

TONY BOSTOCK'S HISTORY NOTES

SHIPBROOK

Shipbrook is a township in the parish of Davenham and lies along the eastern bank of the River Dane opposite the village of Davenham.

According to McNeil Dodgson in his *Place-Names of Cheshire*, the origin of the name seems to mean a place where sheep are dipped in a stream, but it is also possible that the first element of the place-name is from 'scid' a beam suggesting a bridge over a stream. But in truth we shall never know.

The first mention of the township is in the Doomsday Survey compiled in 1086. We are informed that this was a manor held by Richard Vernon. He was a Norman knight who originated in the town of the same name in Normandy and presumably came over with William the Conqueror in 1066. Richard Vernon was given many manors within the county of Chester but settled at Shipbrook, and was known as the 'Baron of Shipbrook', a title bestowed on him by the first Norman earl of Chester, Hugh d'Aranches: in fact this was one of several military baronies he created throughout his earldom. Perhaps it was established here to protect the salt workings at Northwich, whilst the Barony of Kinderton was similarly created to watch over the workings at Middlewich. His barony included the whole of what was then Davenham parish as well as lands further south in Occleston, but in addition to this he had other manors elsewhere in the county.

Prior to Vernon this manor was held by Osmer a Saxon thegn. According to the Domesday Book, Osmer was the Saxon lord nine other manors during the reign of Edward the Confessor (1042-1066); whether he was still alive in 1086 is not clear. He also held the manors of Davenham, Bostock, Audlem, Crewe and Claverton (near Chester). He was also lord of manors at Leftwich, *Essetune* (a lost place name which is thought to be Austerson in the parish of Acton, near Nantwich), Wistaston and *Tereth* (also known as *Frith* a lost settlement in Wrenbury). Whilst these properties were somewhat dispersed there was a clear focus in the ancient parish of Davenham. In all his lands contained about twenty-four ploughlands (about 1500 Cheshire acres, or 3100 statute acres), large tracts of woodland, with a number of enclosures and nesting places for hawks, and meadows. In the time of King Edward the value of these lands was a little over £6 but by 1086 they were worth about £2 less. For taxation purposes (*geld*) his lands were assessed as being about ten hides. Osmer's richest holding was Claverton, a few miles south of Chester, which was valued at £2 both before and after the Conquest. Here the available arable land was estimated as being two ploughlands and to this manor belonged eight burgess properties in the city of Chester, another two on the other side of the river Dee in Handbridge, and a salt-house in Northwich. Agriculturally, and perhaps territorially, the largest manors were those of Shipbrook and Audlem each of which had enough land for five ploughs and were worth twenty shillings in 1066.

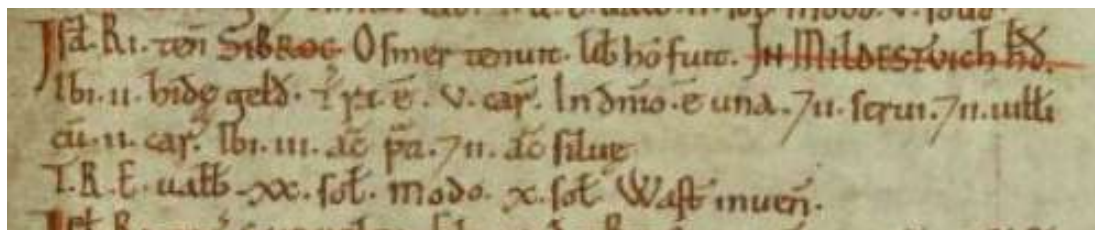


Figure One: The Domesday Entry

The Domesday entry reads:

In Middlewich Hundred

The same Richard holds SIBROC Osmer held it. He was a freeman. There 2 hides tax. There are 5 ploughlands. In lordship is one and 2 serfs and 2 villeins with 2 ploughs. There are 3 acres of meadow and 2 acres of woodland. In the time of King Edward value was 20 shillings. Now 10 shillings. Was waste.

The entry informs us that in all there were about 300 acres of available arable land and that one ploughland or about sixty acres were held by the lord and worked for him whereas two serfs and two villeins had another 120 acres.¹ There was small area of meadow, presumably along the river bank and a small area of woodland which would have been somewhere on the boundary with what became Whatcroft. Before the Conquest the manor's value had been twenty shillings, but at the time of the survey it was worth half that and at a time in between when the Normans first arrived it was worth nothing, or at least produced no profit for the lord. Overall in comparison to neighbouring townships this manor had an average amount of resources. As regards the individuals mentioned: a 'serf' was the lowest form of peasant being bound to his lord – a form of slave; a 'villein' was slightly better off in that he had land for his family's subsistence.

Tradition has it that Vernon built a castle at Shipbrook. Whether this was of a motte and bailey type or simply a fortified house we do not know. Suffice to say that even today there is an area known as Castle Hill which is the supposed site of the motte. Ormerod states that the remains of the castle were cleared 'thirty years ago' (that would be about 1786) under the direction of Edward Tomkinson of Bostock Hall, the then 'baron of Shipbrook'.

The title and estates of the barony descended from Richard de Vernon down through three or four generations to a man named Warin who was living during the late twelfth century and certainly at the time of King John (1199-1216). He married Auda, widow of Hugh d'Altaribus, and daughter and one of three co-heirs of William, the third and last Baron of Wich Malbank (Nantwich) who died during the reign of Henry II (1154-89). Warin and Auda had at least five sons the eldest of whom was also named Warin. This second Warin married Margaret, daughter of Ralph d'Andeville, and had a son who was again named Warin who is known to have been living as late as 1240-50 but died fighting in France without any children, leaving his three sisters to inherit the barony. His sister Maud married Sir Richard Wilbraham; Rose married John Littlebury and Auda married Sir William Stafford. After a prolonged litigation with their uncle Ralph Vernon, rector of Hanwell, the sisters were obliged to give up to him the 'baronial title' and the manor of Shipbrook with half of the remaining estates. The other half being assigned to the husbands of the three sisters.

The Wilbraham share, which included the manor of Leftwich, was further divided when Sir Richard Wilbraham left two daughters who married into the Winnington and Lostock families. The descent of the other two shares is not known for sure, though in the late thirteenth century a sixth part of the barony, which included Bostock manor, passed to the St. Pierre and thence the Cokesay families.

The capital manor of Shipbrook passed from the Rector of Hanwell to his illegitimate son Ralph who is recorded as 'Raufe ye Olde' on account of his living to be 150 years old! This Ralph married twice: first to Mary, daughter of Lord D'acre and secondly to Maud, sister of Robert Grosvenor of Little Budworth. During the early part of the fourteenth century Ralph Vernon purchased much of the old baronial estate and other lands which extended beyond the

¹ Traditional Cheshire acres need to be multiplied by a factor of 2.1 to arrive at modern statutory acres. My working out of the areas concerned is based on a Domesday 'carucate' (ploughland) of about sixty acres.

parish of Davenham. Vernon's lordship included the homage of the following for their respective holdings: Robert Touchet for Tattenhall, Hugh Roer for Stanthorne, William Audlem for Audlem, William Moldsworth for Great Moldsworth, Adam Moldsworth for Little Moldsworth, John Merbury for Marbury, William Alsager for Alsager, Adam Bostock for Bostock, John Newhall for Newhall and a Hugh Merbury and Richard Henhull for some unstated lands. The only exception being a sixth part of Leftwich and ninth part of Shipbrook which Agnes Lostock held for life, but this then eventually passed to Ralph's son Richard.

Old Ralph had a number of children from both marriages some of whom died without issue so that final descent of the Shipbrook estates became complicated. He did have a son named Thomas who married a member of the Lostock family and thus regained some of the estates lost earlier. But, eventually, Shipbrook passed to old Ralph's great-great-grandson Sir Ralph Vernon who was living during the middle of the fourteenth century and thence to James Vernon of Lostock and Haslington who then granted all the Barony of Shipbrook estates to Sir John Savage of Clifton in the mid fifteenth century whose descendants held the barony through to the eighteenth century. More about the Vernon family will be revealed later.

The ancient circuitual boundary of the wasteland known as Rudheath passed through and around this township. The earliest known description is dated 1346 and the part concerning Shipbrook starts at *Shipbrokesmos* and continues north: '.....and following that moss thus dividing Ruddeheth as far as Polsych to Shipbrokeslone, and following that brook as far as to a certain old ditch stretching as far as the house of Walter Page in Shipbroke, and from there beyond the highway as far as the house of Reginald Legg, where a certain old cottage is raised in Ruddeheth,....'.² Whilst this sounds strange one can follow this on a modern O.S map. Starting in the south the boundary followed along Shipbrook Moss and area of waste land along the edge of Rudheath as far as a stream running from a pool, probably one of the pools behind Manor Farm and Brook Farm alongside the railway line, then onto Shipbrook Lane which is now Davenham Road and then on to what is now Park Farm.

George Ormerod's description of the township in his mammoth volumes of the *History of Cheshire*, first published in the 19th century, is particularly complimentary 'situated on the right bank of the Weever (obviously he means the Dane), opposite to the township of Davenham. The view from the high ground is extremely pleasing, commanding a rich vale watered by the stream above mentioned, to which the lands on each side slope in rapid declivities, verdant and well timbered.'

There was a water mill in Shipbrook which is referred to as early as 1362 and in the early seventeenth century there is a reference to *Millne Lane Bridge*.³ Under Brereton's stewardship and the work of his bailiff, Richard Leftwich, the mill and the dam were rebuilt in 1532/3 allowing the mill to become a viable asset after several years of non production: the mill was then held by Arthur Holford of Davenham at an annual rent of £3 6s 8d.⁴ Where it stood is something of a mystery now, though references to Mill Field in Shipbrook and a 'Mill Hill' in neighbouring Shurlach might suggest it was close to the border of the two townships. However, it is also possible that it was further south where a stream running off Rudheath, called the Puddinglake Brook, joins the River Dane. Hereabouts on the other side of the river in Davenham is Bridge End Farm but no bridge. However, during the 17th century there were two bridges in the township: one a horse bridge called 'Longe Bridge' (the present bridge) and another a horse bridge called 'Millne Lane Bridge'. It seems therefore that there were two crossing points of which one was associated with a mill.

² Vale Royal Ledger Book

³ Black Prince's Register, vol. iii; Dodgson, vol III, p. 209

⁴ Ives, E.w., (ed)., *Letters and Accounts of William Brereton of Malpas*, Record Soc. vol. 116 (1976), p. 150

Little else is known of the township. However we do have some information as to who lived here during the Tudor period. The Muster Roll of 1548 lists the following men: Thomas Colly, William Rudelhurst, Randall Halmark, and George Bulkley, as being able to serve in the army but lacking equipment.⁵ If these men are the adult male representatives of each household then it suggests that there were only four and a population of about two dozen people. Perhaps Bulkley was the miller in succession to Arthur who was there in the 1530s, as to the other names they do not seem to survive in the parish. During the 1580s according to the parish registers, we have families named Anderton, Blease, Bradford, Hilton, Holland, Jackson, Plumley, Simcock, Vernon and Walley of *Shebrockhil*. Some of these it seems may have lived in neighbouring Whatcroft and some may not have produced children here so that the estimated population for the late sixteenth century is still low, perhaps no more than fifty.

In 1664 there were twenty-three domestic buildings here suggesting a population of about one hundred. Of these the majority of homes were single-hearthed, two roomed cottages. Three properties had two hearths or fire-places and were occupied by Richard Bradford, John Wrench and Robert Williamson, another, occupied by Richard Chantler had three hearths and was probably Shipbrook Hall. Four years earlier twenty-five people paid tax on income from property here and a further nineteen paid tax on their income: including five named fives in all forty-nine people are listed. The wealthiest person seems to be Thomas Walley, gentleman, closely followed by Richard Bradford, Thomas Barrow, Richard Chantler and John Wrench all of whom were described as husbandmen.

The township was described in 1796 when the Barony of Shipbrook was sold by auction on behalf of the trustees of Edward Tomkinson of Bostock Hall. There were four estates sold as separate lots totalling 367 acres. The first was Shipbrook Hill Farm which contained almost 135 acres and was occupied by Joseph Carter on a lease due to expire in the spring of 1807. The second lot was Shipbrook Hall Farm occupied by Joseph Bancroft, a tenant at will, and comprising of 110 acres. The third was an unnamed estate of 116 acres occupied by John Cookson with a lease due to expire in the spring of 1803. The last lot consisted of a house and nearly five acres held at will by Samuel Stanway and two cottages with gardens and a croft.

In 1824 a schedule of property in Shipbrook shows that almost all the land here was owned by John Hosken Harper of Davenham Hall. The exceptions to this were an area of twenty-six statute acres near to the Shurlach border owned by Thomas Caldwell and William Stubbs and tenanted by John Prescott, and a small estate of thirteen acres owned by a Mrs Topping. Harper's lands comprised of four large farms, each in excess of 100 statute acres occupied by John Bancroft, Peter Bancroft, senior, Joseph Bancroft and John Basford; a smallholding occupied by Josiah Stanway; another occupied by Richard Chantler, junior; four houses rented by Elias Astles, William Pimlot, Richard Dudlow, and Mathew Burgess; and two cottages occupied by Ralph Burgess and Richard Goulden.

The 1824 list of land owners and occupiers indicated that there were 518 acres in Shipbrook whereas the tithe return of 1837 lists 477 acres: a late 19th century map says that the township contained 564 acres.

By 1841 there were only 14 houses occupied by the families of Carter, Baguley, Holland, Bancroft, Mossely, Warburton, Shaw, Cotterel, Birtles, Broady, Lownds, Astles, and Piggott. A total population of only 89.

⁵ Public Record Office: SP 10/3

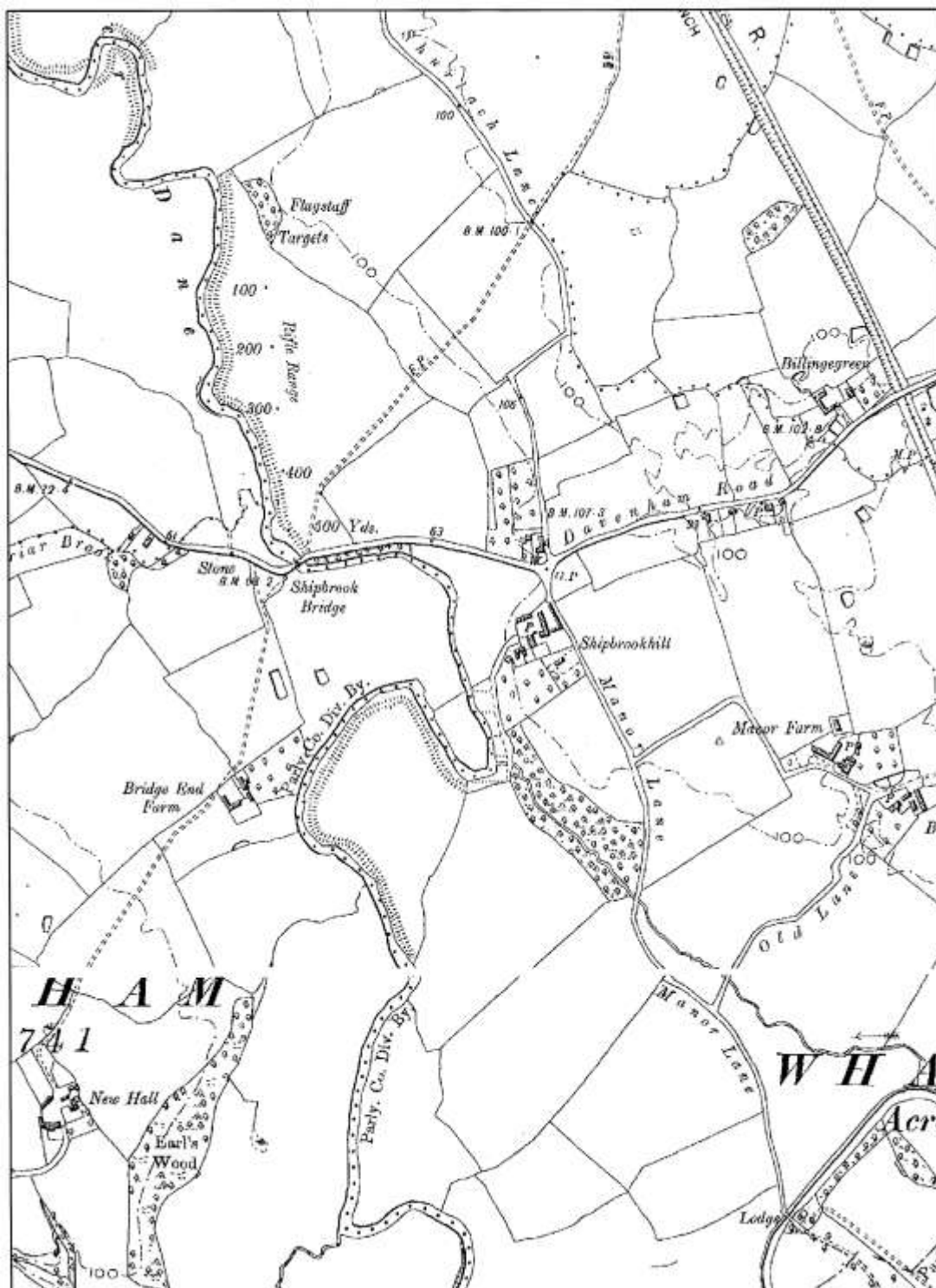


Figure Two: The central part of Shipbrook, c. 1900

To be continued