

# **TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: SWANLOW**

## **OLD FIELD FARM, OR OLD FARM, SWANLOW**

Old Field Farm on Swanlow Lane has the appearance of a 17<sup>th</sup> century or early 18<sup>th</sup> century 'T' shaped house and the history of its ownership can be pushed back to that latter period.

### **The Wood Family**

According to the nineteenth century census returns the farm was leased by members of the Wood family starting with John Wood from circa 1808, when he paid £2 6s 8d in tax for the house and land. The owner being George Wilbraham of Delamere House, Delamere. John died on 3 February 1829 leaving several children by his wife Ann: Thomas, William, John, Samuel, Jane, Joseph and Philip. Of these children it seems that Samuel inherited the farm and is recorded as paying £2 6s 8d in land tax in 1831. According to the 1841 census Samuel was living here with his wife Ann and their many children. The son John became a wine merchant who at the time of his father's death lived in Devonshire Street, Bishop's Gate, London. By 1851 Samuel Wood and his family had moved to a farm in Winterley, Haslington, Cheshire: then his mother Ann was still alive aged 78 years. At this time a thirty-two years old labourer, John Ikin and his wife, along with a female servant and a lodger with 'no business' were living at 'Old Farm' - perhaps Ikin was temporarily here as a sort of caretaker.

By 1854 a Thomas Wood farmed the sixty-two acres as a tenant of George Wilbraham Esq., and paid £1 15s 9d land tax on the house and its land. It seems that Thomas was the illegitimate child of Jane, daughter of John and Ann Wood, as, according to the 1851 census, before he married Thomas worked on his step-father's 75 acre farm further down Swanlow Lane in Weaver township: his mother Jane being then the wife of the farmer William Moseley. Thomas and his wife, Elizabeth (nee Lunt), are noted in the 1861 and 1871 census at the farm.

When the tithe agreement and the accompanying map were drawn up in 1846 Old Farm was owned by Wilbraham and occupied by James Leicester, who lived along Swanlow Lane in Over, so the Wood family may have been sub-tenants or else Leicester was only temporarily in possession. The farm then consisted of several fields lying behind the farm: Moulton Field, Sandbach Field, Sandbach Croft, Marl Field, Hill Field, Field, Wood Field, Town Field, Outlett, Barn Field, Pit Field, and a few small plots near to the house. It also included 'Over Lane Field' on the opposite side of Swanlow Lane, and 'Holloway Head Field' further back down Swanlow Lane. In total there were 62½ acres of land.

In 1881, at 'Old farm', Thomas, then aged 59, lived with his wife Elizabeth and their two sons, John (aged 27) and Edwin (aged 23). There had been another son, Philip born in 1856 who is not listed in that year. By 1891 Thomas had died (1889) and his widow remained on the farm with her two sons and they were still there ten years later. At the outbreak of the First World War John and Edwin were jointly farmers.

### **The Acton Family**

The land tax returns from the 1780s until the early 1800s show that a John Acton paid tax for a house and land owned by George Wilbraham. In the late 1790s John Acton of Swanlow paid 7s 6d to the churchwardens of St Chad's. Prior to that Thomas Acton had paid the same land tax amount in the 1770s and paid 5s to the church in 1781. Whilst the name of the property is not given in these records the amount of tax paid is exactly the same as that paid

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by the Wood family and it is only one of three properties owned by the Wilbraham's in the parish of Over.

Thomas Acton is also listed as a resident of Swanlow according to the manorial suit rolls of the manor of Over for 1781 and back to 1775.

When the Wilbrahams came to possess this farm, along with Stocks Hill and Hooter Hall, is not known. However the Wilbrahams of Nantwich are known to have had interests in the manor of Over since the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century.

### **The Stanway Family**

Using the same manorial court rolls we find that Samuel Stanway is Acton's predecessor as far back as May 1740. He also occurs in payments of 5s made to the church wardens of St Chad's and is recorded back as far as 1749.

### **The Robinson Family**

In May 1740 the name of William Robinson is crossed through and replaced in the manorial roll by that of Samuel Stanway: clearly Stanway's predecessor had been Robinson.

William Robinson seems to have occupied the farm since October 1734 when he succeeded Thomas Robinson 'Alderman' who had been there since at least 1731 and died in April 1734. The term 'Alderman' suggests that at some time Thomas had been mayor of Over, perhaps in the 1720s. Unfortunately there is a gap in the manorial rolls however a Thomas Robinson lived in Swanlow in 1700 and he may be the same person or else his father.

In some respects there are similarities between this building and Over Lodge, or Dawk House, on Swanlow Lane which bears the date 1711. The two buildings may be of the same period.