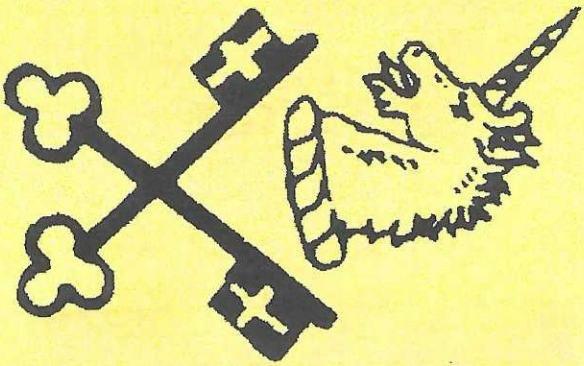


**THE HISTORY OF
PRESTBURY**
by
A.J.S. Cartmell



THE HISTORY OF PRESTBURY

A.J.S. Cartmell, M.A.

Produced for St. Peter's Church Prestbury

Editorial

There are several excellent publications about Prestbury. They include "A Sketch of the Parish of Prestbury" by George Yarnold Osborne, 1840, reissued 1998; "Prestbury and its Ancient Church" by John Earles, 1928 and later editions; "Prestbury", produced by Prestbury Women's Institute, 1963; "Prestbury Village Walk", compiled by Mrs M Sheard, 1989 and "Walks around Prestbury", Prestbury Amenity Society: "Prestbury", township pack no: 11, Cheshire Libraries, Arts and Archives, 1991; "Prestbury, Cheshire", Prestbury Village Council, 1992 and a booklet about the Millennium Tapestry in the Prestbury Village Hall, 2000. A book about the church by Gordon Hindle is in preparation. The village also finds a place in publications with a wider remit.

On the evening of 11 October 1977 Tony Cartmell delivered a lecture to the Prestbury Amenity Society covering the history of the village since earliest times. His work was printed in the parish magazine in several instalments, beginning in the summer of 1982. However the magazine ceased publication after the winter of 1983/4 so that the last instalment never appeared. The full text of the lecture is now presented according to Tony Cartmell's original typescript with a minimum of editorial alterations. Headings have been introduced. Tony Cartmell's footnotes, together with other additions dealing with new historical evidence and changes in Prestbury during the last quarter of a century, have been inserted inside square brackets. Pictures, some unpublished, others from earlier church publications, have been supplied by David Belfield and Barbara Hartley.

Tony Cartmell had been co-operating with the Editor in preparing this version of his lecture. He died before he could see the final publication. This little book is dedicated to his memory.

John Swallow, May 2000

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TONY CARTMELL: MAY 1918-APRIL 2000

Introduction

In his inaugural lecture at Cambridge 50 years ago, Prof. G M Trevelyan said "On the shore where Time casts up its stray wreckage, we gather corks and broken planks, whence much indeed may be argued and more guessed; but what the great ship was that has gone down into the deep, that we shall never see." What he said then of his ship - and of course he was referring to the ship of the English state - is as true today of our village. All I can do tonight is to tell you about some of the corks and broken planks which have been picked up on our Prestburghal shore and to try where I can, and where it seems reasonable, to fit those corks and planks into a conjectured structure and story.

As yet the finished article must be very sketchy, for a large part of the research which is essential to build up the progressive background of any parish has yet to be begun. The nineteenth century historians worked very hard; but for some reason which I have never understood, they took scant interest in anything other than manorial history. So they produced for us long genealogies of the lords of the manor and quite a lot of hotch potch information of the churches those lords supported; but they tell us nothing of the people, of how they lived, of the successive events which affected their community. These are the things which most interest us today, and as I said earlier there is much work yet to be done to establish how much of that part of the story can be filled in.

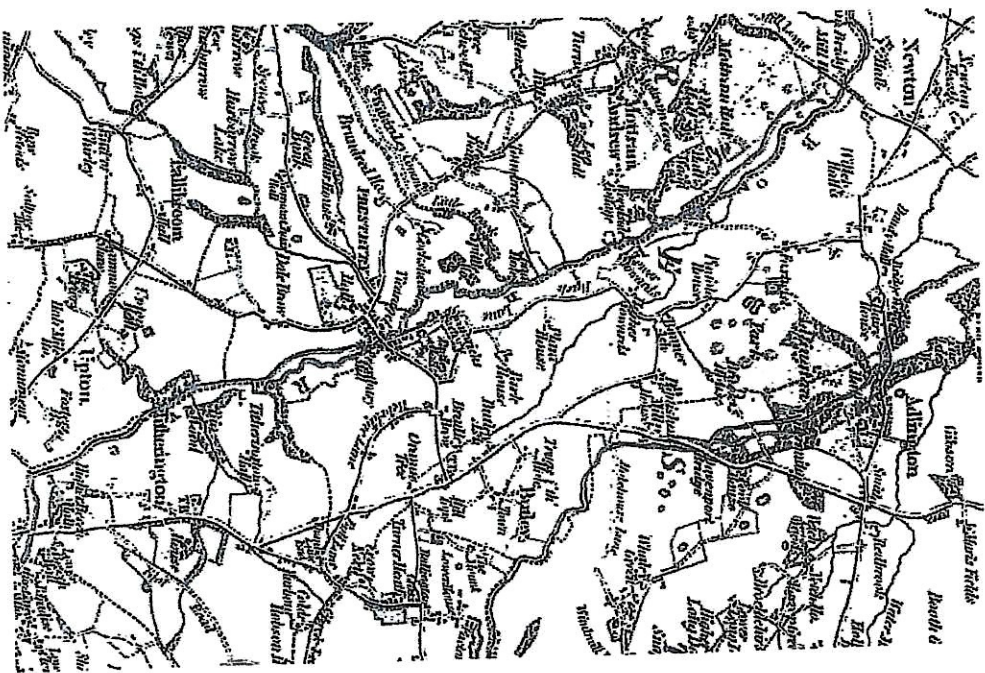
A Wild and Barren Countryside

So, I have made my excuses and must get down to the work. And the first thing to do, however nebulously, is to set the primal background of the story. It is fairly clear that man had little regard for this spot in the ages before Christ. You may be a little surprised to have to understand that the eastern part of Cheshire was the very last part of England, excepting Lancashire and Cumbria, to be tamed by man. It was a very wild countryside, and barren too. Its opening up and subjection to human management was a long and gradual process spread over many centuries; and in this immediate area it was not fully completed until the end of the eighteenth century. The Welsh marches of Cheshire and the Wirral were centuries ahead of the Macclesfield Hundred in this respect, and therefore in the increase of population. Perhaps that is why they still tried to come it over us poor east Cestrians today.

The overall picture of this area which you must have in your mind's eye as a background of all its history until at least the end of the medieval era - shall we say until the sixteenth century - is this. From just this side of Macclesfield right through to Wilmslow the Bollin flows through a broad flat valley, and to this day the river rises and falls very fiercely and suddenly in response to rainfall. So the whole of this valley bottom was marshland, rushes, innumerable small channels of the river, and so innumerable little islands. On an early map, between the village and the sewage works, I was still able to count at least twelve separate channels of the river, particularly in the playing field area. No wonder that that area was

known as The Eyes, meaning the islands and watermeadows; and as recently as in the 1848 Tithable Assessment there are amongst the field names the Far-, Further-, Great-, Higher-, Little-, Long-, Lower-, Middle-, Nearer-, Turney-, Eyes. And that in about 1268 some gentleman found it necessary to explain, in Latin of course, that he was referring to "all those islands beside the Bollin facing Mottram."

But I diverge. In 1000 BC, round about which time the Celts arrived in this country and superseded the most ancient Britons, and right up to less than 400 years ago, the valley bottom constituted a very difficult barrier to man - unfit for wheel or keel or heel. And wherever on each side of the valley the ground began to rise high enough to drain naturally, the tree forest began - lightly to begin with, say first and second stage forest growth, and then heavy dark hardwood forest, home of animals particularly of the deer and pig families. That there was second stage forest growth along the Heybridge Lane ridge 1000 years ago comes down to us in the name, which has nothing to do with hay or bridges, but is just a corrupted form of "high birches". Then as the ground got higher, particularly on the east side of the valley, the trees gave way to rank grass and outcrop rock - still known as forest - up the mountainside.



Map showing the River Bollin, Heybridge (Hebidge) Lane, Cold Harbour (Cold Arbour) and other places referred to in the text. A copy of the map (Printed Maps, Bryant 1831) is deposited with Cheshire and Chester Archives in the Cheshire Record Office. Reproduced here with the permission of Cheshire County Council.

The Celts and the Romans

That was the picture when the Celts arrived. But they were a people who preferred to live on draughty hill tops, where they could see the enemy approaching. They were certainly on Kerridge hill at one time, and just conceivably in Mottram; but they would keep away from the valley bottom.

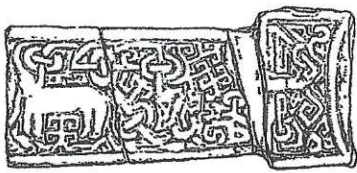
After the Celts the Romans, or rather as well as the Celts the Romans, because by and large they learned to live together. But again there was nothing on this spot to interest the Romans much, and they made no attempt to open it up, though they did pass this way. They were established in the salt wiches, and ran the industry from a headquarters at Kinderton by Middlewich. They also opened up the mineral springs at Buxton, which thus became a leave centre and resort for the Roman army. And they certainly made a road between the two, the exact line of which has yet to be established with any precision. Some say that they came through our village; but I think it more likely that they just missed it. Certain it is that they were seen in Birtles and in Rainowlow. And on a reasonably straight line between the two there is one very significant name still there today - Cold Arbour Farm which lies between Tytherington Lane and the now disused railway. Wherever you see the name Cold Harbour, or often now with the H dropped, Cold Arbour, it is reasonable to assume that the Romans knew it. Though nowadays used principally as a shelter for ships, the basic meaning of Harbour is "army shelter" or even rudimentary fort. The name, nearly always epithetised Cold, was frequently

applied to overnight staging camps along the Roman march routes. Those of us who experienced staging camps during the last war can no doubt have some fellow feeling for the Romans! So here I imagine they spent their last night before the final march up the hill to Buxton. If this is so, then I think they are most likely to have crossed the Bollin somewhere near Beech Hall, where the valley is steepest and narrowest and there was therefore least width of marsh, rather than at modern Prestbury.

The Saxons

Within a century of the Romans abandoning the country, the Angles and Saxons began to arrive, and from this area the Celts moved over into the fastnesses of Wales where they have remained ever since. Now Angles and Saxons were lowland dwellers, and so it came about that the traceable history of Prestbury was to begin. In the period from the beginning of the sixth century up to the Norman Conquest I am not aware of any documentary evidence of the existence of this village. Nevertheless we have been left three legacies by the Angles and Saxons which, viewed against the background of the times, help us to reconstruct our earliest form. These are the Saxon cemetery, the Saxon Cross, and the name Prestbury.

The cemetery was found in 1808 in an area described as Butley Sands, which is roughly the fields between Prestbury Lane and the Butley Ash. They were searching for stone or gravel with which to make the main Poynton to Macclesfield road. About three feet below the surface was found a roughly circular layout of tumuli, barrows and cairns. There were also pottery cremation urns, and signs of fire and maybe of sacrifice. The sad thing is that all we have left now is a fragment or two of urn, and a journalist's account in the Manchester Volunteer, a newspaper of the day. They smashed the best urn they found by careless handling, and finally broke up all the stones for use in road foundations. No trained archaeologist got near in time to see any of this, but from the urn fragment and the account, the cemetery was certainly Saxon, and probably dated from the pagan era.



In 1840/41, in the course of repair work, a part of the chancel wall in the church was dismantled. And embedded in it was found the carved stone which now stands in a glass case in the churchyard. Experts have identified the carving as seventh century Saxon. [Recent work requires the date to be reassessed and the carving now seems likely to date from the tenth or eleventh century rather than the seventh, as previously supposed. It can also be said with reasonable certainty that the fragments are part of a cross of an unusual Saxon design, of late Saxon, probably Anglo-Scandinavian origin.]

Lastly the word Prestbury is Anglo-Saxon, and there is no reason not to believe that it is descriptive of the spot in the Saxon era. The word will have been *Preðeta burh*, and in regard to its meaning I would like to digress just for a moment. It is usually translated "priests' town", but today that is most misleading. Words change their meanings over the centuries, and this is particularly true of "borough" and "town". Both originally - say in the sixth century - meant an enclosure, but with the important distinction that the burh was fortified whereas the tun was not. Keeping that distinction right up to the middle-ages, both words otherwise progressed gradually to mean a building within an enclosure, then several buildings - enough to hold the family and retainers and all the farm animals and so on - then a village, then a town or borough as we know them today. In passing, tun in many places had another specialised meaning as an

outlying farmstead belonging to a manor; thus Butley Town is the outlying farmstead belonging to the Manor of Butley.

From our three facts we can then deduce that by the early seventh century there was a Saxon settlement in Butley before the days of any substantial conversion to Christianity, as shown by the cemetery. Later there was a Christian settlement, as shown by the cross. And this settlement took the form of a building or buildings with some specific form of fortification.

This all fits well with the events in Mercia at that time. In the first half of the seventh century Mercia was created and ruled by a strong and notable pagan king called Penda, although what you might call Celtic Christian excursions into Mercia from Northumbria had already taken place. Then in 653 Penda's son Peada was converted to Christianity, closely followed by his other sons, Wulfhere and Aethelred. Thereafter a stable Christian state was established with the assistance of a mission of four priests from Aidan's monastery at Lindisfarne. Diuna, an Irishman, was appointed first Bishop of the Mercians - a title without a seat - and in 669 another of the four, the Anglian Ceadda - known to us today as St. Chad - was appointed Bishop of the Mercians and first Bishop of Lichfield. From that year until in 1541 the present diocese of Chester was established, the Prestbury area was within the Diocese of Lichfield - or as it became later the Diocese of Lichfield and Coventry.

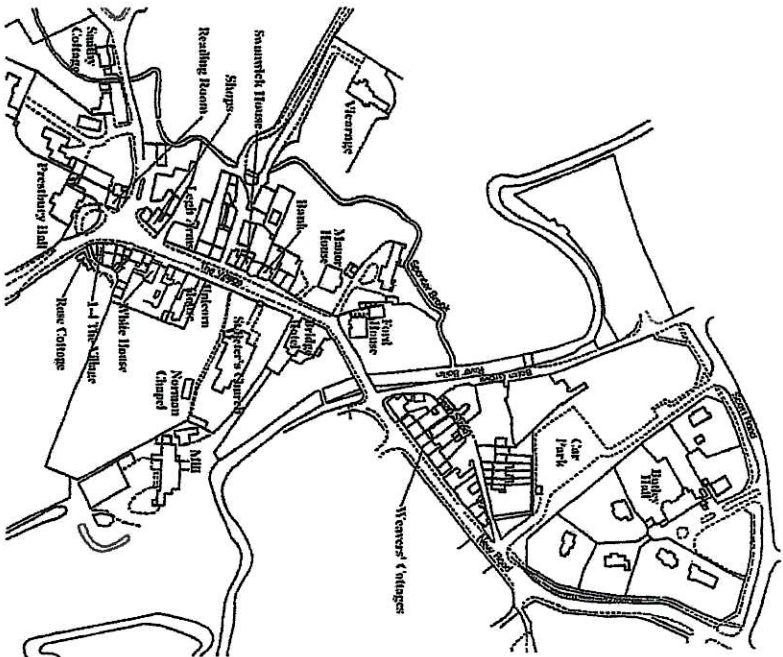
We can be certain that from 669 onwards Christian centres were established all over Cheshire, and there

is no reason to doubt that ours was one of them. Wulfhere and Aethelred were particularly active, and the latter appointed his niece Werburgh as overseer of nunneries, though she seems to have been keener on founding monasteries. It is useful to note at this point that Werburgh died in 704 and was dubbed Saint with almost indecent haste. Her body and relics were laid to rest in her favourite monastic foundation at Hanbury Staffordshire; but when in the ninth century Hanbury was strongly threatened by the Danes her relics were removed in 874 to the comparative safety of the Church of St Peter and St Paul in Chester, which stood within the old Roman fortress walls. It became St Werburgh's Abbey and today Chester Cathedral.

Prestbury Village

But back to Prestbury. A study of Saxon crosses leads one to believe that they were set up to mark the sites of monks' cells, and this was probably the case with ours. We cannot be sure that it was on the present churchyard site, but it is a very reasonable supposition, as it would then have attractive attributes. A dry knoll, close to the river, which would not be too heavily wooded - maybe birches as at Heybridge Lane. About the only point between Macclesfield and Wilmslow where the rising, and therefore dry ground is quite close to the river on both sides, thus making a crossing easier but retaining the defensive property of the river marsh. On the west side also the Spencer Brook as a natural defence - it then became known as the Presteslache, the priests' boggy stream, and remained so called until at least the Middle Ages. So they would only need some form of earthwork on the southern side to form their burh. From later indications I believe the most likely site of their cell is roughly where the Manor House now stands; but more research is needed in that direction.

The land they chose would also have the attribute of being close to the Butley settlement, and may be reasonably close to a settlement which may have been of Celtic origin at Mottram. In fact I wonder whether at that time Butta was still alive - the Saxon who formed a settlement in a leah or woodland clearing now called Butta's legh or Butley? Probably one or both of the lords of Butley and Mottram felt some possessive link with the land chosen by the priests and probably both considered that they had made a concession to the Church.



Present day Prestbury village. Based with permission on the map in "Prestbury Village Walk" published by the Prestbury Amenity Society.

So the pattern of religious life became established on this site, and the priests, or monks began their life of walking out from their burch along paths through the forest, radiating in all directions. By degrees they would find other little settlements and establish a sphere of influence. The enormous parish of Prestbury was certainly established well before the end of the

Saxon era, and the most likely reason for its size was the extremely wild and barren countryside, and the consequent sparseness of a sufficient population to be organised as a priest's shire or share, that is a parish.

The indications are that there were two Saxon churches on the site, the first built around the beginning of the tenth century. It would be timber framed, with wattle and daub walls, and probably a reed thatch roof - very susceptible to fire danger. Perhaps in 980 the marauding Danes burnt that one down when they streamed down through Longdendale - Cheshire's Achilles heel - and for a time overran much of the county. Anyway, the second church did quite well, for it evidently lasted until the Norman Chapel was built in the twelfth century.

By the eleventh century, a fair amount of information becomes available to us about the Saxon administrative unit - the Hundred of Hamestan - a name which tells its own tale again, meaning as it does the "stony settlement". In the Norman era it was renamed the Macclesfield Hundred. This hundred was about 20 miles from north to south, and averaged 10 miles wide; and a good half of it was within the forest later to become known as the Forest of Macclesfield. But the hundred substantially comprised only two parishes, Prestbury (whatever it was then known as) and Stockport, neither of which on the face of the record was included in the Domesday Book. Prestbury itself was just on the western edge of the forest which was bounded by the Etherow river on the north, the Goyt on the East, the Dane on the south, and a line through Poynton, Mottam, Prestbury, Gawsworth and Rode on the west. Even in Saxon

times there were special forest laws - usually arbitrary and harsh on the local inhabitant in order to facilitate the lord's hunting. This would be another reason for the sparsity of the population and the size of the parish, at least half of which was within the forest.

The parish had probably reached its greatest extent by the time of the Norman Conquest, and of its 35 townships Bosley, Wincle, Sutton, Wildboardclough, Macclesfield Forest, Rainow, Macclesfield, Upton, Tytherington, Hursfield, Bollington, Pott Shrigley, Kettleshulme, Lyme Handley and Taxal were within the forest; Prestbury, Butley, Newton, Adlington, Mottram, Fallibroome, Woodford, Poynton, Worth, Henbury, Birtles, Alderley, Gawsorth, North Rodé, Marton, Siddington, Capesithorne, Chelford, Old Withington and Lower Withington were either overlapping the edge or right outside the forest.

The Normans

And so we come to 1066 and the advent of William of Normandy, whose conquest of England has for ever after so radically affected rural settlement and land ownership in this country. To begin with he was much occupied in subduing southern England, or else back in Normandy dealing with those who tried to nibble at his dukedom in his absence. So, foolishly, the inhabitants of Yorkshire and Cheshire began to feel a little safer again and to shout defiance from what they thought was a safe distance. But William made a note of it, and as soon as he had troops available - already including quite a few southern Saxons - he turned his attention to Yorkshire in his inimitable way, destroying everything in sight, and then handing over the land to his followers in which to establish their feudal baronies

It was Cheshire's turn in 1070, and for the second time within a century the invading armies streamed down Longdendale from Yorkshire, and they certainly passed this way. Soon after 1066 William had already removed Hereford from Mercia and given it to William fitzOsborn his cousin, a strong hand to deal with the Celts of Wales. Now Earl Edwin of Mercia lost the rest. William appointed Gherbod as Earl of Chester in 1070 and Roger de Montgomery, Earl of Shrewsbury in 1071. However, Gherbod did not find the recalcitrant men of Cheshire a very attractive proposition, and he resigned and returned to Normandy within the year. So William sent to Normandy for his nephew Hugh of Avranches and established him as Earl, not just of Chester but of the County Palatine of Chester; in other words he made a

petty king of a petty kingdom within the kingdom of England. He took over all Earl Edwin's estates, which brought him immediately into personal possession of the manors of Macclesfield and Adlington; but he also took possession of Gawsworth, Chelford, Henbury, Capesthorpe, Rode and a number of other townships in Prestbury parish.

But at the time of the Domesday survey in 1086 there were two notable exceptions. Mottram was still held by one Gamel who had held it under the Saxon regime. And Butley was either still held by Wulfic or possibly in the course of being handed over to Hugh's son Robert - there are two very similar entries appearing to be Butley in the Domesday Book, and their exact significance is still in doubt. Gamel and Wulfic must surely have been the Quislings of their day.

Domesday Book

Of the 35 townships of Prestbury, the vast majority of which will have been manorial holdings at the time of the conquest, only thirteen appear in the Domesday Book. So one could as well ask of any of them that question which has so often been asked of Prestbury - why was it omitted? It may well be that some were so devastated in 1070 that they had been entirely deserted for the time being, and so could not be counted. But I do not think that that would be very generally true. After all, those that are recorded had been hit pretty hard. Macclesfield and Adlington had each been reduced from a value of £8 p.a. in Edward the Confessor's reign to £1 p.a. in 1086. And only in these two cases is there any recorded population, between 10 and 20 at Adlington and between 1 and 10 at Macclesfield. In fact the total recorded population of Macclesfield Hundred is only 60, compared with 405 in Wirral Hundred, 109 in Bucklow Hundred and 149 in Northwich Hundred. And again, Chelford, Henbury, Capesthorpe and Marton are all recorded in the Domesday Book but stated to have been waste both before and after the conquest.

One must I think look for some other explanation, and the most likely is that Prestbury did not merit an entry in itself. Churches generally are not mentioned in the Domesday Book - only nine in the whole of Cheshire, and then only because the church owned the manor, or the priest operated a plough team, or some such direct interest in the land. But there is no evidence that Prestbury itself, although the centre of a large and powerful parish, was yet more than a church and a monkish cell within some fortification - not a manor,

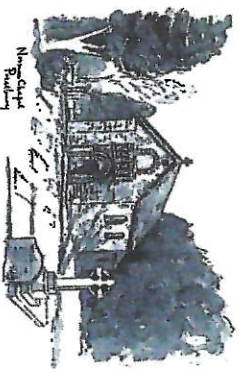
not even a hamlet. If it is not too ridiculous a comparison to make, rather as the Vatican is within the Roman State, Prestbury was within the manor of Butley or Mottram. Certainly in the thirteenth century when the Pigotts had become lords of the manor of Butley they still thought they had some kind of interest on the Prestbury side of the river.

The Church

I believe then that the Saxon church did not get destroyed, and that, although there was considerable devastation in the district, towards the end of the eleventh century the new Norman lords of the manor were getting going again. But we hear little of the church until it springs into the news three-quarters of the way through the twelfth century.

Meanwhile it had no doubt continued as the centre of a large and influential parish, gathering possessions round it. Yet when the fifth Norman Earl, Hugh of Gyffylliog, presented the church and all its possessions etc to the Abbey of St Werburgh somewhere between 1175 and 1181, he still does not refer to it as a manor. This gift resulted from Earl Hugh's misdeeds. He had succeeded as a boy in 1153 and behaved reasonably until 1170 when he was in his twenties and looking for power. This was the year that Henry II's authority was weakened by the murder of Thomas a Becket; so Earl Hugh went off back to Avranches and Bayeux and began helping the King of France to harry Henry II's dukedom of Normandy. Henry finally caught him and imprisoned him; but when it was all over, towards the end of 1174, he seems to have pardoned Hugh and allowed him back into some of his Chester earldom. Hugh then repented, and particularly wished to ensure that he would be buried in the abbey church of St Werburgh. So as well as a rent of 12d p.a., he made a present of what will henceforth be called the "church and manor" of Prestbury to the Abbot. Out of such a case of personal deviousness can the later history of a parish stem.

It seems likely that immediately after the gift was made, the Abbey got down to work to replace the



timber-framed Saxon church by a building of stone, the money coming from several of the now important Norman families in the great parish whose names have

since become familiar to us all, Davenport, Worth and so on. One wonders rather whether it was the cash of piety or conscience, since at that time the native Saxons were still a downtrodden, often enslaved element of the manorial communities. The names we use today for our meats tell their own tale of this age. The Saxon herdsmen used Saxon words for their living animals, sheep, cows and pigs; but only the Normans could afford to eat the meat, and they called them mutton, beef and pork.

Anyway the Norman chapel was built in its original form, with a rounded apse at the east end. It was probably started no later than, and probably earlier than, the date of Earl Hugh's gift; but maybe the final touches, including the magnificent corbelling above the west door, were not completed until the 1190's. Thus one may accept the ingenious explanation of the figures in the corbelling which Dr. Renaud devised, in which he identifies one figure as King Richard I, so bringing the date within the years 1190 to 1199. It appears, however, that the chapel was soon found too small for so large a parish, and the lords of the parish had to put their hands in their pockets again in order

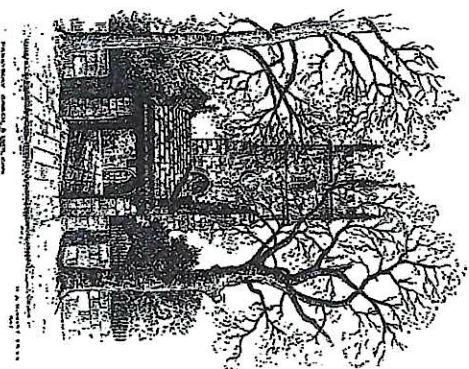


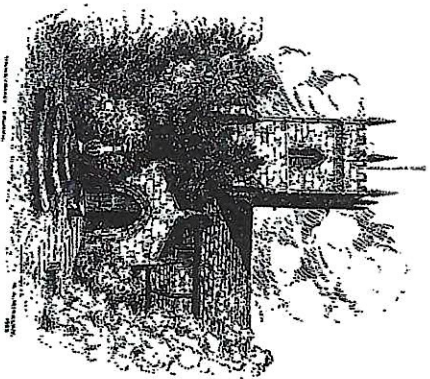
to keep in with the powerful abbot. Now it is most usual to find in the oldest churches round the country that the next stage is to build on a larger nave and to convert the original church into the chancel of the larger one. In our case there must have been money and power, and a desire to impress, because they left the chapel as it was, and between 1220 and 1230 built our present chancel and nave as a single operation.

A church in use is never a static building. Successive generations of vicars, wardens, church councils and patrons all make their own changes, sometimes of physical need, sometimes of taste, and this has been true of ours. Since 1220 every century has seen its changes. In about 1310 the South Aisle, and probably a north aisle of character similar to it, were built. In about 1350 the Tytherington Chantry - now the St. Nicholas chapel at

the east end of the South Aisle - was formed. In about 1480 the tower and west and south porches and the first part of the Lych gate were built. By 1548 three bells had been brought into use, increased to four in 1588, six by 1692, and finally

eight about a century later. Between 1563 and 1572 the first tower clock was installed. By the sixteenth century the churchyard was dominated by a mortuary





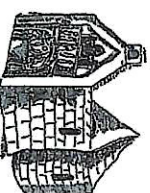
cross; we do not know when it was erected but it was certainly repaired in 1577. Not long afterwards it fell out of fashion and was removed, and in 1631 the sundial was erected on the old base of the cross. In 1637 an organ was installed in a

loft above the chancel screen. In 1674 the whole church was re-roofed. The cost is recorded in the churchwarden's accounts for 1676 as £62.10.0. [In the early nineteen eighties the church was again re-roofed, for a sum in excess of a hundred thousand pounds.] Pews were first put in in 1707, a motley collection of box pews at that time. Evidently at this time there were complaints about the coldness of the nave for parish meetings. So in 1719 a wooden ceiling was inserted resting on the corbels of the main roof trusses - on the north wall of the nave its line can be seen today. At the same time the itinerant painter who painted the pictures of the apostles and the tribes of Israel in the spandrels between the nave arches also painted the whole of this ceiling. He painted imitation panels and medallions with representations of the evangelists. He was paid £32 for the lot.

In 1740 a very much larger and apparently ugly north aisle was built at the expense of the then Charles Legh

"of eccentric memory, in wretched taste" (Osborne). His memorial is in the Legh chapel at its east end. In 1880 came a major restoration in which the north aisle was changed again to its present form, the organ was moved to its present position, the gallery with outside stairs at the west end was removed, and the present ringing chamber formed. Then within the last 10 years we have replaced the organ and re-cast the bells. [Since the lecture was delivered, it has become necessary to give the organ a thorough overhaul. As this would be very expensive, it is thought that it might be better to take the opportunity to install an electronic organ instead. It is hoped to take action during 2000.] And so endlessly our church changes and will continue to change.

The Norman chapel, however, had obviously been allowed to decay from the moment that the church was built, and in 1592 a drawing by Randle Holmes shows a roofless ruin. It was not until 1747 that the chapel was substantially rebuilt in its present form by the Merediths of Henbury, who were then permitted to use it as a mortuary chapel. It was later brought into use as a Sunday school and so continued until a century ago. There followed a further period of creeping decay; but one of the first acts of our present vicar [Harold William Rogers, vicar 1950-1980] was to instigate its restoration again in 1953. And of course, in this present year [1977], in memory of Mrs Rogers, [who died in 1976] some lovely little painted windows have been installed.



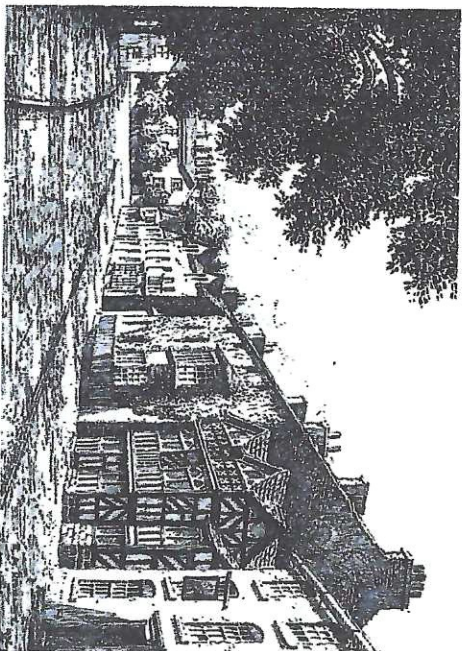
So much for a brief sketch of what has happened to the church buildings. Their organisation and management are a different story. Prior to the fifteenth century there is nothing to indicate that the Abbey of St. Werburgh did not administer the parish through its officials, gathering in the tithes and rents, making provision for the resident priests from them, and passing the rest on to the abbey. In this work the bailiffs of the Abbeys were as tough as they come and had little mercy for their indigent debtors. Abbeys did not always manage their properties themselves, often letting it to others, known as fee farmers, at a fixed rent, the fee farmer then making what he could out of the tithes and rents. It is in this way that we first come across Legh of Adlington involved in Prestbury. In 1448 for £100 p.a. the Church and tithes were leased to Robert Legh jointly with Nicholas Briddon who was then the vicar. This lease was renewed in 1461 and again in 1492, both times in the name of Legh alone, and then in 1525 to George Legh and the then vicar Ralph Green.

The Manor

We have so far been dealing, of course, with a Catholic church; but the dissolution of the monasteries closely followed the last lease. And in 1541 the church, and its advowson and manor were granted by letters patent of Henry VIII to the newly created Dean and Chapter of Chester. There follows a period of ebb and flow as Protestantism was virtually outlawed again by Queen Mary and finally reinstated by Queen Elizabeth.

Meanwhile the less scrupulous had been taking their opportunities. In 1547 Sir Richard Cotton obtained the manor and advowson from the Diocese, it is said by extortion. He let it to the Grosvenor brothers in 1555, and in 1559 they even presented the new vicar. But in 1579 Queen Elizabeth declared the Cotton title illegal and then on 19th December, 1579 by Letters Patent granted all the lands etc. previously held by the Abbey to a consortium of Sir George Calvely, George Cotton, Hugh Cholmondeley, Thomas Legh, Henry Mainwaring, John Nuthall, and Richard Hurleston and their heirs for ever at fixed annual rents. By a Deed of a few days later she reserved £113.11.4 p.a. of those rents to the Chester Diocese. In the following year, on 6th August 1580, for reasons unexplained, all the others involved gave up all their rights except for certain tithes within Chelford and Asple, to Thomas Legh. And from then until this day Legh of Adlington has been the holder of the manor and advowson of Prestbury, and therefore the Lay Rector and Patron of the Parish.

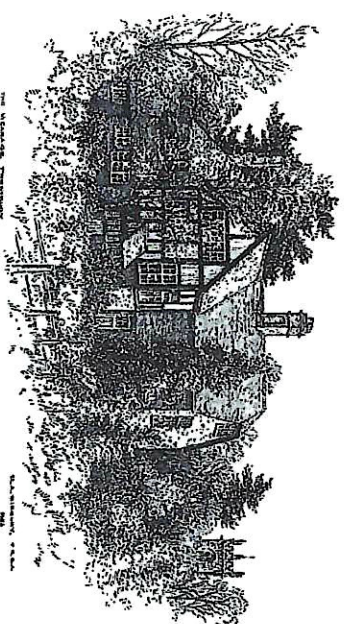
It can be seen, therefore, how it comes about that Prestbury never has had a manor house nor a family of lords of the manor. Some family in the early Middle Ages evidently did adopt the name Prestbury, but they do not seem to have had any continuity nor any connection with the village. We just find odd instances such as a mention of a Henry de Prestbury who was granted fee of certain lands in 1340, and of William de Prestbury who was a sheriff in 1396.



I know of no record of any house large enough to have been a manor house in Prestbury township before the National Westminster Bank building; but this is a Tudor building and even the date of about 1480 to 1490 which is usually attributed to it seems on the early side. I would have thought it more likely that it was built for the vicar at the time of the Reformation, 50 years later, when a new Protestant era with vicars who were not brothers of St. Werburgh's began. The oldest part of Prestbury Hall goes back to about 1790 and I know of no earlier history of the

site. [However, Mr Victor Eva, who at one time lived in Prestbury Hall, calls it a manor house and records that it was built in the early years of the fifteenth century, in the perpendicular style which was in vogue from 1399-1485. Richard Sutton was born there in about 1460. He was a lawyer and became a privy councillor in 1498. He was knighted in 1522. Prestbury Hall became a dower house to Adlington Hall. It was restored in 1790.] Until modernised in the 1860's the hall is described as "quaint, picturesque and resembling a French chateau." (Osborne). For a number of years it was lived in by Dr James Hope, a very well known heart specialist of the early nineteenth century and Professor of Medicine at University College, London. [The house was used as a maternity hospital during the 1939/45 war.]

The house now called the Manor House was built on glebe land in 1708. This house was normally used as the vicarage until the present one was built by Canon Broughton in about 1890.



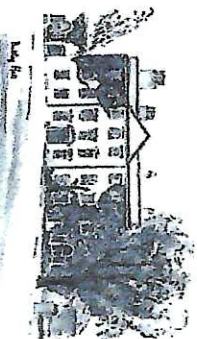
The present vicarage

Butley

On the Butley side of the river there is continuous manorial history from Saxon times, if not from Butta himself, and it seems likely that the manor house was always in the area where Butley Hall stands today. Whatever the right interpretation of the duplicate entries for Butley in the Domesday Book, it is evident that the Saxon holder was soon ousted by Hugh Lupus' son Robert. At the time of the Domesday Book the Picot family of Say in Normandy had obtained large holdings in Shropshire and SW Cheshire. And soon afterwards, as the Pigotts, they appear in Butley. They held the manor for nearly 400 years, the last of the line succeeding to it in 1551 and leaving it to three co-heiresses. By 1602 Legh of Adlington had purchased from them all except Heybridge and Yewards and another thirty acres. By 1629 they had obtained the whole of the actual Butley Hall Estate, which in 1530 had comprised 24 messuages, one water mill, 500 acres of arable land, 100 acres of meadow, 500 acres of pasture, 200 acres of heath, and rents of 9/10d, one pair of gloves and one lance. The annual value was 40 marks, or £26.13.4.

In their latter-day the Pigotts were probably absentee landlords. And by the mid-sixteenth century they had sold Butley Hall itself separately. It was then occupied by Davenport of Henbury until at least 1626. There followed a John Hobson of Over Alderley and other purchasers, one called Watts selling it to the Downes family of Shrigley in about 1750. They remained there for one generation and built the present stone front in the 1780's. Legh then

bought the hall in 1790, and soon after it was granted for his life by Elizabeth Rowlls Legh to her kinsman Rev. John Rowlls Browne, who was vicar of Prestbury from 1800 to 1843. In consequence it has often been stated that during his incumbency Butley Hall became the vicarage. I am not sure how true this is. Certainly in 1840 Browne was living in the vicarage (now the Manor House) and had let Butley Hall to a Mrs Antrobus. The hall was sold again in 1861 to William Coare Brocklehurst, then head of the well-known family of the Brocklehurst Whiston mill and MP for Macclesfield. Since his day it has changed hands more than once before conversion into flats. The stable yard has been demolished. It stood on the other side of Scott Road, which now follows the line from New Road of the original driveway.



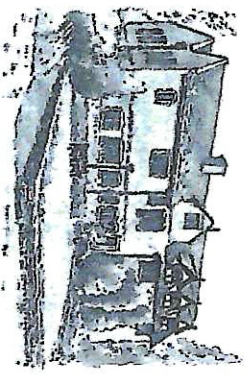
Foxwist, Willot Hall

Within the township of Butley there were several smaller manors. Probably the most ancient and most interesting was Foxwist, the site and inner moat of which can still be seen along the footpath opposite Top o't'hill Farm on Bonis Hall Lane. The Foxwists were there early in the thirteenth century in a small timber frame manor house protected by inner and outer moats. They were probably a junior branch of the Pigotts, as their seal was very similar in design. They were Squires of the Palatinate Prince and were often noticed in public office in the county.

There was an interesting sequel to a dispute in the 1350's between Robert de Foxwist and his boss the Black Prince, as a result of which Robert was exiled for a while. The Black Prince was one of the most active of all the Palatinate Princes and spent a lot of time in his county. And at this time he decided that he did not wish his Macclesfield manor house on Park Lane to continue to be used for all sorts of courts and meetings. So in 1359, in Robert's absence, they removed his house from Foxwist and re-erected it just in front of St. Michael's church, Macclesfield, where it became the first Town Hall. It was evidently an arcaded building, and shops were inserted below with the meeting room above.

Robert built another house on his return. Early in the fifteenth century, however, the family seems to have come to an end. The house went to another well-known family, the Duncalfts, and remained in their hands until they fell on bad times and had to sell out to Sir Urian Legh in 1609. There were still Duncalfts

in the parish until the 1840's. A brass plate to one of them can still be seen on the east wall of the nave of the church, close to the sanctus bell rope.

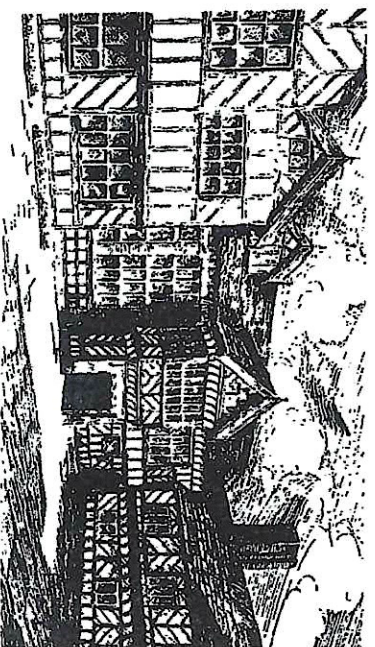


Willot Hall was another small manor, within the hamlet of Foxwist, from the early fourteenth century. The Wylot family at various times was connected with the Newtons of Park House, Butley, and with the Mottersheads of Motttram. Both Willot Hall, where the present house is seventeenth century and Park House came into the hands of Legh before the seventeenth century was over.

Bonis Hall, Mottram, Newton

The other main estate in Butley was of course Bonis Hall. We seem to know nothing of it before the 16th century except its name, which is one which makes me wonder. It clearly originates from the old German name Bonard; but how and when did he get here, and what was he doing? Anyway, in the time of Henry VIII it was purchased by Pigotts for a younger son. And this branch continued much longer than the senior branch at Butley Hall. Eventually, however, one of them, by name, George, married an heiress of Fairsnape near Preston. They seem to have preferred her lot, because son Thomas in 1746 sold Bonis Hall to - you may be surprised to hear - Charles Legh of Adlington.

Thus before the end of the eighteenth century the Legh family had become owners of practically all of Prestbury and Butley, as well as the original de Corona estate of Adlington.



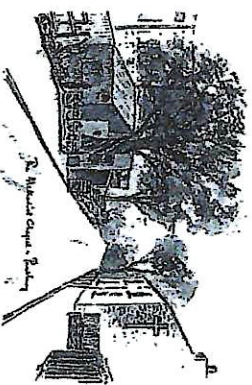
Adlington Hall

It was, however, well into the nineteenth century before the Leghs obtained any interest at all in Mottram, when in 1851 Americus Legh married a daughter of Rev. H. Wright of Mottram and Offerton. Over the ages the Mottram Manors had passed through the hands of Mottrams, Mottersheads, Despensers, Calveleys, Booths of Dunham and Crookes of Macclesfield, reaching the hands of Wrights of Offerton in 1738. Only in the present century has the principal estate been broken up. In passing, it is of interest that the valuable non-ferrous metal vanadium was discovered in the Mottram Heath copper mine by Professor Roscoe [a distinguished professor of chemistry at Manchester University who had made extensive studies of vanadium in the 1860's. One vanadium ore is named mottramite.]

The only other township of really local interest is Newton, which until the present [twentieth] century was part of Butley rather than Mottram. Newton remained in the hands of the Newton family until the early seventeenth century and, after their demise, soon reached Legh hands, in about 1681. Every major manor of course, had its corn mill; but Newton went further - it had a walk mill as well as a water mill, and it also had a fulling mill for processing woollen cloth. I do not know exactly where they were sited.

Mills and Brickworks

In contrast I have no doubt that we all know where the Prestbury and Brutley mills are, or were. The Prestbury mill is still in use and has only very recently ceased to be a true corn mill after 700 years of grinding flour. [The site is due to be redeveloped in the year 2000.] It must be fairly sure that it was actually started by the priests. Though Pigotts seemed to think they had an interest in it in the thirteenth century, I rather doubt it. And I must certainly take the W.J. pamphlet to task for any suggestion that a lord of the manor built a mill for the benefit of his tenants. He did no such thing. He did it for his own benefit and compelled his tenants to use his very expensive monopoly service. The Abbey would form no exception to that rule, in fact they were probably even harsher on the tenants.



The Butley manor mill was at the end of Bollin Grove, and it was only in about 1964 that the last part of it was demolished. It was also a water mill fed by a

the houses between the cottages and the Tennis Club entrance are built on it. At Walter Dawson's corner the levels were such that the millstream had to feed by a bucket wheel. For the length of this part of Bollin Grove and past the Bridge Hotel the river bed can still be seen to be paved. The purpose of this was to reduce the turbulence and facilitate the filling of the buckets.

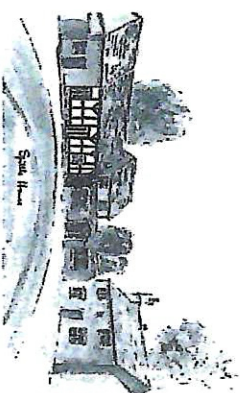
A point about the cottages themselves is interesting. They were built in 1825 by the Revd. Watson, then a beneficent owner and operator of the mill. They were designed to face west, so that the millstream would be running between the backs of the houses and Bollin Grove. To this end a private road was laid out on the school side of the cottages. At that stage it was evidently decided that it would be better to make the cottages face Bollin Grove and give each a little bridge over the millstream. And so it was done. But to this day you can still see the road which was laid out behind the cottages and which in 150 years was never used. [This road joins the Tennis Club entrance (which was originally the mill entrance) between the houses and the squash club. It now provides access to the rear of two of the cottages.] Over the years this mill changed its coat several times. We hear of it as a corn mill in Henry VIII's day and in 1644. The latter instance is interesting. You will recall that Thomas Legh had obtained all the Butley estate by 1629, so at least by then the mill had come into his possession. But he was a fervent royalist and was imprisoned by Cromwell. And so we find in 1644 that on a petition of Thomas Legh's wife, the parliamentary committee for sequestrations ordered that she should have the Miln [Mill] House with the grounds

belonging to it (this is now the farmhouse on the main road on the left just after you pass under the railway bridge on the way to Adlington. It was the Legh dower house then), also the desnesne of Foxwist, and the mill at Prestbury, for the maintenance of herself and her children. By the end of the eighteenth century we find this mill marked on a map as Swanwick's Cotton Factory. In 1809 a Deed refers to it as Messieurs Reddish's silk factory. And a silk factory it remained until it finally closed towards the end of the nineteenth century.

We know also from the old field names that Butley and Prestbury each had a brickworks. Butley's was on Heybridge Lane: the ponds still show where the clay was taken from. [Prestbury's was on the top of the hill behind Cockshead (meaning top of the hill) Farm, an old mediaeval name which has recently been changed to White Gables Farm by its present owner. It was close to the little stream that flows out from Withinlee and down past The Spittle House. The clay diggings are now ponds in the gardens of houses in Withinlee.] Prestbury had two smithies. The most recently in use is now the Smithy Cottage at the foot of Chelford Road; the other was part of the premises of a well-known firm of builders [J.W.Brocklehurst and Sons].

Spittle House

I am nearly forgetting to include a word on the topic which is my closest interest, that of the Spittle House. The oldest section is of so-called elbow-cruck construction, nearly all of the frame and roof still being original. This dates it somewhere between 1300 and 1450. But one wonders why the St. Werburgh monks and lay brothers should have built a spittle house, that is a somewhat primitive hospital, so far from their

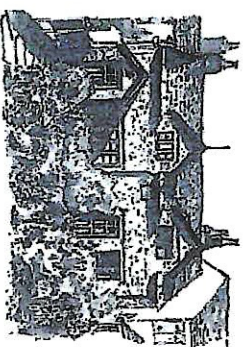


church [and outside its "burh" or protected area]. I believe the clue may be the edict made by Edward III in 1346, that lepers were not to come near places of human habitation. There were many lepers in this country then, and the disease was not understood, and therefore feared. So the monks in their compassion, as other monasteries did in some other places, may have built their spittle house where lepers might reach it. [This theory is, I believe, supported by the unusual layout. Farms generally - and certainly all others in this district - have their buildings situated by the public road. Here the buildings are situated right in the middle of the 22 acres which go with them. And this land though completely surrounded by land at some time owned by the Legh family - has never been in Leghs hands. It looks very much like an isolation area.]

Clearly after the dissolution of the monasteries the house, and the land that went with it known as Abbot's Hay, got into private hands. We do know that in 1625 an Upton living there was hung for murdering a Newton of Butley. And in the seventeenth century one half-timbered wattle and daub building was demolished, and the beams and roof flags were re-used in constructing the present brick dwelling house. From 1714 I have all the Title Deeds, the very first of which is a mortgage in Latin [the Cartmells lived there from 1962 to 1985. The deeds are now with the present owners.] Throughout the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century considerable sums were borrowed on the security of the property. The difficulty of access was always there too, and in 1743 a dispute over ownership of two fields and the access road was decided by arbitration. One of the nicer documents is the executor's account of 1775, which is beautifully threaded, with a rough toggle at each end. They had a good wake too - £4 worth of good "AYL". After passing through the hands of several well known local families, the small holding was bought by the estate of Brocklehurst of Hare Hill in 1875 and remained in their hands until my predecessor bought it from them in 1952.

Village Life

But of how the villagers generally lived over the centuries, we still have a lot to learn. For a time after the Normans came there were only the rich and the very poor and down-trodden, and the living conditions of any but the rich were terrible.

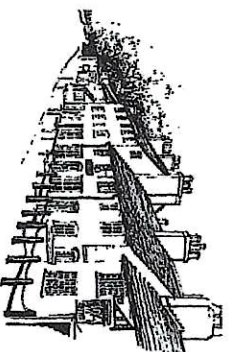


Our seventeenth century cottages in Pearl Street, even the late eighteenth century cottages in Bollin Grove, look picturesque now. But for long enough after they were built they had no water supply, no sanitation, and one or two domestic animals no doubt lived in the house with the occupants. Probably most of the occupants of these cottages were employed in some way on the manor. For I have found no evidence yet of any nucleated farming in the village - by that I mean the system of living together in a nucleus, for mutual protection, but going out of the village during the day to till open strips and to graze animals on the common land. The vast majority of the land in the parish was assarted, that is to say won patch by patch from the forest, and here also from the marsh. And as each patch was won, it was farmed as a unit, and by the early seventeenth century farmhouses like Plant House, Brundred, Heybridge and Yewards were being built on the plots.

Of what happened at the time of the Black Death in 1349, and later when the plague came this way in 1603 and 1646, I have so far found no evidence. In

most places, paradoxically, conditions improved after such epidemics, since labour was made scarce and the poor labourer was enabled to make a better bargain.

By the latter part of the eighteenth century the silk industry was well established in Macclesfield, and was having its effect in Prestbury. Cottagers were



entering the industry, and by the beginning of the nineteenth century the weavers' cottages opposite Prestbury Hall and in New Road were being built. It is of

interest to look at the census figures in 1811 and find that already to 104 families engaged in agriculture, 88 were engaged in trade and 20 in neither. That means that less than half the population was on the land. In Prestbury, Butley and Fallibroome there were then 1065 people comprising 210 families living in 207 houses - more than five people to a house. In 1811 in the whole parish of Prestbury - and by this time still only Taxal, Gawsworth and Alderley had become independent parishes - 1500 families were in agriculture, 244 of them in Macclesfield and 3763 families were in trade, 2500 of them in Macclesfield.

By 1871 there had been more movement to the town, and the village population was 110 less than in 1811. The families were rather smaller, averaging 4.3 people, but the overcrowding in the houses was not much changed.

The Village Centre

As I said earlier, there is no evidence that Prestbury was a nucleated village. And it may be for this reason that the village street is as it is. Remember that the *raison d'être* of the village centre is unusual, it is to be the centre and focal point of a parish some 10 miles across and 40 miles in circumference. Imagine that the Poynton - Macclesfield road does not exist - as until 1810, quite recently, it did not - and you will then see that all roads radiate from Prestbury to the other 34 townships of the parish.

I read somewhere not long ago some author's query why Bonnie Prince Charlie on his march south came through Prestbury instead of going straight down the main road: the query has an easy answer - there was no main road, and to get from almost anywhere to anywhere in N.E. Cheshire before the nineteenth century it was necessary to pass through Prestbury.



So Prestbury had a different kind of nucleus - a parish nucleus whither everyone had to come until well into the nineteenth century to get wed or buried from almost all the huge parish. Recall too that until 1894 the ecclesiastical parish was also what is now the civil parish and more: the churchwardens were largely in control: the guardians of the poor and parish constable were all parish appointed and parish financed. All meetings were held in the church, and it was the business centre for many purposes for ten miles all round. So the village centre held the main services alongside the church. The inns - the Legh Arms from the seventeenth century, the Unicorn from the eighteenth century, and others from time to time. The smithies, the mill, maybe the tannery and so on. Only two farmhouses were nearby, since no doubt they farmed the land nearest to the centre. One is now the White House, the other Grace and Favour plus John Brown's [shop premises, at one time Bromley's, now Artizana plus Holmes-Naden's], both seventeenth to eighteenth century. And just possibly the earliest part of Ford House was in this category. To these add one or two cottages for farm or trade workers - Rose Cottage and the cottage on the corner opposite the Reading Room, the oldest cottage in the street - both seventeenth century.

All the rest of the street is nineteenth century - brought in mainly to fulfil the needs of the spread of industry and to provide community services. The great mill owner wants an imposing house - so we get Swanwick House. More home silk weaving is needed - so we get 1 to 4 The Village, and so it went on.

And where will we go from here? I still hope that we shall successfully resist the movement of the profiteering developers to turn us into a suburban area. We must remain a village, however much adapted. And this means that we must remain a rural centre - not just a residential stronghold with the shutters up. We need to keep our character and our atmosphere not just our dwellings, but our village commerce and industry to serve the surrounding area. I hope we will be able to keep it that way.

October 1977: updated May 2000