

## TALES OF OLD MALPAS

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David Hayns

I remember learning, when I was a young boy, what would no doubt be considered today to be a 'politically incorrect', perhaps even racist, rhyme which ran: *'Taffy was a Welshman / Taffy was a thief / Taffy came to my house / And stole a leg of beef'*. However, I was taught it by a primary school teacher named Derek Evans – no prizes for guessing his nationality! To a child such as myself, growing up in the south-east of England, the words meant little. Since I have become interested in the history of the part of Cheshire where I have lived for over 50 years, in the former market town of Malpas close to the Welsh border, I have come to understand their significance.

Folk memory of early cross-border conflict is preserved in the local legend surrounding the Iron Age hill fort of Maiden Castle on the crest of the Bickerton Hills, part of the mid-Cheshire Sandstone Ridge. The hill-fort, where the surviving earthworks lie just under four miles as the crow flies from Malpas church, offers wonderful views across the Dee valley to the Clwydian hills. The folk who are thought to have lived there would have belonged to the Celtic people known as the Cornovii, whose tribal headquarters were originally on the Wrekin in Shropshire. The name Maiden Castle is popularly thought to hark back to a time when the men of the community were away, and the women feared that an attack was imminent from the wild tribes who lived west of the Dee. The quick thinking women dressed themselves in bright red cloaks and paraded themselves on the crest of the hill. From a distance, the marauding Welshmen thought that they were the men of the hill fort, dressed in their battle robes. Considering the opposition to be too strong for them, the attackers turned tail and fled back home. The real explanation for the name is rather less exciting and is thought to

mean 'an unused castle', dating from after the time when Maiden Castle had been abandoned. However, another intriguing interpretation of the name suggests that it means 'old fortification offering a privacy where maidens may indulge their fancy'!

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One Cheshire community which was wary of the Welshmen in medieval times was Nantwich, in those days the main Cheshire centre for production of salt from natural brine springs. The Welsh traders who came to the town to buy that precious commodity, essential for such purposes as preserving meat through the winter months, were not allowed to cross the bridge over the River Weaver into the town itself. Instead they had to lodge and to carry out their business in the street still known today as Welsh Row, one of the approach roads for the town. Having purchased their supplies, the traders would have made their way back into Wales along Welshman's Street, the former name of the road which is now the modern A.534. With their loads mounted on a string of sturdy ponies, they would have either carried on down to cross the packhorse bridge over the Dee at Farndon, or diverted through Malpas to travel via Worthenbury and cross the river at Bangor bridge.

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The present-day town of Malpas straddles the line of the former Roman military road from Hadrian's Wall, via Chester (Deva), Whitchurch (Mediolanum) and Wroxeter (Uriconium), to Richborough (Rutupiae) in Kent. The town is an early medieval settlement which came into being soon after the Norman Conquest of 1066. The name comes from the Norman French *mal-pas*, meaning 'bad/difficult road'. It was the central township for an extensive ancient parish comprising twenty-five townships in all. The town itself lies roughly in the same area as the former Saxon

settlement of Depenbech, meaning 'deep hollow', which is recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086.

Following the Norman Conquest of 1066, it was in exchange for keeping the Marcher lands under control that local Norman lords were permitted to build castles for themselves, such as those at Malpas, Shocklach, Aldford and Dodleston. Many of the mottes on which the wooden castle keeps were constructed still survive all along the Welsh border, as grassy mounds.

The Norman lords were allowed to lay out new settlements, such as Malpas and possibly Aldford, with licences to hold fairs and markets, from which they pocketed the tolls, and to rent off the land as burgage plots, where the local burghers could build their houses. In return for these privileges they were expected to keep the peace in the Marches and to defend the area against the marauding Welsh. Among other privileges granted to the Malpas barons was the right to summarily execute wrongdoers. This was known as *'the custom of Malpas'*. Fortunately the custom is no longer observed!

In 1281 King Edward 1<sup>st</sup> granted a charter to *'Philip Burnel and to Isabel, his wife, that they and their heirs shall have for ever a weekly market on Mondays at their manor of Maupus in the county of Chester, and a fair in the same place to last for three days each year'*. The Cross, possibly with some of its medieval steps surviving but now surmounted by a memorial to a Victorian rector, is a reminder of the weekly market and the livestock fairs that were held here until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Cheshire communities like Malpas which lay right in the Welsh *Marches* or borderlands – the term 'march' is derived from the old word 'mere', meaning a boundary - were always aware of the 'Welshmen at the gate'. Around 1300 a request was made to the rectors of Malpas to allow the rites of baptism and burial to be

celebrated at Cholmondeley Chapel, Cholmondeley being one of the Malpas townships, because:

*'... the dead in time of war are buried in the fields, because the church of Malpas is so near Wales that part of the parish belongs to the Welsh and part to the English. Wherefore the English dare not go with their dead to the said church of Malpas in time of war [with the Welsh]. And likewise at one time it happened that no Englishman dared to come to the said parish church on Easter day to receive the body of Christ for fear of the Welsh'.*

A court case around 1370 concerned *'Madok ap Gruffyd ap Jorweth ap Atha, Yollyn ap Dogan and Tolla ap Meillour'* who, accompanied by five others with equally Welsh-sounding names, *'... came to Cheshire from Flintshire, with armed force, and assaulted John Rathebon with drawn bows and arrows at Agden (another Malpas township) against the peace on Monday 22 October 1369, and seized Margery, the widow of David Caderout, who was in John's company, against her will and abducted her into Flintshire'.*

What happened subsequently to poor Margery and whether she ever returned from Flintshire, the records do not tell.

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The impressive 14<sup>th</sup> century parish church, dedicated to Saint Oswald, probably had its origin as the private chapel to the castle, for which the only surviving evidence is the massive mound or *motte* adjacent to the church. Enlarged in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when it received its magnificent roof with painted and gilded ceiling, the church served the large ecclesiastical parish of Malpas until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, from when the ancient parish became divided into the five smaller ecclesiastical parishes of Malpas, Bickerton, Bickley, Tushingham-cum-Grindley and Whitewell.

The castle motte may not be entirely in its original form, since it contains a reservoir constructed in the 1830s at the expense of the Drake and Cholmondeley families, as part of a scheme to provide Malpas with its first piped water supply. The metal dome in the road by the Cross covers a valve which was also part of this scheme. On the motte would have been the wooden castle keep, and the boundaries of the present churchyard are probably the same as those of the castle's outer section or *bailey*. The castle was the headquarters of the large and powerful Barony of Malpas, originally granted by the Earl of Chester to his bastard son Robert fitzHugh, not long after the Norman Conquest.

The Barons had the right to nominate the Rector of Malpas and, possibly owing to a divided inheritance between two female successors, Malpas became one of the few parishes to have two rectors, from early medieval times until 1885, when the two rectories were re-combined. The divided rectory was an uncommon, but not a unique, situation. It probably arose from the time when the Baron had no male heir but did have two daughters, both of whom were entitled to 'nominate' a Rector. However, another explanation is provided by the legend that King James I (or King John), while travelling around the country in disguise in order to have a look at what his subjects were up to, arrived at the Red Lion Inn at Malpas. A 19th century Rector of Malpas wrote a poem to describe what happened next:

***THE TWO RECTORS***

(Tune: Too-re-lay. Start on middle C)

***Reverend Philip Egerton***

***(Sir Philip de Grey-Egerton – Higher Rector 1804-1829)***

*A tale I will tell you, and though it be long,  
I trust it will prove an excuse for my song,  
How the parish of Malpas two rectors can boast,  
One of whom claims the honour of being your host.*

*One day as King John was proceeding at leisure,  
To view the Welsh mountains from this side of Cheshire,  
To the Lion at Malpas in. cog. he came down,  
With a travelling cap on instead of his crown.*

*The landlady curtsied, the landlord he bowed,  
As the monarch, dismounting, advanced through the crowd,  
For he looked just like one of those men of renown  
Who bring samples from London to each country town.*

*To a neat little parlour they straightway repair,  
And place in due order the great elbow chair,  
Which chair at this day is in mighty request,  
And a penny is paid by each down-sitting guest.*

*Odds fish, quoth the king, since to mirth I incline,  
And am loth to sit down by myself here to dine,  
In this populous town is there ne'er a brave chief  
To partake of a chop or a collop of beef?*

*The landlord replied, there's the apothecary,  
Who oft cracks a joke o'er a glass of old sherry;  
And, besides, there's the Rector and Curate also,  
Who enjoy a good dinner wherever they go.*

*The doctor was gone out to visit a patient,  
The Curate was young, the Rector was ancient,  
So the one to the Lion tripped down in a canter  
And announced that the other would presently enter.*

*They ate and they drank, and were merry and gay,  
Till the twilight of evening succeeded the day,  
And when of good cheer they had all had their fill,  
The rubicund landlord stepped in with his bill.*

*The Curate proposed, in the joy of his heart,  
That himself and the Rector should each pay their part,  
And because their strange guest had promoted such glee,  
To permit him to pass on his journey scot free.*

*But the Rector exclaimed, I'll ne'er pay for such knaves,  
For 'tis fit that each tub should stand on its own staves,  
So divide the account, not by two, but by three,  
And we'll rub off the score in an equal degree.*

*Half asleep with his eyes, wide awake with his ears,  
The King what the clergy had said overhears,  
And discovering himself to the utter dismay  
Of the Rector, he thus to the Curate did say:-*

*Kind sir, while I rule o'er this land, your regard  
For a stranger like me shall not lose its reward;  
But whene'er with a traveller you sit cheek by jowl,  
You shall have wherewithal to replenish the bowl.*

*Now the King loved a pun, so he added in jest,  
Whilst they listened with care to the Royal bequest,  
If I were to share my possessions with you,  
It is plain half a crown would be all that's your due.*

*I therefore desire, and do it with pride,  
That you with his reverence the tithes will divide,  
And thus though old Troy could ne'er boast of two Hectors,  
The parish of Malpas may boast of two Rectors.*

*And now my tale's ended, before I retire,  
As your minstrel this boon in return I require,  
That each British Bowman in chorus will sing,  
Here's a long happy reign to our patron the King.*

The two 'livings', meaning the posts of each of the rectors, were known as the 'Higher' Rectory or Mediety and the 'Lower' Rectory or Mediety. The word mediety means one of two approximately equal parts. The Higher Rector lived at the old rectory, which is now a private house and the Lower Rector lived at the house, until recently known as *The Bolling*, in Church Street. The present rector lives in a

modern house built in the 1980s, in the grounds of the old Higher rectory.

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The greater portion of the Barony passed eventually to the Brereton family, the rest being mainly in the hands of the Cholmondeleys, with a smaller portion going to the Egertons. The Brereton and Cholmondeley families are represented by two superb alabaster chest tombs in the church. They are located in the Cholmondeley and Brereton chapels at the east ends of the north and south aisles, respectively. One of the children depicted on the Brereton tomb, which commemorates Sir Randle, who died in 1530, and his wife Eleanor, is William, the sixth son, who became Groom of the Privy Chamber to Henry VIII and accumulated considerable possessions in Cheshire and the Marches. It may have been jealousy on the part of his enemies at Court which led to him being falsely accused, along with others, of adultery with Anne Boleyn. He was executed on Tower Hill in May 1536. He appears as a character in Hilary Mantel's prize-winning novels *Wolf Hall* (2010) and *Bring Up the Bodies* (2012).

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The Breretons were involved also with the founding of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Malpas Grammar School, originally financed partly from the revenues of the salt works in the nearby hamlets of Higher and Lower Wych. The school, where until the 18<sup>th</sup> century all the teaching would have been in Latin, survived until 1903. During the Civil Wars in the 1640s the salt works were destroyed by Parliamentary soldiers from the garrison at Nantwich, who slept overnight in Malpas church. The Brereton tomb escaped damage at their hands because the Parliamentary commander in Cheshire was Sir William Brereton, of the Handforth branch of the family. The only Civil War actions of any consequence in the area took place in 1644. In July of that year Cholmondeley House, a Royalist garrison, was assaulted and taken by Brereton's Nantwich forces and the next month they completely routed Royalist troops camped on Oldcastle Heath, about two miles

from Malpas, killing over sixty of them. The Royalists were in retreat from the Battle of Marston Moor, in Yorkshire.

In 1636 Sir Thomas Brereton, a descendant of Sir Randle, founded and endowed one of the two sets of Malpas almshouses, intended originally to house poor elderly persons. Lord Cholmondeley had them rebuilt in 1721. They were subsequently remodelled, in 1955 into four dwellings, then in 2001 into the two dwellings in Church Street now known as Cholmondeley Terrace. The six Wigfield almshouses in Chester Road were endowed in 1854 by the Reverend Henry Wigfield of Bickerton. They too have recently been remodelled, and re-named Wigfield Terrace.

Another local family which felt the effects of the Civil Wars was the Alports of nearby Overton Hall. Richard Alport, a Royalist, fell into debt by lending money to support the King, had his estates confiscated by the Parliamentarians, and was sent to London's Fleet prison. On his release in 1648 he came back to a ruined and plundered house. Today it is restored as a substantial residence which, until fairly recently, was the house for a farm renowned for the quality of its Cheshire cheese.

It was Richard Alport's grandson, another Richard, who in his will left £500 to endow a Bluecoat charity school in Malpas. The school opened in 1745 and the present primary school is still known as the Alport Endowed School, although the original 18<sup>th</sup> century school building in Tilston Road has been converted for domestic use.

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We now jump 86 years, into the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Before Malpas Parish Council was formed, following the 1894 Local Government Act, the affairs of the town were conducted by the local ratepayers who met together as the *Town* or *Vestry* meeting. In those days the rates were collected by the church, for such purposes as maintaining the roads, relieving the poor and keeping law and order. The Town Meeting was under the ultimate control of the church, and

one of the two Malpas Rectors was Chairman, by right. Among the minutes of the meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1831 there is a copy of a letter in which the ratepayers of the Parish of Malpas requested the churchwardens to call a meeting of the parish *'for the purpose of taking into consideration the best method of supplying [fire] Engines for the use of the Parish'*. This shows that, in those times, the churchwardens had a number of 'civil' duties in addition to their work in looking after the church's affairs and its building. Following the meeting, an order was sent to Messrs Tilley & Company in London for *'2 Engines of the Second Class of twelve men power upon the improved principle, with six lengths of improved pipe ... One dozen of leather buckets at £5.10s.0d per dozen for each Engine. The Engines to be upon Block Wheels'*. The two engines were brought by canal to Wheelock Wharf, near Sandbach, then by road to Malpas. One was to be based in Malpas, the other at the 'Egerton Arms' at Broxton, on the opposite side of the road to the modern 'Egerton Arms'. Volunteers would have taken the horse-drawn engines out to fires and pumped them by hand, drawing water from farm pits, ponds and streams.

By the time that Malpas and Broxton Parish Councils were formed in 1894, the Malpas engine was in a sorry state, due to heavy use both on farms and on buildings in the town, whereas the Broxton engine was still serviceable. Each parish council agreed to take responsibility for its respective engine. Malpas Parish Council bought a new engine in 1895 and housed it in a wooden shed next to the Jubilee Hall, where the modern drive leads to the hall's car park. Broxton Parish Council constructed a brick and slate shed for their engine and this still stands by the Old Coach Road, immediately opposite the entrance to Frogg Manor Hotel. The stone plaque over the door reads *'B.F.B. [Broxton Fire Brigade] 1895'*. It appears that the Broxton engine continued to be operated by volunteers whereas Malpas decided to employ a paid part-time uniformed brigade. Malpas Parish Council ran the brigade, with some replacement of engines, right until 1930, when it was taken over by Malpas Rural District Council. In 1934 the Rural District

Council built a new fire station, now the Old Fire Station bistro, in the High Street.

Underneath one of the side windows of the Jubilee Hall, by the drive, can still be seen the brickwork filling the space where the key to the 1895 engine shed was once kept behind a glass panel. When the fire alarm was raised the first person to arrive at the engine shed would smash the glass and open the doors, ready for the horses to be hitched up. The firemen and horses were summoned by a bugle, which hung in the engine shed. There are two stories connected with that bugle, which is still preserved in the modern fire station. On a Sunday in June 1915, during World War One, a recruiting meeting for the army was held at The Cross in Malpas. Just as residents were returning from their various places of worship a rallying bugle call, given by a boy scout from Crewe, sounded through the town and was mistaken by many as the call-out signal for the Fire Brigade. People gathered round The Cross, expecting to see the firemen turn out. The other story tells of the rag-and-bone man who came to town with his bugle to attract the attention of the residents. When he blew it the firemen ran from their workplaces or houses to find that there was no fire! The unfortunate rag-and-bone man was taken before the Broxton magistrates and fined ten shillings (50 pence) for disturbing the peace.

The Broxton Parish Council engine was not so heavily used as the Malpas engine and went out only occasionally, mainly to minor farm fires. There were not any regular firemen and it may be that the victims of fires had to fetch the engine and operate it themselves, making a payment for its use. Eventually, in 1932, the engine was sold to the Bolesworth Estate for around £7.10s.0d (£7.50) and the engine shed was let by the parish council for an annual rent of £2.12s.0d (£2.60). Enquiries to the Bolesworth Estate office suggest that the engine no longer exists.

The fire service in Malpas has been through many changes of organisation and administration over years since those first Tilley

engines were brought up the canal from London in 1831. We are fortunate in that we can continue to benefit from the services of the Malpas Fire Brigade (now part of the Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service), operating from its modern fire station in Chester Road.

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*‘Except for the newspapers and the enhanced price of many commodities there would be little to indicate that a war was in progress so far as Malpas is concerned .... The men in several instances who had come into the town to hear the news, saw the proclamation posted up on the post office doors, and without a word they jumped on to their cycles, and left to fight for King and country’* That news item appeared in the Whitchurch Herald for 8th August 1914.

Even allowing for journalistic licence, that press report made me feel quite emotional as I started on my research for a booklet about *Malpas and the Great War*, published in 1993 to mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armistice. The number of local studies of life on the home front during major conflicts continues to grow. Inevitably this brings those researching them into contact with stories about the experiences of local men and women who were involved in the actual fighting abroad.

An author who specialises in researching the subject is James W Bancroft, whose series of *Local Heroes* titles includes *The Light Brigade at Balaclava*. One of his subjects is John Palin, born in Malpas in 1828, who enrolled in the 4<sup>th</sup> Light Dragoons. He was among the 673 men, Tennyson’s ‘six hundred’, who rode ‘into the valley of death’, during the Crimean War action at Balaclava in 1854. About 250 were killed but Palin *‘was the last mounted man to return of the entire brigade. His rolled cloak was riddled with bullet holes, and two balls had passed through his water flask which hung by his side’*. Later in life he worked as a cab driver in Altrincham and *‘before he lost his teeth was a favourite at local entertainments as a reciter of ‘The Charge of the Light Brigade’!*

Not all of the stories which came back from the various military fronts were heroic or horrific. Some were comic, others rather poignant. A Malpas man who took part in the South African war, previously known as the 'Boer' war, was George Chesworth. With Arthur Caldecott, also from Malpas, he became 'news' even before he left England. This was the result of an incident at Aldershot, where the men received their initial training, reported in verse in *The Whitchurch Herald* in March 1901. The two had become involved in a drunken affray but got off lightly.

***THE MALPAS YEOMEN AT ALDERSHOT***  
(from '*The Whitchurch Herald*' March 1901)

*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 might 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!*

When George returned home to Malpas in 1902, he was invited to a dinner in honour of himself and the other local volunteer members of the Cheshire Yeomanry who had served in South Africa. It seems that he was asked to give an after-dinner speech about his experiences

and, as an *aide memoire*, he wrote this out in a school exercise book. The book still survives locally. From it we know that George took part in several expeditions in search of parties of Boers. Skirmishes and running fights with the enemy are described and the notes suggest that he gave a good account of himself on each occasion.

In the 'poignant' category are the verses sent home from the front by Lance-corporal R G Lee of the King's Royal Rifles. The Lance-corporal was a son of the licensees of the 'Durham Heifer' at Broxton. His verses were published in the 'Chester Chronicle' in January 1915 under the title *A Soldier's Poem*. They are addressed to the girl he left behind in the Malpas township of Broxton:

*'But when I am far away dear, others may whisper love to you/But think of the boy who is fighting for his country and for you! ..... Think of me sometimes, darling, and when the conflict is o'er/I am coming back to claim you, for my own and evermore!'*

It was of the same Broxton, where he spent childhood holidays with his aunt, that Wilfred Owen, a far better known war poet, wrote later in life. '*... Broxton, by the Hill / Where first I felt my boyhood fill / With uncontainable movements; there was born / My poethood*'. One is led to wonder what muse floats upon the Broxton air?

In 1985 I was grateful to receive from the late Ian Rowbotham of Hyde a list of 23 Malpas men who fought in the various campaigns against Napoleon. Among these was Hugh Parbutt, who is remembered twice over in Malpas. His 1861 gravestone, recording him as a sergeant in the 59<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot, stands in the parish churchyard while, just across the road, the lane where his shoemaker's shop stood is still called 'Parbutts Lane'. Mr Rowbotham's researches show that Hugh had received the Military General Service Medal and was part of '*that astonishing infantry*', as it was described by General Napier, which helped to defeat the French at Albuhera in 1811, during the Peninsular Wars.

Finally, a story from the days of the Second World War, which some may recall, even if just as a hazy infant memory. It was a sad sign of the declining activity which has affected many local voluntary organisations when Malpas Women's Institute closed down in 1995. Malpas had been one of the earliest WIs formed in this country but, like other voluntary organisations in recent years, reached the stage where it could not find sufficient candidates for the all-important officer posts of secretary and treasurer. Since then a number of other WI branches in our part of Cheshire have closed for similar reasons. Fortunately, the Malpas WI committee had the foresight to deposit their records, covering 1919-1995, in the Cheshire Record Office. The documents were very useful when I decided in 2005 to write a booklet called *Malpas and the Home Front*. about the area during the second World War. The WI books cast a very interesting sidelight on activities in the town during those years. For instance, the reports of speakers give an indication of how rationing and other restrictions affected the home economy. When Mrs Hands, from the Ministry of Food, visited the WI she demonstrated the preparation of four dishes '*and members gained lots of profitable information, as to the use of left-overs, dried eggs and dried milk*'. Miss Constantine came to demonstrate '*how to do household jobbery. Owing to the fact that there is a shortage of workmen, keen interest was taken in how to put on a washer, put in wall plugs, mend carpets, wash blankets, and repair a fuse*'. Subjects covered by other speakers and demonstrators included poultry keeping in wartime, 'make do and mend', wartime gardening, and dressmaking. Competitions at the monthly meetings included a '*supper dish for four persons not to cost more than 6d [2½p]*', '*best dish made from potatoes*' and '*best scones using a Ministry of Food recipe*'.

Although Malpas lay directly under the line taken by German aircraft as they flew to bomb Liverpool, the town escaped relatively unscathed by the effects of enemy action. However, during the night of 10<sup>th</sup> November 1940 rural Cheshire suffered its worst bombing, shaking the local population out of any complacency which may have

developed. In response to this 'night of terror' the Malpas WI set up a committee '*to feed people bombed out of their homes if necessary*'.

Plans for evacuation of children and mothers from urban areas at risk from bombing were put into effect right at the beginning of the war in September 1939. The Women's Voluntary Service took the lead in putting the plans into action, involving both the Women's Institutes and Girl Guides in national and local committees to oversee the operation. Malpas WI had a talk from the local evacuee billeting officer in January 1940 and the following May provided volunteers to prepare a hostel in Malpas, at *The Beeches*, designed to house children who, mainly due to medical or behavioural difficulties, could not be billeted in private houses. The records show further involvement when in November 1941 the WI members helped to provide a tea-party for local evacuees and, in the following January, when they formed a sewing party to make clothes for evacuee children.

Across the country an important contribution made by Women's Institutes was the establishment of Fruit Preservation Centres, set up after the introduction of jam rationing in February 1941. By the end of the war nearly 6,000 such centres had been set up by local branches, many of them using one of the 500 canning machines presented by the women of America. In the summer of 1941, 13,000 tons of fruit were saved by the scheme from being wasted and were turned into 2,000 tons of jam. The government supplied the sugar and, where necessary, paid for the fruit. The women volunteers who did the work were not allowed to buy a single jar of their own products and each jar had to be full to the brim as it would be sold as part of someone's ration. Among the Malpas WI records is a volume recording the daily output for July to November 1941 of the centre which had been set up in the Malpas WI room in Church Street. There the members would meet from 9.30 am to 6.00 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays, processing prodigious quantities of fruit and vegetables to produce jams, canned fruits and chutneys. Local residents were

encouraged to bring in produce, either wild or cultivated in their gardens, to sell to the WI. The fruits used most frequently for jams were gooseberries and damsons, both common in Cheshire gardens; plums, rhubarb, raspberries, redcurrants, blackberries, bilberries from the nearby Bickerton Hills, and apples. Bottled fruits and vegetables included pears, apples, damsons and tomatoes; and chutneys were made using marrows, apples, onions and tomatoes. The production of a hundredweight (50 kg) of chutney on one day in October must have saturated the streets of Malpas with vinegar fumes!

Later the branch elected to take part in another government backed scheme and in June 1943 became licensed as '*A Catering Establishment for the sale to agricultural workers of Meat Pies or Meat Products under the Meat Pie Scheme*'. The pie scheme, launched in 1941, was a sort of rural equivalent to the British Restaurants which were located in urban areas, and enabled the distribution of meat and fruit pies to village centres for sale to workers in the fields.

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So I finish telling a few of my 'Tales of Old Malpas', which form just a small part of the fascinating history of the place where Jill and I have lived since 1967. There are many more tales to be told about the town's past and no doubt many more will be created in the future. As with any community, the history of Malpas is the history not of buildings and institutions but of the countless people who have lived here and walked its streets, since the Normans arrived and created the town some eleven centuries ago.