

TONY BOSTOCK'S HISTORY NOTES: DAVENHAM

MERE HEATH, DAVENHAM

The Mere Heath area of Davenham had existed until comparatively recent times as an area of unenclosed land on which local freeholders had rights to graze their animals and take various necessities. The heath takes its name from the word 'mere' meaning boundary as it forms the boundaries with Eaton, Moulton and Bostock. At one time this area perhaps covered almost half of the township to the south and west but was subsequently reduced in size as encroachments and inclosures were made with the consent of the lord of the manor.

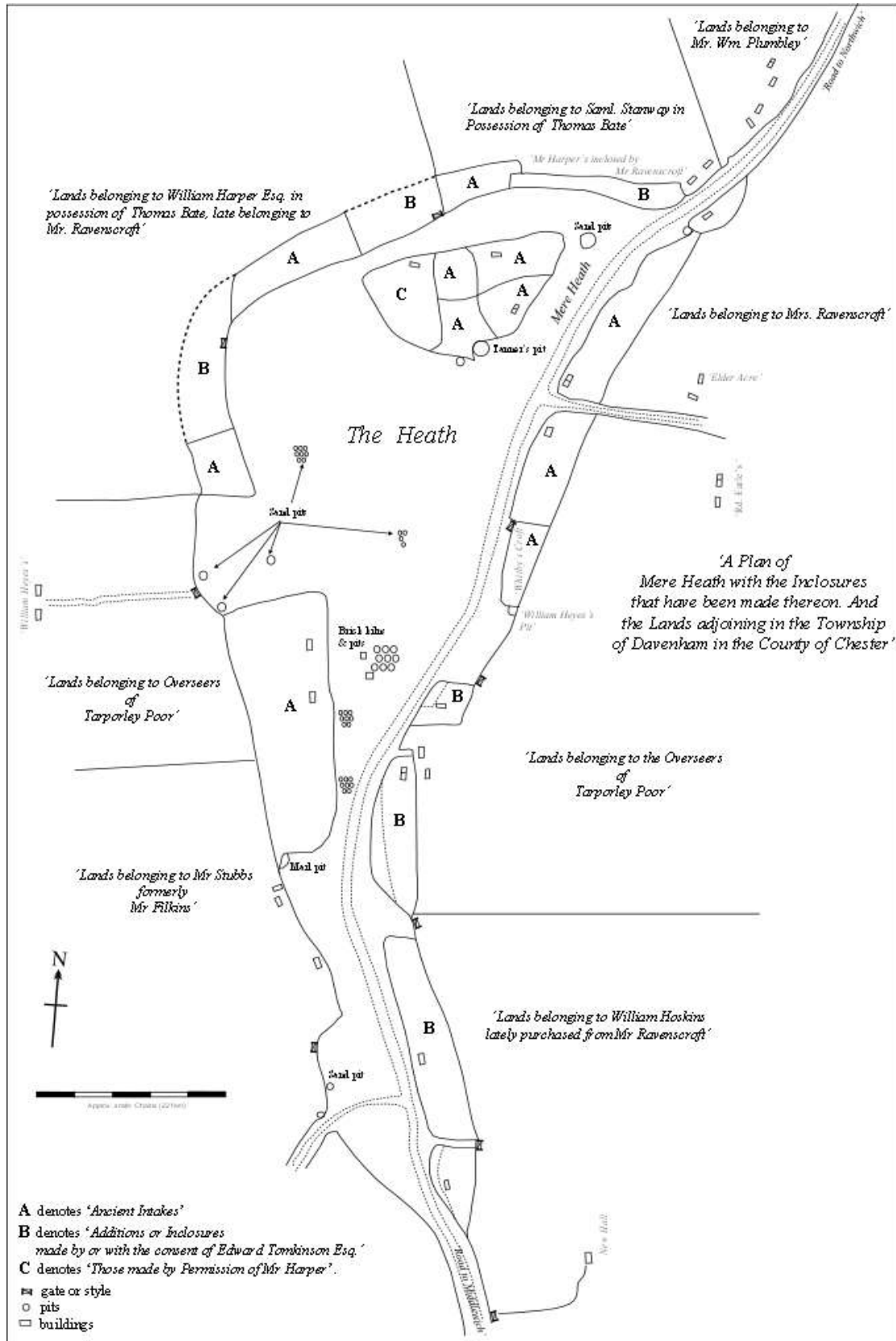
At the beginning of the nineteenth century Mere Heath consisted of about twelve acres of unenclosed land. A plan of the heath made at some time early in the first decade of the nineteenth century, and shortly after William Harper of Everton, Liverpool, had purchased his estate in Davenham, shows inclosures at that time.¹ The plots marked were of three categories: those described as 'Ancient' and held by lease from the lord of the manor; those made with the permission of Edward Tomkinson of Bostock Hall during the late eighteenth century; and those made with the permission of William Harper during the early years of the nineteenth century. The various plots are placed around the perimeter of the heath with an island of inclosures at the northern end. With the exception of the western end, which was enclosed by William Harper, the 'island' enclosures had been made at an early period. It is interesting to note the 'S' shaped field boundaries which may reflect early strip ploughing, first in one direction and then the other. On the southern side of this same area there was an old pit filled with 'much water' known as the 'Tanner's Pit' which may refer back to the occupation of a tenant of this land, perhaps back to the 1660s when Ralph Richardson, tanner, is listed as a tax payer.

The heath was strewn with pits from which sand and brick making material were extracted: some of these were at the time filled with water: one old pit was said to have been a marl pit. An interesting reference is to materials being extracted from two groups of pits at the southern end near the junction with Jack Lane, in order to raise the level of the road which ran across the heath connecting Northwich and Middlewich. Two brick making kilns are marked at the southern end of the heath alongside several 'brick pits'. These kilns were probably brick built structures of a size which would have made them noticeable in the landscape.

In many of the enclosed plots of land and in the surrounding fields there are rectangular symbols denoting buildings, some of which are divided indicating two dwellings. Each symbol is numbered and was apparently referenced to particulars written in an accompanying brief that unfortunately no longer survives. In all there are twelve such symbols on enclosed plots and a further sixteen on land surrounding the heath.

Using this plan in conjunction with the tithe map of 1840 and other smaller plans of two particular estates, along with land tax returns and tithe returns for 1824 and 1840, it is possible to build a picture of Mere Heath in the first half of the nineteenth century and the people who lived here.

¹ Cheshire Record Office (CRO): DFN 2705/262



MERE HEATH c. 1805

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possible to build a picture of Mere Heath in the first half of the nineteenth century and the people who lived here.

About 1810, on the rectangular plot at the southern end of the heath, William Harper, then resident at Davenham Lodge (later to be called Davenham Hall), built a new house which was later to be called 'Davenham Cottage'. Previously there had been two buildings on this plot which were presumably pulled down. A plan of the site of the new house in relation to Mere Heath shows some surrounding fields with acreages given in both statute and Cheshire measure.² These fields, totalling almost thirty-six acres, including the heath itself, were to be linked to form a new farm worked from the house at the opposite end of the heath and known then as 'New Farm'³. A few years later the Davenham Cottage plot was widened towards the road to contain almost three and a half acres of land, the additional land being wood plantation to form what was later described as 'Pleasure Grounds and Gardens'. Following William Harper's death in 1815 this property was occupied by James Tomkinson (born in Reaseheath in 1788), his wife Rebecca and their servants. This member of the Tomkinson family was son of Reverend James Tomkinson (1739-1819), rector of Davenham, and nephew of Edward Tomkinson; he served as an officer in the 17th Light Dragoons. James Tomkinson also owned the triangular set of fields south of Jack Lane: he died without children in 1860.

A few years after John Hosken Harper of Davenham Lodge (William Harper's son-in-law) succeeded as lord of the manor of Davenham, he negotiated with local land owners and freeholders for the inclosure of the remaining parts of Mere Heath amounting to almost twelve and a quarter acres. In order to do so he had to pay various amounts to fourteen people who had rights here: Samuel Andrews, James Butter, John Carter, Samuel Cliff, William Eccles, John Foster, Thomas Higginson, Matthew Hulme, John Lightfoot, John Lownes, Samuel Standley, Hannah Trim, Richard Vickers, and William Whitley.⁴ This land was said to be worth £19 11s 7½d a year with a capital value of £595 16s 3d less a royalty of £59 11 7½d. A plan of the intended plots was drawn up but seemingly never executed in full as by 1840 the majority of the expanse remained as a single seven acre field, and continued to be so well into the last century. The only areas to be enclosed were several plots at the north end around the 'ancient' island of inclosure, and, after 1824, a plot at the southern end at the junction with Jack Lane.

The three acre plot at the southern end of Mere Heath became known as Ivy House Farm. To this was assigned six fields totalling twelve acres of land which at the time of the Mere Heath survey was owned by a Mr Stubbs of Malpas, and formerly by a Mr Filkin. By the 1820s these same fields were occupied by Ralph Kennerdale (or Kennerley) of Mereheath Farm.⁵ By 1840 the extent of Ivy House Farm was reduced to 11½ acres with the loss of 'Far Kennerley's Field' being transferred back to Mereheath Farm then tenanted by William Hancock.

Mereheath Farm on the boundary with Moulton may have been a very early enclosure of the heath lands. This estate of about thirty-three acres was purchased by the overseers of the poor of Tarporley in 1722 for £507 12s, which represented a consolidated fund from twenty-two donors to bring in about £30 a year to be distributed to the poor of Tarporley, Utkinton and Eaton with Rushton. Later in the century it was let for three times that amount. Whether this was a new farm at the time of purchase or not is not known. In the late eighteenth century the farm and its land which included a ten acre field on the other side of Mere Heath, later called Mereheath Field, was occupied by William Heyes: he seems to have retired in the 1820s and

² CRO: DFN 2705/100

³ Much later this was called Mereheath Farm and still is today.

⁴ CRO: DFN 2705/3, dated 29 September 1817

⁵ Later and now Daisy Farm. Not to be confused with what was then New Farm and later Mereheath Farm

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died in 1826. In 1817 the Tarporley parish officials sold the property for £2450 to John Hoskin Harper of Davenham Lodge and the money was then invested for the benefit of the poor.⁶ By 1824 Harper had installed Ralph Kennerdale as tenant of what was then twenty-five acres, the field on the east side of the heath being reassigned. By 1840 the farm was occupied by William Hancock and consisted of thirty-five acres and two years later his son Samuel Hancock was in possession with his wife and family.

According to the plan of Mere Heath of *circa* 1805, along the east side of the turnpike road from Middlewich to Northwich there were several roadside plots some of which contain one or two cottages. All bar one of these had by 1840 been planted with trees. Whether this was for the purpose of producing and selling timber or to enhance the scenery for those travelling along the road or perhaps to hide the labourers' cottages we do not know.

The southernmost of these inclosures, made whilst Edward Tomkinson was lord, was occupied in 1816 and in 1824 by Thomas Carter, who, if he is the same person listed in the 1841 census was a wheelwright and carpenter who was born in Bostock about 1790. In 1841 he lived with his wife and their sixteen years old son, George. In the middle of the next plot stood a cottage which still survives today. This was owned and occupied by John Goulding who paid 6d land tax for his property in 1800; he was still living here in 1824 and again in 1841 when described as 'independent': he died in 1846 aged eighty-nine. The plot was at some time after the drawing of the plan divided into three parts as in 1824 it was described as containing a house garden and croft, consisting of over an acre, and then in 1840 was listed in the tithe award as a cottage, garden and croft consisting of three-quarters of an acre.

The next plot, which was created in the late eighteenth century, contained two cottages which in 1816 were occupied by Job Darlington and 'widow' Burgess. Then eight years later by Job Darlington and Thomas Burgess. Darlington, a labourer, died in 1845 aged seventy-eight and Burgess died in 1832 in his thirties.

In the fields behind Darlington and Burgess's plot, stood buildings which, in 1840, housed the home of John Goulding and a bakehouse occupied by John Crowder (Crowther). However, in 1824, the bakehouse together with a house and croft were occupied by Joseph Goulding, a tailor. Eight years earlier Mary Carter, widow, when the croft was known as Mereheath Croft.⁷ John Goulding was in 1841 a labourer in his thirties who lived with his wife, Ellen and their five children. The two Gouldings were related though not as father and son. Crowther was employed as a groom, presumably by the Harper family, and he lived in the neighbouring, square shaped plot in 1840. Here in 1824 and 1840 there was another cottage occupied by a Thomas Massey.

A little further on lay William Whitby's croft which was a parcel of land described on the plan as being 'ancient'. Whitby was a shopkeeper who lived in the village.

Between Whitby's croft and the drive to Davenham Lodge was another 'ancient' inclosure which was occupied in 1840 by Mark Bloor of whom nothing is known save for the christening of a child at Davenham church in 1840.

On the other side of the entrance to Davenham Lodge two cottages re shown on the plan which do not seem to have survived very long as they do not appear on the tithe map for 1840.

The last property on this side of the road was the home of the Mulliner family. In 1799 John Mulliner had purchased this plot, a part of Barn Field, from Thomas Highlord Ravenscroft of

⁶ Oremrod, G., *History of Cheshire*, ii, p. 237; Bagshaw's *Directory of Cheshire*, 1850

⁷ CRO: DFN 2705/60

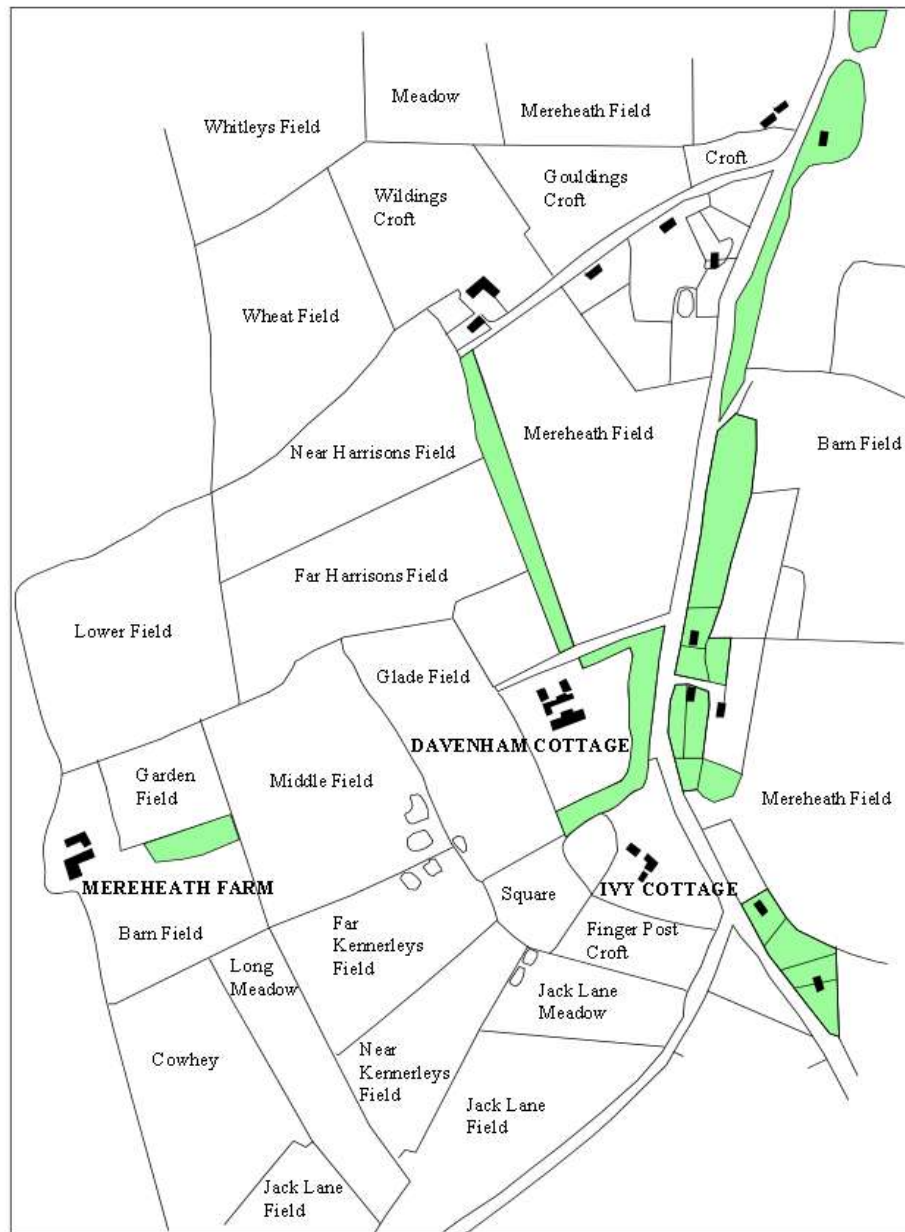
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Davenham Lodge, the then lord of the manor, and built a house here. In 1810 Mulliner and his wife Mary sold this plot to William Harper for £285 and then leased it back.⁸ John Mulliner was the occupier of this quarter acre plot in 1824 and he died in 1840 leaving his daughter Frances to continue living here.

Crossing back across the road onto the heath we come to the 'island' of inclosures. There are on both the plan and the tithe map three buildings, one of which is divided into two. This later property, facing the turnpike road, was occupied by George Astles and William Weedall.

Facing the north was the home of Thomas Dutton senior who was in occupation as early as 1816. He was the son of a Davenham couple John and Hannah Dutton. By 1841 he was at least sixty years old and living with his wife Hannah, a dress maker, and their children. He died in 1847 aged sixty-five and Hannah died the following year. Next door on land which had been newly enclosed by William Harper, lived Thomas Dutton junior. According to the census he was a labourer in his twenties living with his wife Esther and their five children. The parish records show him to have been a salt boiler.

⁸ CRO:DFN 2705/161



MERE HEATH, 1840