

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: SWANLOW

THE OLD STAR INN



Originally, in the 18th century at least, 'The Old Star' was called *The Starr*. It subsequently became the 'Old Star' in the mid 19th century and remained so until 1969 when it was changed to the 'Star Inn', it then reverted back to being 'The Old Star' in the 1990s.

The 'Old Star' stands in a location that many centuries ago was a thriving community. In fact a settlement that may stretch back millennia. In ancient times this was the heart of Darnhall and the nearby church marks its focus. The name Darnhall in Old English means the 'hidden place of worship' and the circular nature of St. Chad's churchyard along with a well and springs are indicative of a pre-Christian holy place.

When the Normans arrived they found four small manors located around a ridge of high ground overlooking the river Weaver and gave them the collective name of 'Over' - a name which came to predominate over the whole district. It is highly likely that Over was indeed a small settlement in its own right which, along with Darnhall, became amalgamated with the other two unidentified manors. Alongside the church, in the manor house which was the forerunner of Church House Farm, lived the Norman lord of the manor of Over and Darnhall. The successive lords of this area were in fact the all powerful Norman Earls of Chester, and upon their extinction the eldest son of the King. During the early twelfth century the lord moved his residence away from the church and the village to a new site two miles west where a new house, hunting lodge and park, were created. In the 1260s this site was granted by Prince Edward, along with all the lands of the manor to the new abbey founded by him at Darnhall which was later transferred to Vale Royal. The only asset not granted to the Cistercian monks was the church of St Chad, which had already been granted, along with the tithes* of the parish to the nuns of St Mary's, Chester.

During the medieval period the area around the Old Star and stretching south down Swanlow Lane, there was a large village known as 'Churchton' with a population of about 500. This

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village slowly declined and eventually disappeared, save for several cottages which included the site of the Old Star, during the time of the abbots of Vale Royal due to the fact that one of the abbots, in the late 13th century, created, up on the Over ridge, a 'new town', or borough, with a market and annual fair, and encouraged settlement and trade. The ancient borough was situated along modern Delamere Street.

There is little else to record about the history of the area until the time of the Dissolution of the Monasteries under King Henry VIII, when the lands around about were granted by him to Sir Thomas Holcroft, a courtier from Lancashire, who then resided at the old abbey, and from him to the Pershall family from Staffordshire, who then became lords of the manor living at the ancient manor house, Church House Farm. During the Civil War the Pershall family were Royalists and had their home and lands sequestered (taken over for the use of Parliament). The Borough of Over was a Parliamentarian garrison town in 1643-45 and as a result their troops were billeted in various local houses and cottages. After the Pershalls suffered bankruptcy Over became the property of the great Cholmondeley family of Vale Royal, though not exclusively so as others acquired property rights here too. The lands of Darnhall manor became separated from Over and were granted by the Henry VIII to Sir Rowland Hill who settled at Darnhall Hall: eventually they were succeeded by the Corbett family.

The historical annals are silent as regards the Old Star until the 19th century although there are occasional references as to the owners and occupiers. There is a possible reference to the public house in 1717. In the evidence given concerning a disputed will of Charles Whittingham of Church Hill, Swanlow, it was said that Charles and a few other gentlemen had met in an 'ale house' run by Thomas Holbrook, where they drank and played cards. It was said that the premises were along Swanlow Lane and 'near to the church', a location suggesting the present site of the Old Star, or if not then very close to it.

According to land tax assessments, as early as 1769 James Tomkinson, Esquire, who lived at Bostock Hall, was the owner of the property and Richard Darlington was his tenant : 11s 8d was paid in tax on the house. According to Cowdroy's *Directory of Cheshire, 1789*, a 'Mr Darlington' was the inn-keeper and three years later 'the Starr' was occupied by 'Widow Darlington' who paid the same land tax of 11s 8d. By 1798 Thomas Deane was the licensee. About 1800 Samuel Howard purchased 'the Starr' from Tomkinson and remained the owner for several years. Thomas Deane was followed by Thomas Leicester as publican. The next owner of the property was a local farmer named John Baker who purchased it from Samuel Howard, under him there seems to have been a joint tenancy under a man named Vernon and a Peter Eachus.

In the mid-nineteenth century census returns (from 1841) and a survey known as the Tithe Apportionment in 1840 give us some detailed information.

In 1841 the 'beer house' was owned by John Baker, senior, and occupied by John Prince and his wife. At that time, alongside, on what is now the car park there were a number of cottages [222] owned by Baker and occupied by William Foster and others according to the tithe return. These tenants also had the use of the gardens on the opposite side of the road now a grassed area. John Baker, junior, described himself as a 'Publican of Darnhall' in 1846 and perhaps resided on the premises whilst Prince managed the business for him, but he died in 1849. In 1851 John Prince (born in Tarporley in 1816) was still the occupant of the 'Old Star'.

In the neighbouring cottages, William Foster, a salt boiler, lived in one of these cottages with his wife and their three children, whilst next door lived labourer Joseph Sproston, his wife and their two children.

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By 1854 and again in 1856 John Baker is still recorded as the owner with John Prince operated the beer house and paid a tax of 4 shillings and then 4s 6d. The owner, John Baker, died on 25 January 1856.



Tithe Map of Over, c. 1840, showing plot 223 'The Old Star' with cottages in what is now the car park.

In 1861 John Prince and his sixty-years old wife, Ann, are listed as beer retailers at the 'Old Star'.

In 1871 George Hamlet, a thirty-eight years old local man, ran the public house with his wife Elizabeth. He also farmed 53 acres of land nearby employing nine men and nine boys. Living in the Old Star with him were his seven children and two servants. About this time a George Cross of Sandiway was the owner of the premises – he was related to old John Baker.

In 1881 thirty-nine years old Joseph Viggor was the beer retailer at the 'Old Star'. He lived here with his wife, Sarah, and their three infant children and a fifteen years old female domestic servant. Joseph's father, also named Joseph, was the licensee of the 'Blue Bell' public house that stood next door to the church. He was licensee of the Blue Bell from 1851 until 1885 when his daughter Ellen took it over and kept it until 1928.

In 1891 Peter Bates, who was born in Darnhall in 1830, was the publican. He lived at the Old Star, which was number 47 Swanlow Lane, with his wife, Fanny, and their eight children.

In 1901 Joshua Tickle, aged 52, was both licensee and a farmer who lived at the 'Old Star Inn' with his wife Sarah and a thirteen years old female domestic servant. About this time a John Cross was the owner of the premises.

Licenseses

Pre 1769 - 1789	Richard Darlington
1789 - 1797	'Widow' Darlington
1798 - 1800	Thomas Deane
1806 - 1818	Thomas Leicester
1818 - 1819	Vernon & Eachus

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1820 - 1830s	Peter Eachus
c.1840 - 1861	John Prince
- 1864 -	Peter Bate
1869 - 1876	George Hamlet
1876 - 1881	Joseph Viggor
1881 - 1892	Peter Bates
1892 - 1903	Josuah Tickle
1906 - 1910	Joseph Fletcher
1914 - 1923	Elizabeth Fletcher
1923 - 1969	Amanda Charlesworth
1969 - 1972	Frederick Kendrick
1972 - 1976	Beatrice Kendrick
1976 - 1980	John Seddon
1980 - 1982	John Ruscoe
1982 - 1985	George Benson
1985 - 1990	Elizabeth Parry
1990 - 1994	Reenie George
1994 - 1999	Tony O'Keefe
1999 - 2004	Mark ??????
2004 - 2009	Noreen Khan
2010 - present	Ernie Welch

[The above list of licensees is based on A.J.McGregor's *The Licensees of the Public Houses of Vale Royal*, published in 1990.]

