richard Vernon who we have met with earlier. The initial estimate for the cost of the work was £9000 raised by subscription from local gentlemen including Egerton who gave £1000, Amson £500, and Vernon a further £1000. For about eight years almost little was done to further the scheme and in frustration business men with local interests - Thomas Patten, his brother Jonathan Patten of Manchester, Thomas Eyre of Wharton and John Dickenson of Manchester - offered to take over as

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'undertakers' and proceeded to build the canal. Once work began in 1730 it took only two years and about £20,000 before flats (sailing barges) began to operate up and down the river.

There were also bills for the road between Middlewich and Winsford to be improved by repairing and widening between 1753 and 1779. It is likely that during this period of time the road became more direct unlike the old road that wound its way through Clive and along Rilshaw Lane to approach Winsford from the south.

Control over the running of the navigation was, according to the Act in the hands of Commissioners, though in practise it was down to the undertakers. The Commissioners did however appoint and oversee the work of the administration staff of clerks and inspectors of tonnage and pay their salaries out of the tonnage dues.²⁹ Isaac Wood was a clerk of the Navigation based at Winsford at a salary of £40 p.a., but his activities in trade on the river required him to resign from his post in 1735. A Robert Pownall was inspector of tonnage at Winsford.

Tonnage increased steadily. In the first year 18930 tons 7 cwt were transported, which comprised of 7954 tons 15 bushels of rock salt, 6988 tons 25 bushels of white salt, 2634 tons 19cwt of coal, 534 tons 6 cwt of paving stone, 225 tons 14 cwt of oak and timber, 219 tons 18 cwt of limestone, 167 tons of merchants goods, 126 tons 19 cwt flint stone, and 79 tons 10 cwt of pipe clay. The 'merchants goods' included imports such as brandy, port, wine, tobacco, sugar, molasses, prunes, raisins, anchovies and train oil. Boat accessories, such as blocks, rope, ocham, anchors, and mast poles came upstream. Exports included 'crateware' (pottery goods) and cheese. But the transport of salt and coal dominated.³⁰

In succeeding years, despite the increasingly high rates of transportation, the volume of goods up and down the Weaver Navigation continued to increase. In 1742/3 nearly 31500 tons of goods, including iron ore, were shipped and that same year twenty-nine boats were recorded as taking goods to Winsford with a total of 236 cargoes. For example the *Hope* loaded twenty-one cargoes at Winsford.³¹ Winsford's trade was about a third of Northwich's and included goods to and from Middlewich.

In 1752/3, 43126 tons were carried, again including iron ore. Imports at this time included cotton and hides. In 1762/3 the total tonnage for the river was 76952 tons of which Winsford's portion was 8805 tons.³² Ten years later tonnage was up three-quarters on the 1760s with a grand total of 118905 tons. Of this Winsford was responsible for 14899 tons.³³

Completion of Trent and Mersey canal in 1778 had an adverse effect on Winsford with about half of the Potteries and Middlewich trade going by the new canal.³⁴ So that in 1782/3 the total river trade was down slightly to 118865 tons against what had previously been a rising trend: of this Winsford contributed less than half.³⁵ Ten years later there had been a slight improvement to a total of 159527 tons of which Winsford had 25200 tons.³⁶ This decreasing volume resulted in the post of inspector of tonnage at Winsford being abolished in 1784. Inspector Kent had died in 1777 and was succeeded by his wife until 1784.

In an effort to increase business with Middlewich the Navigation Trustees commissioned improvements to the road to Middlewich by laying down gravel which was completed in November 1784.³⁷ It seems that the old road used Rilshaw Lane the level of which had to be lowered to join the Middlewich to Winsford Road then being constructed along what is now Station Road.

Salt Making in Over

It is difficult to assess how many salt proprietors there were in the Winsford area, which includes both Over and Wharton, during the later 18th century as the records of shipments of

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salt down the Weaver from here include salt from Middlewich. As mentioned above Thomas Patten was certainly one we may be sure of and fortunately his company's accounts survive. Between 1734 and 1744 the works produced an annual average of 1982 tons of salt. This produced an income of £1787 out of which costs of coal from Staffordshire (£841), freight charges (£390), wages in making the salt and loading (£176), and miscellaneous expenses, including repairs (£251) left a gross profit of £129. Added to this Patten profited from the operation of his flats were averaging at £218 a year and profits from the wharfs and warehouses amounting to £85 a year.³⁸

The pattern of salt trade down the river from Winsford is explained fully in Calvert but is worth summarising here.

During the 1730s we have Messrs Patten and Wrench, Parrot and Wilkinson and in 1741 Charles Cholmondeley. Wood is first listed as a shipper in 1747 and for the next fifty years he held the most prominent place amongst the largest shippers of white salt from Winsford.

A Mr Seaman first appears as a shipper in 1737, then again eleven years later and then regularly until the end of the next century.

In 1750 Stringer and Chesworth appear on the scene though the former retired from business in 1773 and Chesworth continued to operate for several years with the latter continuing to till the end of the century. Barrow occurs between 1750 and 1776. Between 1757 and 1775 W. Ball is a shipper. By 1766 the shippers were Wood, Lowe, Ball, Stringer and Seaman. In 1773 4324 tons were shipped by Wood, Lowe, Seaman, Ball and Stringer. The following year sees Thomas Marshall added to the list of shippers. In the late 1770s the shippers were Wood, Lowe, Seaman and Chesworth.

During the early 1780s the only shippers of salt were Wood and Seaman. Isaac Wood was replaced by his widow Jane in 1781.

In 1785 the shipments totalled 4139 tons. Roylance arrives on the scene from Northwich in 1785.

In 1786 Jane Wood, Seaman and Roylance were joined by the firm of Henry Wilcken from Liverpool who already had a salt mine at Marston. This new firm soon became the largest shipper of salt.³⁹ In 1787, 8758 tons were shipped by these Winsford firms.

By 1790 the shippers were Wood, Seaman, Chesworth, Roylance, Wilcken, Joseph Leay and Hugh Henshall who together were responsible for shipping 13,769 tons of salt.⁴⁰

In 1792 land taxes were paid for the salt works in Over in possession of Mr Wood, Mr Roylance and Messrs Wilcken & Co.⁴¹ Of these three Wood paid £17 10s in tax whereas the other two each paid half that amount suggesting that Wood's works was the larger enterprise. Ten years later Mrs Wood paid £14 11s 8d tax and John Roylance paid the same amount on the two salt works he owned, one of which was occupied by Joseph and William Leay.⁴²

During the first decade of the nineteenth century a number of salt works were established or proposed on Cholmondeley's land along the west bank of the River Weaver to the north of Winsford. It seems that a number of entrepreneurs were keen to prospect for brine and to take on fifty years leases for low lying land along the western banks of the River Weaver, the property of the Cholmondeley family of Vale Royal. In August 1802 Thomas Cholmondeley leased to John Okell & Company the site known as 'Knights Grange Salt Works' for fifty years from September 1803 at annual rents of £100 for the first thirty years and £142 thereafter. Okell was gentleman who resided in Sandiway and his colleagues were: Joseph Goulden, a merchant from Anderton, and brothers William and George Holland timber

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merchants from Castle. It seems that these brand new works had not been established and were at this time simply an earmarked site; it was bounded by another salt works in possession of Messrs Clay and Midgeley. The conditions of the lease were that Okell was to build the works to include a storehouse for salt that measured 50 yards by 30 yards and 4 yards high by March 1804; four pan houses each of which was to be 12 yards square; sink a brine pit and erect engines and pumps; and to refine the salt on Cholmondeley's lands and not sell it on. Should it have been the case that no brine was found the company could sink pits on neighbouring land not already allocated for salt works. Should nothing have been found down to a depth of 55 yards then the lease would be void. Joseph Goulden himself, in conjunction with Okell and the Holland brothers, had a lease dated April 1803 from Thomas Cholmondeley. This was for an additional 6 acres and 23 perches of land at Knights Grange at £80 a year for fifty years from September 1803. The purpose being to sink a rock salt pit and to erect engines and salt storehouses.

Three years later in August 1806, the company of Davenport and Done had a lease from Cholmondeley of lands at Knight Grange. The parties were: Aldersey Davenport, a merchant of Wharton; John Done of Tarporley, gentleman; William Dodson, a timber merchant of Wharton; and John Thompson and William Harding of Wharton who were the executors of a Charles Heppard. The land involved contained 6 acres 1 rood and 15 perches adjoining Okell's salt works and included a brine pit. The terms were for 50 years from March 1807 at rents of £130 and £172. The company was required to erect a storehouse 4 yards long and 30 broad and 5 yards high and to put in engines and pumps.

In July of the same year William Marshall of Wharton, yeoman, Joseph Bayley, a tanner from Swettenham, Thomas Harrison of Kinderton and Randle Pickin of Middlewich had a lease of 3 acres 1 rood and 37 perches for fifty years from September 1806. Their rent was to be £100 for the first thirty years and then £145. They too had to erect buildings and sink a pit.

On 20 April 1807 Richard Lathbury Dudley, a merchant of Nantwich, and Thomas Done of Wharton, a yeoman, had a lease of land adjoining the others at Knight Grange for the purpose of processing brine drawn from Okell's pit. Their lease was for only 46 years and the annual rents were £60 for the first twenty-six years and then £80.

In January 1808 John Okell and Company let their brine to Rankin Okell and Company. The former company now included John Ellson and James Swindall of Witton who acted for the estate of Joseph Goulden. Other parties to the deal were Samuel Harrison of Vale Royal, Richard Mather, a merchant of Hartford, Richard Rankin a merchant of Leftwich, William Okell of Liverpool, William Leigh of Barnton and Robert Wade of Over. The term was for only ten years at a rent of £25 a year based on a pan of 780 'superficial feet' (i.e. square measure say 30 x 26 feet). The brine was to be boiled in works to be erected on a field, part of Mill House Farm, and transported to the property boundary by John Okell's company.

The Rankin Okell Company had a fifty-years lease of four acres of land for their salt works in January 1808 on fields named Friars Hill, Friars Wood and Hough Meadow. The rents were £100 and £142. As usual they had to build storehouses and sink a brine pit but were able to use John Okell's brine. This lease states that if a rock salt pit was sunk then the rent would be increased by £50 a year. If the lessees supplied Cholmondeley tenants with brine then their rent would be only eight pence per square foot.

The last lease of the decade was dated 29 November 1808 and was granted to Robert Pulford Taylor, a surgeon of Middlewich. He and his colleagues: John and George Pugh, drapers of Over; John Barker of Rushton, John Done of Calveley and John Hitchin of Alraham, yeomen, had the lease for fifty years from February 1809 at the usual rents of £100 and £142. It was also stipulated that a fourteen yards wide canal was to be made to the Weaver, each tenant along side it were to give up seven yards of land for it.

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In 1832 taxes were paid on salt works: three owned and occupied by William Court; five owned by Thomas Lord Delamere (occupied by Messrs R. W. Wade, William Marshall, Messrs Dudley Wade & Co., John Dudley, and Hodson Davies & Co.); and one owned by Messrs Wilcken and occupied by Edward Brabant & Co. According to the tithe survey of about 1840 the following salt works existed in Over: William Cross, who had what was known as the 'Island Works', James Muspratt, William Courts, Robert Leng, Thomas Caldwell, Robert Leng, junior, Dudley Dutton & Co., Robert Broady & Co (owned by Bromilow Maddock & Co.), John Davis and Messrs Falk (owned by Lord Delamere).

In 1854 William Court had two salt works along with a brine pit and boat yards. The executors of William Ledward held the two salt works occupied by Messrs Muspratt & Co., and Messrs Tennant & Co. Ralph Atherton owned and occupied another salt works, as did Samuel Davies, Samuel Burgess, William Cross, Messrs Johnson & Co., Messrs Jackson & Co., Mr Greenhough, Mr Warwick, Mr Bracegirdle, Lord Delamere had eight (two of which were occupied by Thomas Royle and Thomas Harrison), the Meadow Bank Co. had two both of which were occupied by Mr Firth, and Messrs Bromilow had two occupied by themselves. A total of twenty-five works.

Two years later there were twenty salt works on which land taxes were paid in Over. William Court paid tax on a brine spring, reservoir and an engine house and had a salt works occupied by Frederick Firth & Co. John Court owned and occupied another salt works and a dock yard and owned another works occupied by Robinson & Co. The executors of William Ledward held the two salt works occupied by Messrs Muspratt & Co., and Messrs Tennant & Co. Simpson and Potter owned and occupied a salt works as did James Eardley, Ralph Atherton, Messrs Johnson & Co., William Cross, Messrs Jackson & Co. Joseph Greenhough owned two salt works occupied by Thomas Warwick & Co. and by Thomas Warwick. Lord Delamere had two works occupied by Thomas Ryley and Thomas Harrison. Brownilow & Co had a salt works occupied by Messrs Brownlilow Haddock & Co. The Meadow Bank Co. had salt works occupied by Samuel Bracegirdle & Co., Philip Juncker, and John Thompson & Son. Lastly Herman Falk owned and occupied another.

Salt Making in Wharton

The steep sloping banks on the eastern side of the Weaver made it more difficult to establish salt works. However John Dudley owned some flat land here and inspired by the activities across the river he began to search for brine. At first he was unsuccessful but a chance find as he was about to give up produced an abundance of brine such that in 1797 the then largest salt works was established. John Dudley continued to ship salt until 1833. In 1834 he was joined in partnership for a few years by Sir John Williams, a judge of the Court of the King's Bench.⁴³ In 1837 Dudley involved his son in the enterprise and from then on the name Dudley frequently occurs well into the nineteenth century.

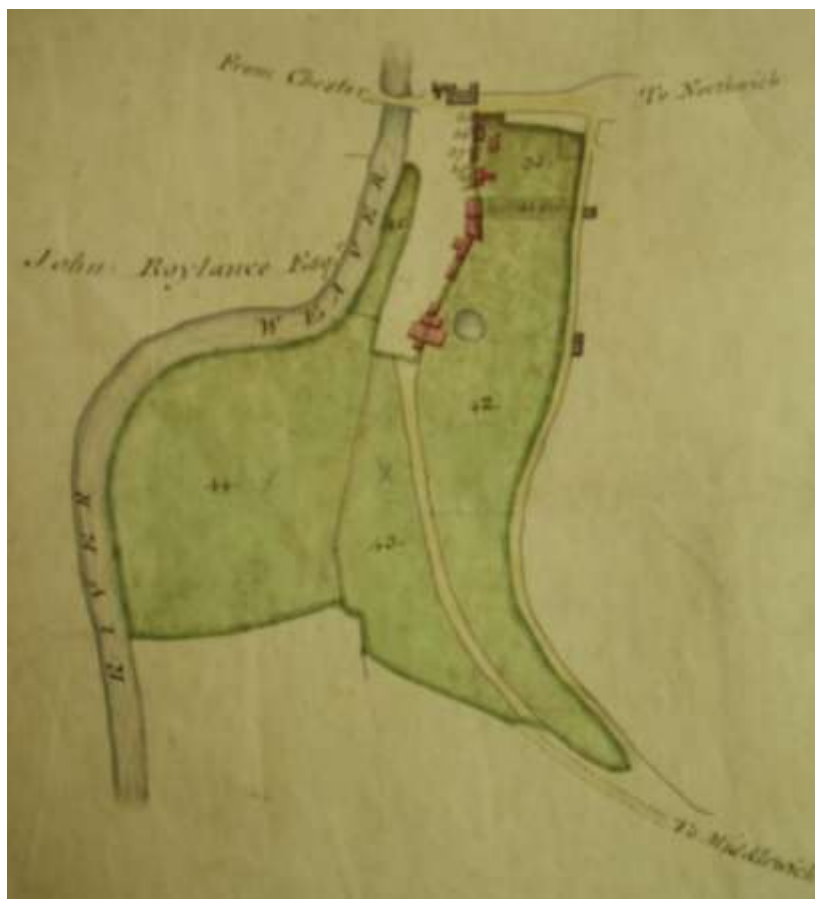
Isaac Wood also established a salt works on the Wharton side of the river and in the late 1780s and early 1790s had the only salt works here. He also had possession of a number of parcels of lands one of which was an area known as 'Done Fields', where salt works were to be developed later. On another parcel of land new houses had been built by 1781 which bordered the open ground facing the river – the start of what was to become the heart of the Winsford hamlet. These pieces of land were leased to Charles Hibbert who lived at the 'Red Lion' situated alongside the bridge across the Weaver.

In August 1818 the Wood family sold their property on the east side of the river to William Dodson and Messrs Done & Co. The Dones then took possession of the 'Done Fields' and the 'Red Lion', which had been home to Charles Hibbert and his wife Mary from 1763 until 1817, and between 1817 and 1828 the publican was a Robert Lightfoot.

The deed of transfer to Dodson of the remainder of the Wood property, for a sum of £2600, gives a plan drawing of the property and a list of the occupiers of the buildings from which a description of early nineteenth century Winsford may be drawn.⁴⁴ On the corner where the road from Middlewich joined that from Davenham was property consisting of half an acre

Figure Two: Winsford in 1818

and worth £10 a year, known as 'the Hill' (now Wharton Hill). A little way up the bank stood a house and a bake-house occupied by James Amson. Below, fronting the Middlewich Road



there were a number of small house plots. The first of these was occupied by Miss Hall, the next by Ann Hickson, then John Stretch, then Thomas Dickonson, and lastly Thomas Stretch. The first of these was perhaps as large as Amson's house as it was worth £13 a year, whereas the other four, which shortly afterwards were pulled down, were only valued at one or two pounds. Then came a public house called 'the Cock' with its stables and garden run by Samuel Williamson and worth £30. Interestingly within this property there was a brine pit but no suggestion that it was being used for extraction. Fronting the next field, 'Hill Field', once known as 'the Banking and Croft upon the Hill', which contained just over three acres, there was a storehouse adjoining the stable of the public house, a pan-house joined to that where brine had been or was being boiled to make salt. Then came a shippon, an old store-house, a house and another pan-house. Behind in the field there was 'a cistern' in which brine was presumably stored. None of these were occupied in 1818. Across the Middlewich Road (now Station Road) were five and a half acres named 'The Lower Hill Field' and 'the meadow' which were occupied by Williamson. The meadow, which had trees growing on it, occupied the loop of the river where the Marina is now situated. A narrow strip of land immediately north of the meadow was known as 'the Wharf'. Between here and the buildings first mentioned and northwards towards the bridge was an area devoid of detail on the map which formed the area that became the market place occupied by a variety of buildings around its edge and including, just north of Dodson's property a coal wharf owned by John Dudley of

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Wharton. Facing down the road to Middlewich a large building known as the Red Lion which had been in existence since at least 1781.

A survey of Davenham parish, which included the township of Wharton and therefore Winsford, made in 1823 records William Dodson's property. First he had the 'Royal Oak Public House', (formerly 'The Cock') with its garden and three and a half acres of meadow. Next he had a total of six acres that included the market house, a warehouse, a coal yard, a pice of land, the 'Hill Piece', 'Lower Hill', and the graving yard. Seven houses, each with a shop and a garden are listed as being occupied by: James Amson, John Read, John Dunn, Thomas Cawley, Thomas Williams, George Robinson and William Brooks. The last six houses probably replaced the earlier four mentioned in the deed of 1818 as having been pulled down. He also owned two butchers shops one occupied by James Minshull and the other by a person named Jepson and lastly a cottage occupied by someone called Alderley. Altogether about nine and a half acres.

Five years later the Dodson family sold their interest, for £942, to John Cheshire of Northwich, who began to establish a salt works on the meadows alongside the river. During Cheshire's ownership a timber yard and graving dock were also established alongside the river which were tenanted by William and John Cross; also a coal yard, wharf, warehouse, the market hall stable and a 'crane' had been erected on the narrow strip of land to the north of the timber yard, and a house had been built with an adjoining ironmonger's shop and a block maker's shop, immediately west of, and below, 'Big Hill Field'.

The year 1841 is a particularly important point in local history research for two reasons. Firstly this was the year of the first real national census which gives details of houses and families resident in any township. Secondly, the year of the census coincides with the production of the tithe survey and the accompanying maps, the first detailed survey which records land usage, ownership, and who lived where.⁴⁵ From these two sources we have enough information to produce a picture of any given district.

The Done family were still in possession of the 'Red Lion' in 1841 when Joseph Moore was the publican and had been for at least the previous three years and was to remain so for a further three years. Joseph's wife was Phoebe and they had two children, Mary and Daniel. Living with them were two male servants and a female servant. At the time of the census two agricultural labourers were staying at the inn.

In front of the 'Red Lion' was the Market Place. Much of the residential properties and shops were along the left hand side of Winsford when walking towards Middlewich and had once been owned by the Woods family and described as 'New Houses' in 1781. On the corner, opposite the 'Red Lion', was a house and shop owned by James Amson - a man who was in his sixties at the time of the census had a corn dealing business. He lived in a large house on Winsford Hill with his wife, Jane, and a family that consisted of two adult sons, Ralph, born in 1805, a butcher, and William, a plumber, as well as two young children who were probably grandchildren; there was also 15 years old Mary Amson, probably a relative, who was described as a female servant. His other son, Amos, a butcher, occupied the shop on the corner of the Market Place. It seems that this property was also occupied by George Moseley, a grocer, his wife, their infant son, and two female servants. It is likely that the two trades were conducted from two shops within the same building. Amos is probably the brother of Ralph who was still trading as a butcher in 1850. Next door there was another shop owned by James Amson, then a grocers shop owned and occupied by Richard Allert, then Thomas Atherton's, tailoring shop; his lodger, James Barton was a sail maker. Next came the premises of Thomas Cawley, a grocer and beer house keeper (later 'The Swan'); then William Percival, a shipwright, who ran a beer house at his premises known as the 'Flatman's Tavern' (later 'The Ship'). Next came the premises of Thomas Cross, a 'shopkeeper'. This row of shops ended with the inn known as the 'Royal Oak' (formerly 'The Cock') run by John Williams

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and his family who had held the public house and the lands at the back since 1834. This property is indicated on the map of the Weaver Navigation drawn in 1721. During the late eighteenth century it was occupied by Thomas Whittle and then in the early years of the next century by Samuel Williamson.

The first property in the next block was the smithy run by William Blackburn and George Cornes. Elderly Blackburn lived at the shop with his wife and two female servants, whereas Cornes lived up on Winsford Hill. Next came the cottage of James Yardsley, a salt maker and then another beer house run by Richard Tickle, an agricultural labourer. John Burrows occupied the last property in this block. At the rear of the block William Preston had a cottage. Land owned by John Cheshire separated this block from the next, a row of semi-detached cottages owned by John Beswick. These still remain and stand opposite the car park by the river. The first of these housed the family of William Such, a bricksetter, who had nine children, of whom the first two sons were also brick setters. Next door to them lived Charles Rawcliffe's family; at the time of the census he was not listed, instead his wife Ann is shown as the head of the house with her two children and a female servant. According to the tithe map a John Muskett lived next door but he and his family must have been absent for the census. George Gilbert, a size maker, and Thomas Griffith, his wife Elizabeth and their daughter Jane lived in the next house. Then came a cottage owned and occupied by the Robinson family; whilst Peter is mentioned in the tithe, according to the census Sarah and her four children were living here. This is the last residential property in Winsford.

The other side of the Middlewich road, heading back towards Winsford Bridge, followed along the timber yards that ran down to the river that belonged to John Cheshire's salt works. Here ship building was now carried out in what was commonly called Winsford Dockyard or Winsford Wharf. William Cross was the shipbuilder who built flats and other boats and acted as a timber merchant. He lived on the site with his wife Sarah, their adult son George and three other children; they had a male servant and two female servants. It is here that the many ship-wrights and ships carpenters who lived in Wharton and Over would have worked. He seems to have employed thirteen shipwrights, a ships carpenter, a sail maker, and perhaps a further five joiners, a carpenter and seven sawyers who are listed in the census. Of the shipwrights there were three members of the same family: Thomas, Samuel and Job Pickstock.

Fronting the Market Place, was Cheshire's salt works worked by William Cross. Living on this site was William Baker, a salt maker, and his family of seven children. Next door William Norton had a cottage and barber shop which was. This property, owned by John Dudley and leased to John Cheshire was occupied by James Edge. Lastly the 'Shambles',- an area of small shops and the market which were owned by Samuel Hulse and leased to John Harper Hosken of Davenham and John Cheshire and occupied by Samuel Blackburn and others.

In 1848, to raise the £10,000 he needed Cheshire mortgaged his properties to Messrs Parr, Lyon and Greenhall of Warrington but unfortunately within a few years he went bankrupt.⁴⁶ In March 1852 Cheshire's property was assigned to a Thomas Green, esquire and held in trust by William Cross, Thomas Rigby, James Grimshaw and George Morgan in trust. By this time the salt works alongside the market place which William Cross occupied, consisted of five storehouses, four pan houses with furnaces, a brine shaft, brine cistern, a cottage, a smithy, offices, an engine house containing a steam engine, machinery workshop, a stable, a weighing machine and two shops occupied by Thomas Thompson, a butcher, and John Harding a shoemaker, along with a sail-room occupied by John Barton. Part of the former meadow land and timber yard sites now hosted a bone and size works with seven boilers, furnaces, two coolers, two sheds and a button moulding factory which had once been occupied by William Ratcliffe, but at that time by Thomas Swanwick Bradbury. The Cross family timber yard with

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its graving dock, brick-built smithy and brick-built saw-pit and block maker's shop still remained.

At the northern most part of the town, alongside the railway line (behind where Fords of Winsford is now situated) the smoking chimneys of the two Bostock salt works, owned by James France- France, would have been seen belching out their smoke across the fields of Wharton. The farthest of these two was worked by Thomas Frimstone and the nearest by Messrs. Fairclough & Frost. Slightly to the south of these, on a loop of the river, stood the new large works owned by Josiah Perrin and leased to Henry Waterton and known as the National Patent Salt Company. Next, came two smaller works leased from Perrin by George Beaver-Sloper and Messrs. Slater & Anderton, and then the slighter larger premises of Messrs. Irvine and Blackwell. Below an area known as 'Done fields', on lands owned by John Sumner, Phillip Sumner and Jackson Lewis (in front of what is now the Vauxhaull Dealers and 'The Wharton Park' public house) were the salt making premises of Richard Done and Leigh & Brother.

Some of these works had housing on site for their employees - the owner's agent and the salt workers. In 1841, at the National Patent Salt Works, a cottage was occupied by Harriet Bourne who lived there with her four children, including a baby boy, Frederick, and a James Hulse, a smith, and his wife. Next to them was the home of the agent, John Smith. The third home was that of John Garrett, salt maker, his wife and their six children. At the Dudley works there were seven cottages housing the families of Samuel Oakes, George Newall, John Newall, Thomas Noden (who had two boys named Curzon lodging), John Newall, and John Oakes. Each of heads of these households were salt makers as were some of their children. One of the sons, James Oakes was a pan smith, and another, Joseph Newall was an apprentice ships carpenter. The company clerk was William George Read who lived in a house on the site with his wife Eliza and a teenage female servant, Catherine Oakes. At the Leigh Works, where Benjamin Phillips was the agent, there were six residential properties. Phillips lived in the first with his wife and a son John who was a pan smith. The other cottages housed the employee-families of James Hulse, John Goulding, John Bennett, Peter Yeadsley, and John Stubbs. At Dones Works there were eight families: Allmark, Pool, Stubbs, Harding, Stubbs, Fisher, Beckett and finally the cottage of John Hulse, agent, and his family.

During the mid-nineteenth century Wharton was renowned for the production of salt from brine. According to *Bagshaw's Directory 1850* salt works were "carried on to greater extent in this township than in any other place in England". The extensive saltworks were situated along the banks of the River Weaver and opposite similar working on the other side in the township of Over. In 1850 there were 370 salt pans in the various establishments giving employment, directly or indirectly to upwards of 700 workmen. At one time 400,000 tons of salt were produced in a single year, the bulk of which would have been shipped in flats down the river to Liverpool. The brine extracted from deposits that generally lay some thirty to sixty yards below the surface, though occasionally they were only twelve yards down, was of an excellent quality producing 52 ounces from a gallon of brine.

¹ *A Topographical Dictionary of England* (1848), pp. 495-498.

² McNeil Dodgson, J., *The Place Names of Cheshire*,

³ Hewitt, H.J., *Mediaeval Cheshire*, Chetham Society, vol. 88 (1929), p. 86

⁴ *Ledger Book of Vale Royal Abbey*, pp.98, 109

⁵ *Ledger Book*, p. 151

⁶ *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, vol.

⁷ *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, vol. and CRO: QJX 3/4/9

⁸ CRO: D5514. The map was probably commissioned by Richard Vernon one of the original undertakers of the Weaver Navigation. It was surveyed by John Billington

⁹ Calvert, *Salt in Cheshire*, (1917), p. 74

- ¹⁰ CRO: DAR /A/62
- ¹¹ CRO: DCR/38/7
- ¹² CRO: D5514.
- ¹³ Willan, T.S., *The Navigation of the River Weaver in the Eighteenth Century*, (1951) p.25
- ¹⁴ Calvert, p. 598
- ¹⁵ CRO: DGR/A/25
- ¹⁶ Calvert, p. 598. Knights Grange was in Whitegate, not Over.
- ¹⁷ Calvert, p. 604
- ¹⁸ Will of Richard Vernon of Middlewich, PRO: Prob 11/609
- ¹⁹ CRO: DCR/38/7
- ²⁰ Thomas Patten of Bank Hall (1720–1806), J.P. and D.L., Lieut.-Col. of the Royal Lancashire Militia, High Sheriff of Lancashire in 1773, and for Cheshire in 1775. Had Bank Hall, (now Warrington Town Hall) built in 1750.
- ²¹ Foster, C.F., *Capital and Innovation* (2004) p.230. CRO: DGR/A/25
- ²² Foster, p. 213
- ²³ Willan, p.44
- ²⁴ Isaac Wood was son of Isaac Wood, merchant of Newton, Middlewich. This Isaac lived at some time near the salt works before moving to Oak House, Over.
- ²⁵ Willan, p.45/6
- ²⁶ CRO: LuWn. 28/4
- ²⁷ In the 1720s this parcel of lands had been in the hands of an Edward Stockton of Wharton who had sold it to a Sarah Ratcliffe. Her nephew and heir, Thomas Ratcliffe, then sold the property to Robert Young of Marton from whom it passed to his son Robert Young of Davenham and his wife Ann daughter of Sir John Egerton, baronet. Ann's sister and executor, Elizabeth, and her husband George Ward, a barrister, then sold the lands to Isaac Wood. CRO: LuWn. 28/4
- ²⁸ As quoted in Calvert, p. 432
- ²⁹ Willan, p.35
- ³⁰ Willan, p.39/40
- ³¹ Willan, p.45
- ³² Willan, p.86. The Winsford cargoes consisted of: 3097 tons 27 bushels of salt; 542 tons 10 cwt of coal; 2877 tons 2 cwt of pipe clay; 1621 tons 11 cwt of merchants goods; 536 tons 1 cwt of pig metal; 78 tons 15 cwt of slate; 50 tons of flint.
- ³³ Willan, p.106. Winsford: 4324 tons 6 bushels of salt, 2206 tons 10 cwt of coal, 4103 tons 3 cwt pipe clay; 3291 tons 6cwt of merchants goods; 424 tons 2 cwt pig iron 267 tons 16 cwt of slate; 147 tons 9 cwt of flint.
- ³⁴ Willan , p.109
- ³⁵ Willan, p. 122. Winsford: 1885 tons 15 bushels salt; 1666 tons 10 cwt coal; 427 tons 1 cwt of merchants goods; 305 tons 12 cwt of flint; 225 tons 10 cwt clay.
- ³⁶ Willan, p. 135. Winsford: 13850 tons 10 bushels salt; 10431 tons 6 cwt coal; 624 tons 19 cwt of merchants goods; 288 tons 5 cwt of flint; 6 tons brick.
- ³⁷ Willan, p.118/9
- ³⁸ Foster, p. 228
- ³⁹ Calvert, p. 606
- ⁴⁰ Calvert p. 607
- ⁴¹ CRO: DVE/2/337/8
- ⁴² CRO:
- ⁴³ Calvert, p.697
- ⁴⁴ CRO: DVE2401/8/5
- ⁴⁵ CRO:EDT 423/1,2.
- ⁴⁶ CRO:DVE 2401/8/5