

# MALPAS HISTORY

NUMBER TWO

JULY 1984

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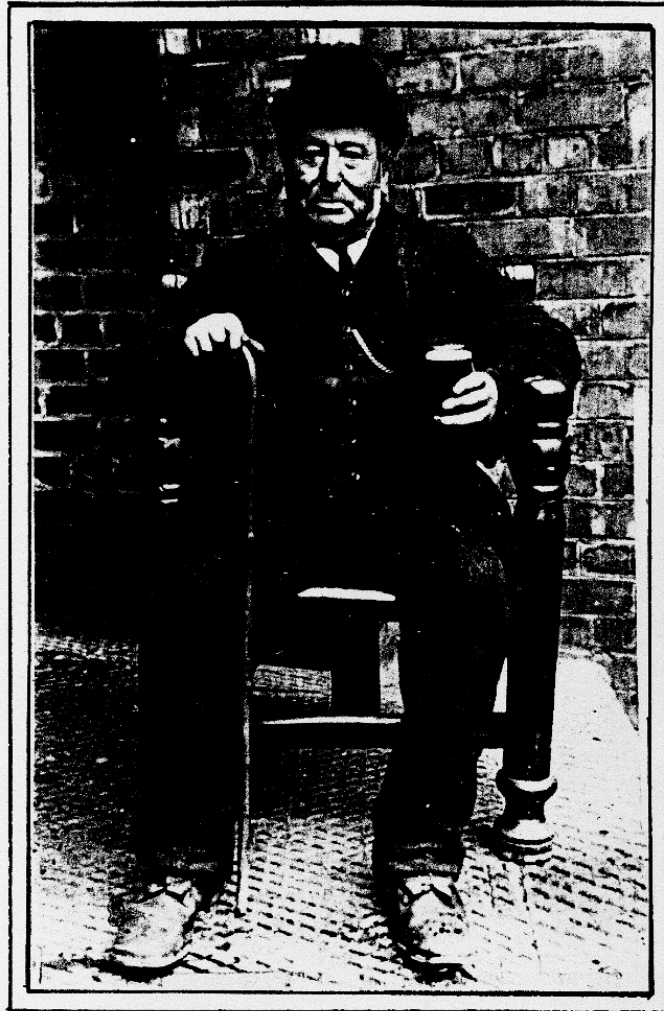
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A magazine for the Malpas area, including the townships of Agden, Bickerton, Bickley, Bradley, Broxton, Bulkeley, Chidlow, Cholmondeley, Chorlton, Cuddington, Duckington, Edge, Egerton, Hampton, Iscoyd, Larkton, Macefen, Malpas, Newton, Oldcastle, Overton, Stockton, Tushingam-cum-Grindley, Wigland and Wychough, all in the ancient Parish of Malpas, and Threapwood.

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COVER PICTURE: Mr William Wragg, photographed in 1911, sitting in the "King's Chair" belonging to the "Red Lion". The King's Chair is supposed to be the "great elbow chair" in which King John sat when, according to popular legend, he came to Malpas (see "Malpas History", No. 1, page 17).

Mr Wragg was the grandfather of our present verger, Mr Bill Jones. This photograph, the one below and those on the back cover are from Mr Les Boughey's collection. We are very grateful to him for making them available for the magazine.



Our thanks are due to Veronica Scholes for undertaking the task of typing all the articles for this issue.

"MALPAS HISTORY" is published by the Malpas Field Club History Group. All correspondence should be addressed to the Editor, c/o Stoke Cottage, Church Street, Malpas, Cheshire SY14 8PD.

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## EDITORIAL

Number Two appears at last. It is rather later than intended and for that I must take full responsibility. We hope you enjoy this issue and that it will receive a similar reception to the first. It was very encouraging that all the copies of Number One were sold so quickly and that we had to print an extra fifty, which were also sold. Most encouraging of all were the many kind comments and suggestions that we received from readers. We were pleased that the "Whitchurch Herald" felt that we had "adopted a very easy, readable style, with enough historical detail to satisfy historians and interesting human details that bring these Malpas characters from long ago very much alive and kicking for the readers of today". Such was our aim.

This issue contains a similar mixture of articles. Gerrard Barnes contributes another of his carefully researched articles, on the way in which a major conflict, this time the Boer War, affected our part of rural Cheshire; Mr D.W.Marwick, who lives in Alderley Edge, is an enthusiast for Postal History and has kindly allowed us to reprint his article on the development of the Malpas Postal Service; Margaret Barker explores the fascinating documents known as Probate Inventories, which can tell us so much about the life-style of Malpas residents in the past; the saga of the Alports at Overton Hall concludes with part two of Mrs Barnett's article; and finally we take you back to the days when horses raced across the Holy Land - not on a Crusade but at Threapwood Races!

Do please continue to let us have your comments on the magazine. We welcome articles from anyone who feels they have something to add to the fascinating story of our parish and will be pleased to consider them for inclusion in "Malpas History" No. 3, which we hope to bring out in time for Christmas.

David Hayns

# GOOD BYE DOLLY GRAY

1899-1902

Gerrard Barnes

"Good bye Dolly, I must leave you  
Though it breaks my heart to go;  
Something tells me I am needed  
At the front to fight the foe.

See the soldier boys are  
marching  
And I can no longer stay;  
Hark! I hear the bugles  
calling  
Good bye Dolly Gray."

A patriotic fervour, which this marching song of the Boer War typifies, swept the country once war had broken out in October 1899. Two and a half years later the signing of peace on 31st May 1902 was greeted in the words of the Whitchurch Herald editorial "with a deep sense of thankfulness." It had been, the Editor continued, "a long and severe war, far longer and far more severe than the best informed or the least sanguine could ever have anticipated." Financially it had cost Britain £288 million and been the cause of Income Tax going up from 8d (3½p) in the pound to 1/- (5p). In human terms, casualties, though minute in comparison with what was to come a few years later at Ypres or on the Somme, had proved grievously high with 28,000 killed or wounded, another 13,000 dead of disease and nearly 64,000 invalided home, amounting to nearly 25% of the 450,000 who had fought on the British side.

In all this, Malpas parish had contributed its share and its sons. Some 20 inhabitants can be definitely identified as having been on active service in South Africa; of these three were killed, one was wounded, one taken prisoner and at least four either invalided back to the U.K. or hospitalised in South Africa through sickness.

Some had regular commissions in the Army. The Earl of Rock-savage was with the Royal Sussex Regiment, Owen Wolley-Dod, son of the Rev. C. Wolley-Dod of Edge Hall, was a Captain in the Lancashire Fusiliers, Roger Rasbotham of Ebnal Grange a Lieutenant in the Durham Light Infantry and Hugh Sandbach of Cherry Hill was serving in the Royal Dragoons. Roger Rasbotham's brother, D'Arcy, was also there with his Regiment, as was George Billingsley of Iscoyd, a private in the King's Shropshire Light Infantry.

The others went out as volunteers, having been almost all members of the Cheshire and Shropshire Yeomanry Cavalry Regiments and answered the appeals for men to form the Imperial Yeomanry. The first appeal for 7000 recruits was made in December 1899 and came in the wake of the succession of British disasters in the first battles of the war. At these, the superior mobility of the Boer burghers, self-sufficient and mounted on horseback, was being seen to give them a significant advantage over the British infantry, dependent on the railway or ox-wagon for transport and supplies.

The Imperial Yeomanry were to fight as mounted infantry, rather than cavalry, being armed with rifles rather than swords. Response to the appeal was immediate and overwhelming. In

Cheshire two companies of 5 officers and 120 men each were formed in a matter of days, and the £5,000 which the County was expected to raise to cover the cost of equipping them, was oversubscribed by public donation to such an extent that it was possible to give each man a compass, a pair of field glasses and a burning glass - "to enable the troopers to light their pipes without matches." The Colonel of the Regiment, the Earl of Harrington, also gave each trooper a sovereign as pocket money.

The Cheshire Volunteers, now designated the 21st and 22nd (Cheshire) Companies of the Imperial Yeomanry, were given an ecstatic send-off from Chester Station by a vast crowd of 25,000 well-wishers en route to Liverpool docks, from where they sailed for South Africa on 30th January 1900. Included in their ranks were seven men from Malpas parish - all in the 21st Company. Two were officers - the Company Commander, Major Lord Arthur Grosvenor, second son of the first Duke of Westminster, who lived at Broxton Lower Hall, and Lieut. Robert Barbour of the Bolesworth Castle family, who was then residing at Bank Head, Broxton.

The five troopers were R.N. Brassey of Bank House, Cholmondeley, John Done of Manor Farm, Hampton, G.H. Proudlove, of Oak Farm, Broxton, W. Turton also of Broxton, and R.N. Walley of Egerton Farm. An eighth man, R. Furnival of Fields Farm, Cholmondeley, went out in April, as one of the replacement draft for the 22nd Company.

For most of these Yeomen, service in South Africa lasted fifteen months, from February 1900 to May 1901. However, some 60 of them, including Trooper Walley, transferred to the Cape Mounted Police in August 1900 and stayed on after their comrades returned to the U.K. Lord Arthur Grosvenor on the other hand came back early, invalided here in early 1901, and he is found addressing a meeting at Bickerton Institute in April on his experiences. Not that these seem to have been particularly exciting. The Cheshire Companies saw little action and much of their time was spent on either town garrison duty or as part of one of the British columns, hunting but rarely coming to grips with the various Boer guerilla bands.

However, although taking part in no major battles - the killing of 2 Boers and capture of 40 others by Lieut. Barbour and 8 men for the loss of a horse being probably the most striking success - death through disease was a greater risk than enemy action and took a higher toll. Three quarters of the 17 officers and men who died in South Africa did so as a result of enteric fever or some other disease.

Illness, as we have seen, precipitated the return of Lord Arthur Grosvenor and was to delay Lieut. Barbour when the rest of the Yeomen sailed for the U.K. but, apart from this, the Malpas contingent arrived home in June 1901 unscathed.

These home-comings provided the occasion for much celebration, both in Chester for the Companies en masse and in the villages for individual troopers. Norman Brassey, for example, was met by members of Cholmondeley Cricket Club (he had been elected captain whilst still overseas) and the Fire Brigade. The horses

having been removed from his carriage, the reception party proceeded to draw him through triumphal arches, set up on the Bulkeley Road, to Bank House. Here in a tent on the lawn, supper was served and the rest of the evening, as the Whitchurch Herald describes it, "was spent in sports, patriotic songs and dancing."

Brassey was also a guest, together with John Done, at the 77th Annual Dinner of the Malpas United Friendly Society in the Jubilee Hall. They were met at the top of the High Street, which was "tastefully adorned with an elaborate arch bearing mottoes in their honour", and accompanied through the streets by a local contingent of Yeomanry, Society members and the Nantwich Town Band. Presentations were made, to Brassey of a silver cigarette case and to Done of a clock. Brassey was also to receive from Cholmondeley friends "a silver vase-shaped cup with side handles, standing 11" in height and suitably inscribed."

At Whitewell, Private Ernest Edge, who had served as a volunteer with the Royal Army Medical Corps and spent two days as a prisoner of the Boers, was welcomed back with a supper in the Parish Room and presented with a silver cigarette box. A Hero's welcome too awaited Lieut. Barbour when he arrived back, travelling from Tattenhall Road Railway Station to the Barbour Institute in a carriage drawn by 40 of the Bolesworth Estate tenants and escorted by half a dozen of the returned yeomen, on horseback and wearing their khaki uniforms. Music to accompany the procession was played by the fife and drum band of the Tattenhall Home for Waifs and Strays. At a presentation at Bolesworth Castle, Barbour received a Bible with an illuminated inscription, and the men were each given a gold chain.

In the middle of these celebrations however two of the leading Malpas families had deaths to mourn. Over the space of seven days came news that Lieut. George Greenshields of The Beeches had died of wounds and Lieut. Roger Rasbotham had been killed in action. There had been a wounding in January 1900, that of Capt. Wolley-Dod and Lieut. Rasbotham himself had been invalided home in June of the same year, when the Malpas Band "serenaded" him at Ebnal Grange, but this was the first time that Malpas had experienced any fatality.

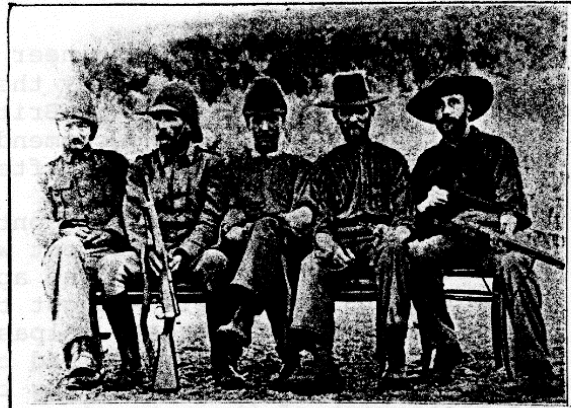
Lieut. Greenshields, who had represented Cambridge University at athletics and cricket and in the season prior to leaving for South Africa had captained Malpas Cricket Club, was commissioned in the Shropshire Yeomanry, attached to the 13th Company of the Imperial Yeomanry. He arrived in South Africa in March 1901 and was mortally wounded in Grootafdeeling in June, aged 24. Lieut. Rasbotham, an old Etonian and "a great rider to hounds", had returned to duty in South Africa in September 1900. He was killed at Edenkop, when he was 22 years old.

A memorial service for both was held in Malpas Church and the stained glass window in the south wall of the Brereton Chapel and the one immediately to the west of this were subsequently dedicated to their memory.

Capt. Wolley-Dod was later to be awarded the DSO and his civilian brother, Thomas, also earned distinction. Working



MAJOR LORD ARTHUR GROSVENOR,  
In command of the 21st Co.  
Taken at Upington.



OFFICERS OF THE 21ST CO. IN MESS DRESS.  
(Taken at Upington.)

Left to right - Lieut. Grosvenor, Major Lord Arthur Grosvenor, Lieut. R. Barbour,  
Capt. Rennie and Lieut. Beaumont.

Top Left, Top Right, Bottom Right  
BOER WAR OFFICERS FROM MALPAS PARISH

Photographs from J.H. Cooke's  
"5,000 Miles with the Cheshire Yeomanry  
in South Africa" (published in 1913)

Below (Left to Right)

George Chesworth, Arthur Caldecott and  
W.O. Mercer in Malpas High Street on  
their return from South Africa. They are  
accompanied by members of the Malpas  
Fire Brigade. This was the cover picture  
for "Malpas History" No. 1, in which  
George Chesworth was incorrectly named as  
Thomas Chesworth. Chesworth and Caldecott  
were the two involved in the disturbance  
at Aldershot (see poem at end of article)

Photograph by permission of Mrs Dolly Mercer



Tripp Cape Town

LIEUT. R. BARBOUR,  
Of the 21st Company, from whose book so  
many photographs in this Volume have  
been reproduced.



Working as an electrical engineer in Pretoria when war broke out, he was left at liberty by the Boers and his efforts on behalf of the hospital, where British prisoners of war were being treated, won him the commendation of the Committee of Enquiry set up by the British after the town's capture.

The withdrawal of these first contingents of the Yeomanry was facilitated by their replacement with 5,000 new volunteers recruited in January 1901. The appeal had again had an instantaneous response. Amongst the first were George Chesworth of Church Street, Malpas, and Arthur Caldecott of Topwood Farm, Oldcastle, who had been accepted by the Shropshire Yeomanry, the latter being the unidentified third man in the photograph of the returning yeomen published in the December issue of "Malpas History".

Public support for the volunteers continued at a high pitch and, prior to their departure for Aldershot in February, a function was arranged in their honour at which they each received a pair of field glasses, a silver match box case, a warm rug, six pairs of socks, a knife, a combination fork, knife and spoon and a parcel containing a muffler, a pair of mitts and a shirt. As was normal practice on such occasions, there was a succession of speeches, in one of which Albert Chesworth, George's father, said that although he sorely felt his son's leaving him, it would have been much harder to bear "if this had been by conscription rather than as a volunteer."

In the following month William Mercer of High Street, Malpas, left as one of the Cheshire Yeomanry contingent and for him the send off took the form of a gathering of friends at the Institute and the presentation of a purse containing six guineas.

Chesworth and Caldecott became 'news' even before they left England, as a result of an incident at Aldershot, which a "London Correspondent" of the Herald wrote up in the verses reproduced at the end of this article.

By the time these latest contingents of Yeomanry Volunteers reached South Africa in April 1901, the days of set-piece battles were past and the opportunities for deeds of glory few and far between. The Boers had resorted to a campaign of guerilla warfare, raiding isolated British columns and destroying the railway. The British forces for their part were engaged in systematically denying the guerilla bands the means of sustenance from the countryside by confiscating cattle, burning crops and farms and removing their families into concentration camps. As an extension of this policy, lines of block houses criss-crossing the country were built to restrict the movement of Boer commandoes.

From a notebook in which Chesworth wrote down an account of his service in South Africa, seemingly as the basis for a lecture on his return, we know that his time was spent in just such operations. Based mainly at Harrismith in the Orange Free State, he took part in several of these expeditions in search of parties of Boers and their sources of supply, up to the towns of Bethlehem and Brindisi near the border with Basutoland. He was also involved in escorting parties of engineers working on the blockhouses and repairing the railway line.

Early in 1902, he contracted dysentery. Hospitalised, his first week was spent in a marquee, sleeping on the floor living off a diet of one pint of water and a spoonful of condensed milk three times a day. Transferred afterwards to proper hospitals, he was away from his Unit for six weeks in all, returning to duty in March 1902. Skirmishes with parties of Boers and running fights with them are described in his notes and it is clear he gave a good account of himself on these occasions.

No mention is made of Caldecott but we must assume he too lived up to his Aldershot reputation, since he returned home with the rank of Sergeant. Certainly he also spent time at Harrismith, since the greetings card he sent from there to "my little sister" (Florrie) in March 1902 has been preserved.

Although the fighting had thus settled into this pattern, men were still being killed, amongst them Private W. Gostage of Threapwood, who died of wounds on 29 December 1901. With the letter of sympathy to Gostage's father, his C.O. enclosed a cartridge from the bandolier, which had been shattered by the bullet that killed him!

Eventually the British stranglehold proved effective and peace was signed on 31st May 1902. News reached Malpas just before 8 p.m. on Sunday, 1st June. The immediate reaction was that crowds of people remained on the streets, discussing the news. At 4 a.m. on Monday the church bells rang out and continued to do so throughout the day. "The Town was paraded up and down by bands of men and boys" and the local newsagent, Mr W O Barlow, was reported to have sold 1,074 copies of various newspapers. However, as the Herald comments about the reception of the news in Whitchurch, the people were not particularly demonstrative over it and there was nothing to compare with the jubilation manifested when Ladysmith and Mafeking had been relieved, in March and May 1900 respectively. On the occasion of the Ladysmith news, the schoolchildren assembled round the Cross, sang the National Anthem and 'Soldiers of the Queen', were regaled with sweets and a bun and were given a half-holiday.

The news about Mafeking was spread by the postmen, who in the days before wireless would be the quickest means of communication with outlying towns and hamlets. Hearing of the relief, when they reported for duty at 6 a.m. on Saturday, they "sent up cheer after cheer before they departed on their rounds." The church bells rang at intervals throughout the day and in the afternoon some 350 schoolchildren assembled at the Cross and, after singing several martial songs and cheering lustily, were given a bun, a packet of sweets and an orange. On behalf of the inhabitants of Malpas, a telegram of congratulation was sent to Lord Salisbury, the Prime Minister. An evening programme of entertainment followed, which included a torch-light procession, fireworks, fun and merriment plus, to judge by a later court case for assault, some "rough play" in the yard of the Wyvern, where beer would have been served at 1d ( $\frac{1}{2}$ ) per pint.

The restrained reception of the peace agreement can probably be attributed to the fact that for the British people the war

had for all intents and purposes been won with the capture of Pretoria, the Transvaal capital, in June 1900. Recourse by the Boers to the protracted campaign of guerilla warfare seemed to be serving their cause but little and to be prolonging unduly the suffering and lengthening the casualty lists unnecessarily. When now complete victory had been achieved, it was greeted with a sense of relief that at last all was over.

During these years, the Herald had continued to set aside at least three to four columns each week to reports of the fighting but the course of events with no front lines and seemingly endless marching and counter-marching across the remoter parts of the veldt must have been very confusing and difficult to understand for the great majority of Malpas readers.

In the early days, the support of the local population for the war effort had been clearly demonstrated, with the formation of Committees to organise fund-raising collections for the wives and families of those serving in the army and navy and to equip a hospital bed to be called the "Malpas Bed". A working party of the ladies of Malpas met every other Wednesday and, having purchased a supply of materials, produced a large assortment of clothing, such as shirts, helmets, socks etc. for the troops. The infant schoolchildren were also enlisted to help and made mats to cover cups in hospitals.

In these activities, the leading role was taken by Lady Margaret Ormsby-Gore of The Lodge, whose husband was a Major in the Shropshire Yeomanry - though not serving in South Africa - and was to become in turn M.P. for Oswestry and eventually Lord Harlech. Lady Margaret was also the author of an idea which she put forward in a letter to the Spectator magazine, whereby "ladies could assist in starting rifle clubs in villages by offering prizes to be competed for." The suggestion was taken up by the Malpas Rural District Council and a public meeting arranged. This does not however appear to have resulted in any positive action and it seems unlikely that the scheme fared any better elsewhere.

Other civilians contributed to the war effort in various ways. Mr Wycherley won a Government contract for the supply of saddles and a 93 lbs. prize cheese from the Bickerton Hall dairy helped to feed some of the British wounded after the battle of Spion Kop. This cheese had been sent to South Africa by Mr P T Godsal of Iscoyd to a friend, who passed it to the hospital treating the soldiers to provide an alternative to the usual bully beef and biscuit diet.

With the war at an end, there was a speedy return home for the troops. George Chesworth writes that he was back in Malpas on 2nd September. A few days later he, Caldecott and Mercer were entertained to supper in the Grammar School. The evening was spent in "songs, toasts and sentiment" according to the Herald report and presumably the menu was rather more varied than the meals of fried sliced dumplings or cakes made from the rations of flour and water issued to him when on patrol in South Africa. In December the threesome were presented with dressing cases by the Malpas Committee in recognition of their service.

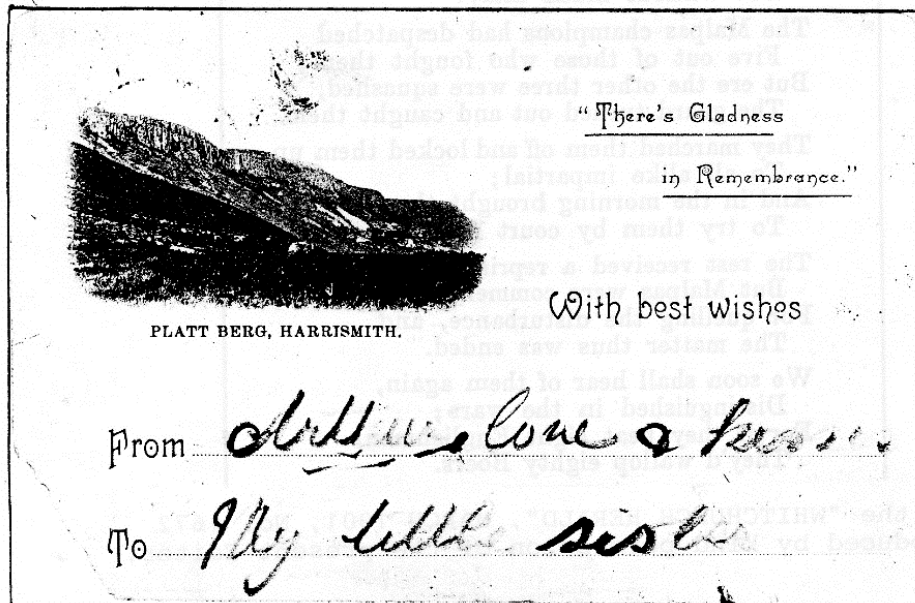
Capt. Sandbach and Lieut. D'Arcy Rasbotham arrived back in October, welcomed with peals of the church bells and cheers of the inhabitants. Twelve years later, Sandbach, back in Africa and fighting this time against the Germans in what is now Tanzania as Commandant of the East African Mounted Rifles, was to be killed in action at Longido in November 1914.

Those members of the Cheshire Yeomanry who had served in the Imperial Yeomanry formed the South African Association and, until 1940, held annual reunion dinners. By 1950 falling numbers had led to amalgamation with the 1914/1918 Association and even the special occasion of the 50th anniversary dinner that year only attracted eight members. Included amongst them however were two from Malpas, Harry Proudlove and John Done. Thereafter, in the words of the Official History of the Yeomanry, these eight "gradually faded away until only John Done was left regularly attending each year." His final appearance was in 1963 and he died in October 1965.

This then, it would seem, left as the last surviving veteran from Malpas the 5th Marquess of Cholmondeley, the former Earl of Rocksavage, and it was his death in September 1968 at the age of 85 that finally brought this chapter of history to a close.

#### REFERENCES

There are numerous books on the course of the war, one of the most recent being "The Boer War" by Thomas Pakenham. The exploits of the Cheshire Yeomanry are recorded in a series of articles and extracts from diaries and letters, collected by J.H. Cooke and published in 1913 under the title of "5,000 miles with the Cheshire Yeomanry in South Africa". The files of the Whitchurch Herald are the source of much of the information about Malpas and its inhabitants during the war, whilst George Chesworth's notes give a vivid picture of life on active service. Grateful thanks are due to the Editor of the Herald and to Mr Kevin Meredith respectively for making these records available for this article. Thanks are due also to Mrs E Skelland for the loan of Arthur Caldecott's postcard to his sister (reproduced below).



MALPAS YEOMEN AT ALDERSHOT.—A fortnight ago we published a report of a disturbance amongst the yeomen at Aldershot, in which the Malpas representatives distinguished themselves for their valour. A London correspondent sends the following verses descriptive of the occurrence:—

When the last Yeoman draft went forth,  
To conquer or to fall,  
Foremost of townlets in the north  
Rose Malpas to the call.

Two of her sons themselves enrolled,  
Chesworth and Caldecott;  
And full of spirits brave and bold,  
Set out for Aldershot.

The days passed by; there came the eve  
Before their embarkation;  
And they resolved that they would have  
One last jollification.

Behold them, with nine other friends,  
Around the table festive;  
But alcohol too often tends  
To make some men offensive.

At all events one vulgar guest  
Became so quarrelsome,  
That Yeoman Chesworth thought it best  
To chuck him from the room.

His comrades witnessing the fight,  
Were vexed to see him floored;  
And on the gallant Malpasite,  
They rushed with one accord.

At such unfairness Caldecott,  
At once with wrath was filled;  
"I'm with you George" he shouted out,  
"For if we're to be killed

"It may as well be first as last,"  
And dashed into the fray;  
And now the blows fell thick and fast,  
But without much delay

The Malpas champions had despatched  
Five out of those who fought them;  
But ere the other three were squashed,  
The guard turned out and caught them.

They marched them off and locked them up,  
To all alike impartial;  
And in the morning brought them up,  
To try them by court martial.

The rest received a reprimand,  
But Malpas were commended  
For quelling the disturbance, and  
The matter thus was ended.

We soon shall hear of them again,  
Distinguished in the wars;  
For if they beat eight Englishmen,  
They'd wallop eighty Boers.

From the "WHITCHURCH HERALD", MARCH 1901, No. 1672  
Reproduced by kind permission of the present Editor.

## THE POSTAL SERVICE IN MALPAS

D. W. Markwick

Malpas today is more than a village but less than a town. If such a place, served as it is by only 'B' classified roads can be called a "by-way" then Malpas is a by-way. But it was not always so, for Malpas is the southernmost point of the central ridge of Cheshire, which was a route for travel and was occupied by such inhabitants as there were in pre-Roman times when the rest of the County was largely woodland or swamp.

It continued to be on an important route of travel when the Romans carried through it their road from Chester to London and thence to the continent, on which the imperial posts of the Roman Empire may well have operated with their stations for furnishing relays of horses for officials and letter-carrying messengers of the government. Some 90 years ago a noted local historian wrote: "From the position of Malpas, from the fact of a medieval fortress having existed there, from the evidence of old writers as to discoveries of Roman remains and traces there of Roman roads leading to it, there can be little or no doubt that it was the site of a small station." (1)

It is perhaps worth mentioning that one of these remains found near Malpas in 1812 and now in the British Museum (there is a facsimile in the Grosvenor Museum at Chester) is the famous diploma in the form of a pair of inscribed bronze plates issued by the Emperor Trajan in A.D. 104 to a decurion serving in Britain. So Malpas may well have been a Roman posting station but such stations were strictly for government use and therefore had little in common with our postal system developed over the last 350 years.

After the Romans nothing much is known about Malpas until the end of the Saxon period, when it is known to have been a rich manor of the Earls of Mercia. Malpas' hey-day began soon after the devastation of this part of the County by William the Conqueror on his return from harrying the North, when under Robert FitzHugh it became the head manor and one of the best endowed and largest of the eight Norman baronies under the Earl of Chester with a castle of the motte and bailey type (the mound where it stood is still to be seen close by the church). It became an enormous parish with 25 townships and having a market. It has a glorious church reminiscent - though smaller - of the "wool churches" of East Anglia and it had one of the 5 Grammar Schools founded in Cheshire before 1540.

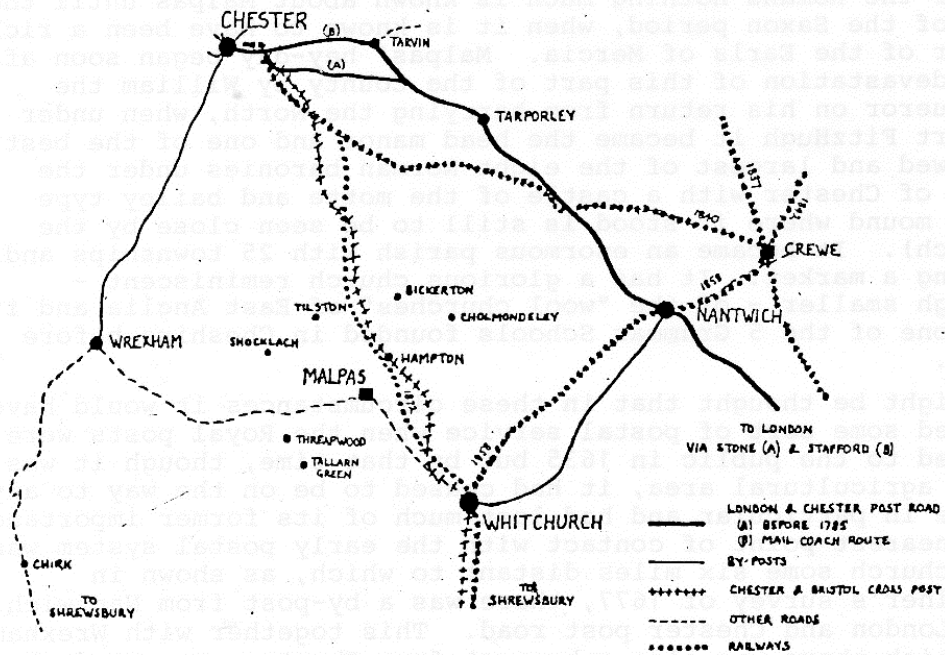
It might be thought that in these circumstances it would have needed some sort of postal service when the Royal posts were opened to the public in 1635 but by that time, though it was a rich agricultural area, it had ceased to be on the way to anywhere in particular and had lost much of its former importance. Its nearest point of contact with the early postal system was Whitchurch some six miles distant to which, as shown in Gardiner's survey of 1677, there was a by-post from Nantwich on the London and Chester post road. This together with Wrexham, to which there was also a by-post from Chester, was no doubt sufficient for the influential gentry around Malpas. In 1700

the extension of the Exeter and Bristol Cross Post to Chester passed through Whitchurch and gave a further facility for letters to and from the south-west.

The position seems to have remained unchanged throughout the eighteenth century. Malpas however was of sufficient importance for it to be the terminus of the turnpiking of the road between it and Wrexham in 1767. Even so, though it is only a mile from the Whitchurch and Chester road, no reference was made to its postal needs when it was decided in 1795 to discontinue the ride between these two towns, as is shown by the following minute of Francis Feeling, Secretary of the Post Office, leading to this decision:

"22 Sept. f.95 1795

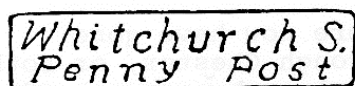
....Mr Saverland has also proposed that the ride to and from Chester and Whitchurch should be discontinued as an unnecessary expense. It costs the Revenue £35 p. ann. and Mr Saverland is of opinion that the accommodation will be as great and the Letters go as quick by way of Wolverhampton. Indeed it appears that the greater part of the Correspondence of Whitchurch with Chester is already forwarded by that route, instead of the direct one and under these circumstances and as there do not appear to be any places of consequence between Whitchurch and Chester on the Road the post now travels, Your Lordships may think it right to adopt Mr Saverlands proposition from the 10th. Oct. next, giving him directions to make the best arrangements he can for the places on the Road from which the post is to be taken if there should be found any of sufficient importance to require it." (2)



The ride between Whitchurch and Chester was re-established when the new Irish Mail Coach between London and Holyhead through Shrewsbury was set up in 1808. It appears however from the records that the contractor refused to continue it after the first year at the contract price and the connection to and from Chester and the Irish Mail Coach was switched to a ride between Chester and Chirk through Wrexham. Again the records contain no reference to Malpas. (3)

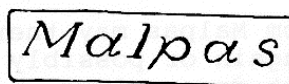
So Malpas is still a place "of no consequence" to the Post Office. But not for much longer and when it did make its entry on the stage of the Post Office, as it did in 1828, it did so as the first of the Receiving Houses in the Whitchurch Penny Post (Fig. 1) and also as the second Receiving House in the Chester Penny Post. (4)

The Malpas handstamp shown (Fig.2) was used for both Penny Posts and the earliest use of it and of the Whitchurch Penny post mark that I know of is on a letter "Missent to London", where it received a circular date stamp of 9th April 1829. The use of the first Chester Penny Post handstamp, which was of the same framed type as the Whitchurch Penny Post handstamp is given by Oxley as from 1834 and of the second type shown (Fig. 3) from 1838. His rating of the rarity of these two marks, namely that the second is rarer than the first, does not accord with my own limited experience.



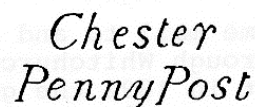
A rectangular handstamp with the text "Whitchurch S." on the top line and "Penny Post" on the bottom line, both in a cursive script.

Fig.1



A rectangular handstamp with the word "Malpas" written in a cursive script.

Fig.2



A rectangular handstamp with the text "Chester" on the top line and "Penny Post" on the bottom line, both in a cursive script.

Fig.3

The covers I have with the Malpas handstamp (Fig. 2). show, as one would expect, that Malpas letters to and from the south went through Whitchurch, while letters to and from the north went through Chester. This changed however when the railway between Warrington and Birmingham opened in July 1837. The Post Office was quick to take advantage of this and Malpas mail to and from London and the places served by the new railway thereupon came through Chester, for which purpose it was served by the station at Hertford until the railway between Crewe and Chester was opened in 1840.

Following the uniform penny post in 1840 Malpas continued as a sub-office under Whitchurch and is so shown in the first Post Office Guide of 1st May 1856. On 7th May 1858 the following handstamp was sent to Whitchurch:



A circular handstamp containing the text "A" at the top, "MALPAS" in the middle, "MY 5" below that, and "58" at the bottom.

Fig.4



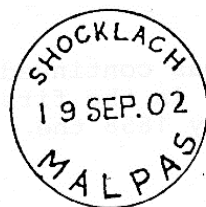
The next type of handstamp used at Malpas appears to have been the Duplex cancellation sent to Whitchurch on 28th Jan. 1882. The number 310 had been allotted to Gerrards Cross in 1844 but had become vacant by 1874.



Fig.5

Further changes now follow in quick succession. The Post Office Guide of 1st Oct. 1884 shows that Malpas then became a Sub-Office under Crewe so that Whitchurch now ceased to be its head office after 56 years. In the issue of the guide of 1st Oct. 1887 appears the entry "Malpas S.O. (Ches.)" which was the designation for Sub-Offices "which receive a large part of their correspondence or their Day Mail Letters from some other than their own Head Office".

Some mail to and from Malpas may therefore now have gone through Whitchurch again or possibly through Chester, or both. But in 1892 the great day arrived when Malpas became a head office itself. In the Post Office Guide of 1st April of that year it is named alone in the list as head offices were, as "Malpas (Cheshire)". Four villages around it are shown as its sub-offices, namely Tilston, Bickerton, Cholmondeley and Tallarn Green. Hampton, Threapwood and Shocklach were added in the issue of 1st Jan. 1900, bringing the number of Malpas' sub-offices to seven. I have not yet come across handstamps of Cholmondeley, Tallarn Green, Hampton or Threapwood at this period but the following are examples of postmarks of the other sub-offices:



RUBBER STAMP

Fig.6.



Fig.7



(1860)

Fig.8



RUBBER STAMP

Fig.9.

The Malpas single ring circular date stamp continued in use at the beginning of the century. The following examples suggest that before the introduction of the standard double ring type, a temporary "skeleton" handstamp was in use in or around September 1903 while the single ring handstamp with time in code was out of action and its replacement with the time in clear was awaited.



Fig.10

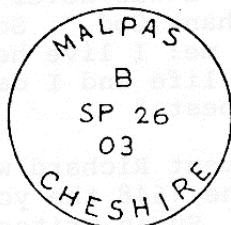


Fig.11

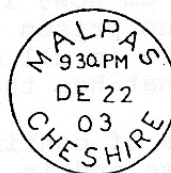


Fig.12



Fig.13

All this however has now changed under the Postcode system resulting from the development of mechanised sorting. Today Malpas comes within the code letter area of Shrewsbury, which is its head office, and its mail normally goes into Whitchurch for postmarking and, except for registered letters, no longer bears a Malpas stamp.

#### REFERENCES

- (1) WATKIN, W. Thompson: Roman Cheshire (1886, reprinted )  
(1974 )
- (2) POST OFFICE RECORDS Post 42, Vol. 11 No. 1096
- (3) POST OFFICE RECORDS Post 42, Vol. 29 Nos. 190 & 390
- (4) OXLEY, G.F. The English Provincial Local Posts  
1765-1840, pages 33 & 67.

This article first appeared in "The Lancashire and Cheshire Mail", Vol. VII, 1978, under the title "Postal By-ways in Cheshire - Malpas". We are grateful to the author for giving us permission to reproduce it here and for taking the trouble to up-date it for us in the light of research he has carried out since 1978.

## ALPORTIANA

## Part Two

### Mrs A. H. Barnett

Sir John Leeke having given approval to his niece, ere long Susan and Richard were engaged to be married and after many set-backs and delays the wedding took place (very privately) on August 5th 1646. Susan went to live with her husband in Fleet Prison. Here she was able to write to her brother (Sir Ralph Verney) a few days later, "I was never so happy since my Father died as I am now, I thank God." Some time later she writes, "It is no prison to me: I live here as well as ever I lived anywhere in all my life and I dare compare husbands with her that has the best."

After two more years of confinement Richard was at last able to obtain his release and in June 1648 the young couple were able to escape to Overton Hall. Susan writes to her brother in France, "My long expected happiness to see home is come at last. I have been in Cheshire these ten days, where I find a pitiful ruined house for want of living in, not only so but plundered besides. I found nothing in it but bare walls. I must be contented with them till Sir Hugh Calveley's debts (for the King) are paid and happy shall I be if my husband may continue here. It is but a little house but very pleasant. I cannot brag that I am likely to tarry here; I fear this happiness will not last long, for there is an execution out against my husband for my Lord of Loughborough and Sir Hugh together .... Pray give my love and service to my sister, whom I would have written to but I have had too much company ever since I came here that I have not had time to settle myself. I am a sorry housekeeper; I have nothing about me, not so much as a cow, nor dare not meddle with any yet, but am forced to keep a tenant in my house and buy all of him."

In Susan and Richard's time Overton Hall was a half-timbered gabled house, projecting in the upper storey, with a pointed stone arch over the Moat. This Moat enclosed about an acre of ground and contained, as it does now, a considerable range of farm buildings. It stands in a sheltered nook of the valley, a mile downhill from Malpas Church, and has in recent years been restored to much of its former dignity.

For less than three years Susan was to enjoy her home. Two children were still-born and of the third child she died. On February 7th 1651 her husband wrote to Sir Ralph to tell him of his loss: "You hoped to have heard of my poor girl's safe deliverance but with a really afflicted soul I am enforced to return to you the most truly sad account .... for it hath pleased Almighty God in his judgement (for my great sins) to lay the greatest and most heavy affliction that ever was on any man." He goes on to tell of her being taken ill, mentioning "the gentlewomen with her, amongst whom was Mrs Poole a sister of my Lord of Shrewsbury and Mrs Dutton, Sir John Reynold's daughter. She said aloud, 'Now I thank God I am delivered', calling me to kiss her; within three hours she and the child it pleased God, they died. Twelve o' clock on Saturday 1st February ..... She was buried on Monday about 3 o' clock in Malpas Church in my own vault ..... accompanied with all

the gentry in this country thither, where preached Mr Holland, a most reverend divine, who had been conversant with her ever since she came hither, and administered the Sacrament to us not ten days before."

Much as Richard Alport clearly loved his Susan, it was only some six months after her death that he married again. This time it was to Elizabeth Bert, step-daughter of Susan's greatly loved old uncle and counsellor, Dr Denton. She bore him two sons and three daughters. Interesting and amusing letters survive relating to the third marriage. A sidelight on the state of the roads at the time is afforded by Dr Denton's account of his journey to Overton, "in 1656 when he lamed three of his four horses in getting 'safe but not sound to Overton', though in time for the christening of the new arrival Katherine which was not without a fiddler and the merry cup." Also the political state of affairs is hinted at when Cromwell, who had control of the country, appointed a Major-General named Bridges to govern the district. He was trying to rig the County elections. We learn that the High Sheriff and the Justices were spending three days at Overton Hall, uniting to oppose the Major-General's efforts. This they achieved.

Richard Alport died in 1664 at the early age of 50, leaving his son John who had taken up the study of medicine and obtained his degree at the age of 25 but died two years later, leaving £100 to the poor of Malpas. Elizabeth had married William Dod, the Rector of Malpas. Katherine married Edward Wright of Stretton, in Chester Palace, Robert succeeded to the Overton estate and Anne married John Puleston of Pickhill. Richard's widow, Betty, married John Leche of Carden within the year and it must be presumed that he took over the control of the Hall and estate until his step-sons came of age. Robert married Anne Mainwaring, the daughter of another ancient house, by whom he had a son and three daughters. Ormerod, the historian, records that there was on the eastern-most pillar of the northern arcade in Malpas Church an eschutcheon bearing the following inscription:

Heere under lyethe

bodies of Robert Alport of OVERTON in ye county

Chester, esquire who married

ANNE one of ye daughters of Sir Tho. Mainwaring

of Peover bt. by whom he had issue 3 daughters and 1 son

She died 30th December and was buried 4th of January 1686 Aged 32

He died 27th of January and was buried ye 1st of February an'o aged 28

VIRTUS VIVIT

This sad record, no longer in the Church, tells its own tragic story. Richard, then a toddler of two or three, grew up to inherit the family estates. During his long minority someone must have been in charge of them, possibly their grandmother Leche. It may be that documents in the Carden archives contain the answer. She could well have been below the age of 60 when

Richard came of age in 1705. Deprived so early in life of both parents it seems only too probable that his young life was none too happy. One is inclined to picture the young Richard as rather a delicate young man. He never married and his death occurred when he was only 36, at the Abbey Foregate in Shrewsbury. It may be that he had gone there for medical treatment, who knows? That he was of a benevolent disposition is borne out by the terms of his will. His house and estate he left to his three nieces. By his will he left a rent charge of 40 shillings per annum to the curates of Malpas Church for a daily service in the week before the Sacrament Service.

In Malpas, where he was buried 9th August 1720, he left £500 in trust for a charity school and £50 for the Blue Coat School at Chester. His trustees bought a farm of 60 acres in Overton and with its rents established Alport's Charity School in Malpas, which still flourishes. The old red-brick schoolhouse, bearing the Alport arms, still fronts the high road, with the modern school behind it.

So came to an end this line of the Alport family, which for two centuries and a half had maintained a status as substantial country gentlemen despite the blows of civil war and, it would seem, of ill-health. Whether this or insanitary conditions dogged their careers it is impossible to say but for the last three generations all its members died in early life and none attained a greater age than 50. This appears remarkable as the family from which they came is noted for longevity. Their memory still lingers in Malpas as the new and commodious schoolhouse provides the principal means of primary education for the youth of the town.

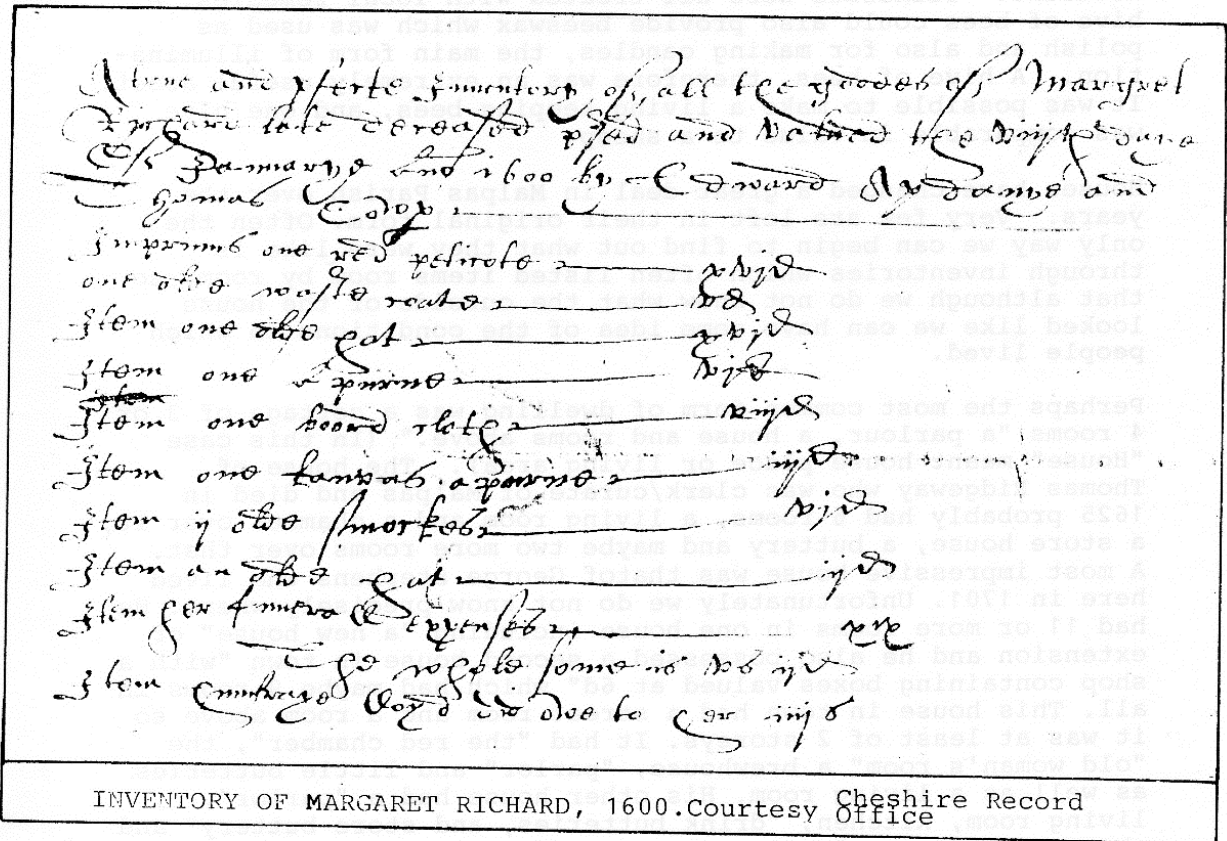
The Arms which Ormerod describes as those of Overton were those borne by this branch of the Alport family and assumed when they acquired Overton. They are not those borne by the Staffordshire branch.

The arms are blazoned (described) thus: The shield, bearing Gules, six pears slipped, three, two, and one, or: on a chief of the second a crescent sable, for difference, surmounted by the Crest, on a wreath gules and or, a man's hand gules holding a pear slipped or, the stock sable, the arms being impaled with those of Mainwaring (Argent two bar gules). Underneath, carved stone, another coat of two lion's gambes chevronwise between three lures, with a crest of a lure on a wreath.

# USING WILLS AND INVENTORIES TO DISCOVER MALPAS' PAST

Margaret Barker

Probate material, that is wills and inventories, can tell us a lot about the past inhabitants of Malpas and its surrounding villages. In the Calender of Wills in the Cheshire Record Office there are well over one hundred such documents listed and derived from almost every township. The earliest we have found to date is the will and inventory of John Dod of Cholmondeley dated 1565, when the Tudors were ruling England. Wills and Inventories are separate documents and by studying them we can learn about different aspects of peoples' lives. Wills can show land ownership and also family relationships. Before 1858 they came under the jurisdiction of church courts, although until 1750 it was not necessary to prove wills unless they were disputed. People with estates of less than £5 were not required to make a will but some did, so although wills give us mainly information about the richer people in the area the less wealthy are not entirely neglected.



Perhaps the most interesting documents are the many inventories that survive. They were lists of "goods chattels and cattells" that were valued on oath by neighbours or executors after a person's death as part of the process of obtaining probate of their moveable estate. This included things in the house, furniture, clothes etc as well as stock, and farming equipment. They first came into being after 1529 when a statute of Henry VIII required an inventory to be exhibited when probate was granted. The process of the making of inventories was declining by the mid 18th century. The Inventory of

Margaret Richard (see illustration) who lived in Iscoyd and died in 1600 looks very sad, "one olde hat, one olde waist-coat" etc. The total of her goods was valued at only 5s 2d. but she did have money for her funeral, which cost 19s., and Humphrey Lloyd owed her 4s. She was perhaps a widow and she maybe lived in a house with sons and daughters to whom she had given her possessions previously. A transcription of her Inventory will be found at the end of this article.

In years gone by the emphasis was much more on self-sufficiency than it is today. Many inventories list spinning wheels and looms among possessions. Others mention hemp and flax and sheep. So we can perhaps assume that people made linen and their own woollen clothes. Linen is often listed amongst goods of even the not so well off.

John Woer of Malpas who died in 1684 left his hive of bees to be shared between his two grand-daughters. Of course this was before the time of refined sugar. Honey was a natural sweetener and therefore much in demand. It was also used as a medicine. Illnesses were all treated with local remedies. A hive of bees could also provide beeswax which was used as polish and also for making candles, the main form of illumination. A hive of bees, therefore was an extremely useful asset. It was possible to make a living keeping bees, and one hive was comparable in value to a sheep.

Houses have changed a great deal in Malpas Parish over the years. Very few are left in their original form. Often the only way we can begin to find out what they were like is through inventories which often listed items room by room, so that although we do not know what the outside of the house looked like we can have some idea of the conditions in which people lived.

Perhaps the most common form of dwelling was a cottage of 3 or 4 rooms "a parlour, a house and rooms above." (In this case "House" meant house place or living area). The house of Thomas Ridgeway who was clerk/curate of Malpas and died in 1625 probably had 6 rooms, a living room and a chamber over it, a store house, a buttery and maybe two more rooms over that. A most impressive house was that of George Stephens who lived here in 1701. Unfortunately we do not know precisely where. He had 11 or more rooms in one house including "a new house" or extension and he also possessed a second house in town "with a shop containing boxes valued at 6d" which had maybe 9 rooms in all. This house in town had a street room and a room above so it was at least of 2 storeys. It had "the red chamber", the "old woman's room" a brewhouse, "parlor" and little butteries as well as a living room. His other house had a "parlor", living room, kitchen, "drink butteries, and store buttery" and above there was a "childrens chamber", a "parlor chamber", "a blew chamber" and a "kitchen chamber". The "blew chamber" contained 17 chairs, one pair of bedstockes, 3 featherbeds and furniture, 2 trunks, 2 desks, 1 table and "carpett", 5 boxes, 5 cushions, white ware and spoons. It must have been a very large room to contain such an assortment. But we do not know why he needed as many as 17 chairs! The "parlor" also contained 8 chairs and 4 stools and the "parlor chamber" 14 chairs.

George Stephens' occupation is given as a yeoman, which means one of the wealthier farmers. His inventory shows that he had a lot of agricultural goods, "4 plows and a Tumbrell, 4 Harrowes 3 carts" and also "A griddle Cop and tripples" whatever they are! His stock consisted of 4 horses, 9 cows, and 2 swine, with corn and hay. He also has a shop so he may have been involved in other business as well. He was clearly a fairly wealthy man for Malpas of 1701. He was buried in Malpas Churchyard on 12th July 1700 according to the Malpas Parish Registers.

This article is the briefest of introductions to probate material, much of which is written in Secretary hand and therefore has to be translated. Many of the words and terms have gone out of everyday use and have to be investigated. There is enough material from this source for years of future work and the contribution it will make to the history of the area should prove to be of considerable value.

### Sources

Calender of Wills and Inventories - Cheshire Record Office.

Wills and inventories transcribed by members of Malpas Field Club History Research Group members.

#### Margaret Richard of Malpas 1600

A true and perfecte Inventory of all the goodes of Margret Richard late Deceased pressed and valued the viijth daye of Januarye Ano 1600 by Edward Ap davye and Thomas Cowp.

Imprimis one red peticote	xvj <sup>d</sup>
One olde waste coate	vd
Item one olde hat	xvj <sup>d</sup>
Item one apurne	vj <sup>d</sup>
Item one boord cloth	viiij <sup>d</sup>
Item one kanvas apurne	iiij <sup>d</sup>
Item ij olde smockes	vj <sup>d</sup>
Item an olde hat	ij <sup>d</sup>
Item her funerall expenses	xix(s)

The whole some is v<sup>s</sup> ij<sup>d</sup>

Item humfraye lloyd did owe to her iiiij<sup>s</sup>

[Parish Register

Margaret Richard of Iscoyd

7 January 1600 Buried]



## "THOSE THAT WON'T COME SHAN'T SEE IT" THREAPWOOD RACES IN 1800

Research by Eddie Broad, Gerrard Barnes & David Hayns

One of the pleasures of sharing an interest in local history is that, so often, individuals investigating different subjects will come up with separate clues about something which none of them were really investigating but which clues, when put together, produce a totally unexpected story! The "re-discovery" of Threapwood Races is a good example.

About ten years ago, David Hayns came across a property sale plan (reproduced opposite) at the County Record Office in Chester Castle. It was in a bundle of solicitor's papers marked "Deeds relating to premises in Malpas". It appeared that the plan had been drawn to accompany the sale documents for the property shown as "No. 2". The style of writing suggests a date between 1800 and 1850. Of particular interest was the road described as "the old Race course". However, it was not until some years later, while out following footpaths in the Threapwood area, that he tied up the plan with the area around the patch of ground known today as "The Cinder Common", in Threapwood, lying between Lower House and Topwood. A former racecourse circuit would explain the curious green lane (now an overgrown public footpath) which runs in a rough semi-circle and which, together with the road, encloses Lower House.

Meanwhile, Gerrard Barnes was working painstakingly through the many volumes of "The Cheshire Sheaf", a "notes and queries" publication which first appeared in 1878, extracting all the information he could find relating to the parish of Malpas. During his searches he came across the following copy of a handbill ("Cheshire Sheaf", 1st Series, Vol. 3, No.2479):

**" WORTHENBURY WAKE  
AND  
T H R E A P W O O D R A C E S ,  
1800 ;**

Will be on **MONDAY** and **TUESDAY** the 29 th. and 30 th of September, 1800 :

On Monday the 29th. will be run for on the **HOLY LAND** at Thomas Hughes, a piece of Plate, value Fifty Pounds.

On Tuesday the 30th. will be run for, by Ponies at Jane Richards, a piece of Plate, value Fifty Pounds.

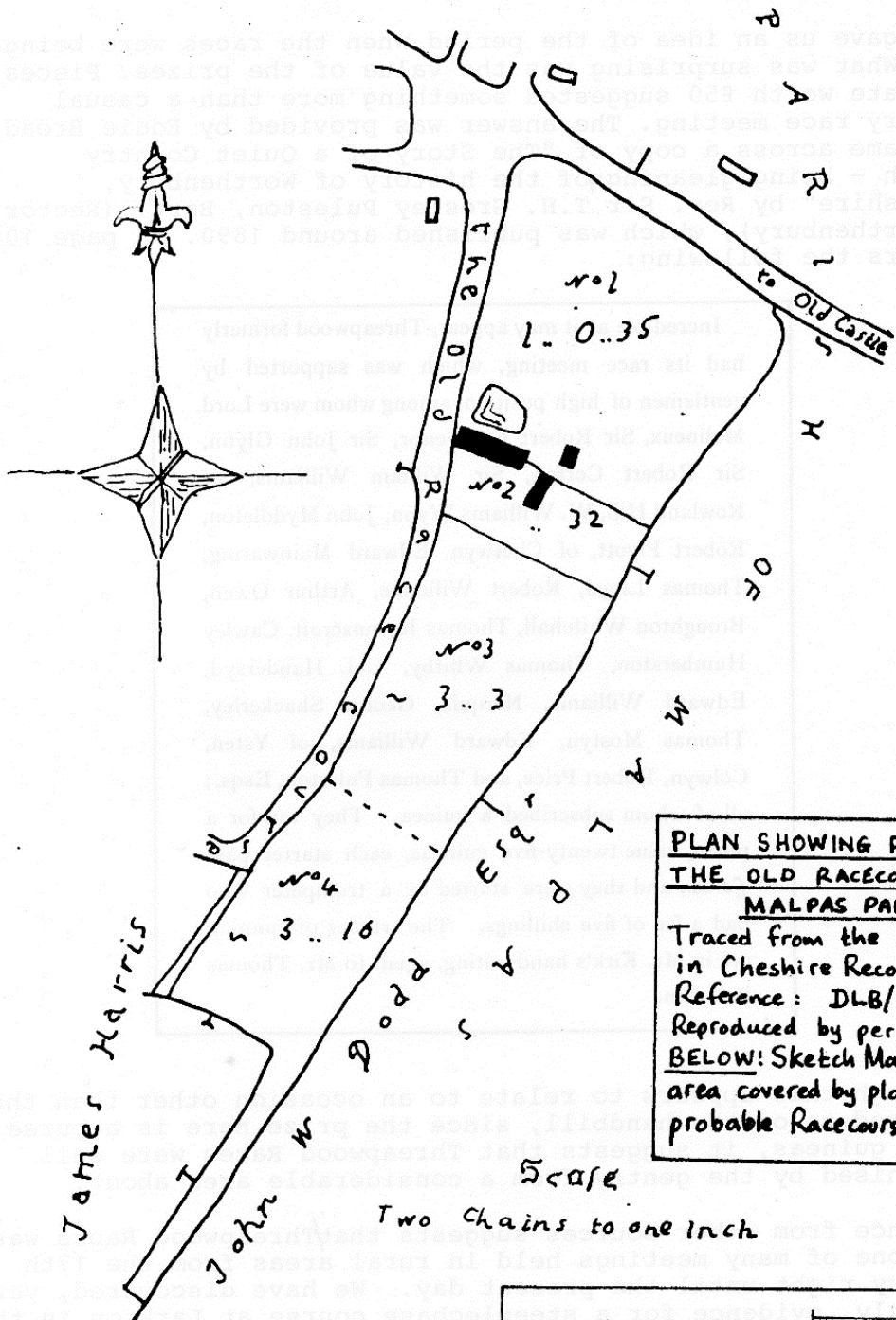
Each of the above plates are subject to Articles.

Every Horse to be entered on each Morning before eleven o'Clock, or pay double Entrance at the post, and start each Evening exactly at three o'clock. . . .  
Not less than three to start.

Balls, -- Assemblies, -- and great publick and private Diversions Bull and Bear Beating, as usual.

N, B. All Tailors seen on Horseback on the Course, will be taken up and whip[p]ed.

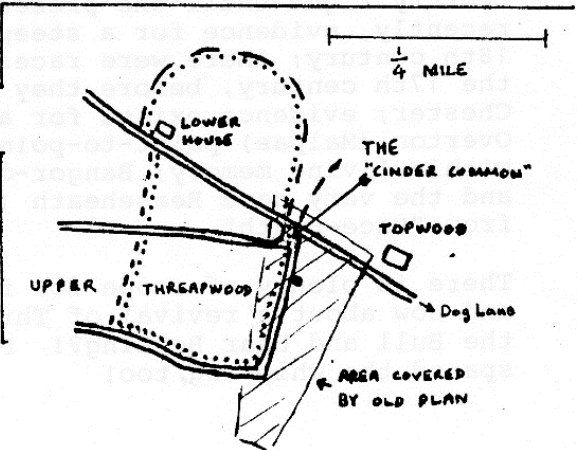
Those that won't come shan't see it."



**PLAN SHOWING PART OF THE OLD RACECOURSE IN MALPAS PARISH**  
 Traced from the original in Cheshire Record Office  
 Reference: DLB/1144/16.  
 Reproduced by permission.  
**BELOW:** Sketch Map to show area covered by plan and probable Racecourse circuit

**KEY TO SKETCH MAP ON RIGHT**

==	Present day roads	} All public rights of way
- -	Green lanes	
- - - -	Footpaths	
.....	Probable Racecourse circuit	



This gave us an idea of the period when the races were being run. What was surprising was the value of the prizes. Pieces of plate worth £50 suggested something more than a casual country race meeting. The answer was provided by Eddie Broad, who came across a copy of "The Story of a Quiet Country Parish - being gleanings of the history of Worthenbury, Flintshire" by Rev. Sir T.H. Gresley Puleston, Bart. (Rector of Worthenbury), which was published around 1890. On page 109 appears the following:

Incredible as it may appear, Threapwood formerly had its race meeting, which was supported by gentlemen of high position, among whom were Lord Molineux, Sir Robert Grosvenor, Sir John Glynn, Sir Robert Cotton, Sir William Williams, Sir Rowland Hill, W. Williams Wynn, John Myddleton, Robert Pigott, of Chetwyn, Edward Mainwaring, Thomas Lloyd, Robert Williams, Arthur Owen, Broughton Whitehall, Thomas Ravenscroft, Cawley Humberston, Thomas Whitby, Col. Handersyd, Edward Williams, Nerquis, George Shackerley, Thomas Mostyn, Edward Williams, of Ysten, Colwyn, Robert Price, and Thomas Puleston, Esqs.; all of whom subscribed a guinea. They ran for a purse, value twenty-five guineas, each starter paid £2 2s., and they were started by a trumpeter who had a fee of five shillings. The articles of running are in Mr. Kirk's handwriting, agent to Mr. Thomas Puleston.

Although this appears to relate to an occasion other than that referred to on the handbill, since the prize here is a purse of 25 guineas, it suggests that Threapwood Races were well patronised by the gentry from a considerable area about.

Evidence from other sources suggests that Threapwood Races was only one of many meetings held in rural areas from the 17th century right until the present day. We have discovered, very recently, evidence for a steeplechase course at Larkton in the 18th century; there were races on the river bank at Farndon in the 17th century, before they transferred to the Roodee at Chester; evidence exists for a racecourse on Bunbury Heath; Overton (Malpas) point-to-point and Tarporley races were held within living memory; Bangor-on-Dee races are still flourishing and the very name Reaseheath (Nantwich) is supposedly derived from "Race-Heath".

There is plenty of scope for further research into the subject - and how about a revival of Threapwood Races, preferably without the Bull and Bear Beating?! Perhaps the tailors could be spared the whipping, too!



AN ESTABLISHMENT THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN BUSY DURING THREAPWOOD RACES.  
The former Threapwood Smithy, now Arrowsmith's Garage.  
Photograph kindly lent by Mr and Mrs J.A. Arrowsmith.



MALPAS GIRL'S SCHOOL  
EMPIRE DAY c. 1920



MALPAS WOMEN'S INSTITUTE MEMBERS' DAY 1924