

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: SWANLOW

SWANLOW AND DARNHALL IN TUDOR TIMES

SWANLOW

Swanlow remained in the hands of the abbots of Vale Royal throughout the medieval period though unfortunately, with the exception of its mention in the 14th century rental copied into the Vale Royal Abbey Ledger Book, there is no record of the township or of anyone from here until the early 16th century by which time the Tudors ruled England.

The accession of King Henry VII to the throne of England in 1485 was the start of the modern era of English history. Under the Tudors (1485 - 1603) England emerges from the Middle Ages into a new world of social and economic change, an era of adventure and exploration, a golden age of English history. This period saw increases in population and a continuation in the relaxation of the rigid mediaeval manorial system leading to rising prosperity for landowners with opportunities for increased wealth for those involved in trade and commerce. As regards religion the pendulum swayed to and fro between Catholicism and Protestantism during the reigns of five monarchs: Henry VII, Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth.

In 1534, in order to gain his divorce from Catherine of Aragon and re-marriage to Anne Bolyn, Henry VIII broke from the Church of Rome and established the Church of England. A consequence of this was the dissolution of the monasteries and other religious houses, which included Vale Royal Abbey in 1538. Its property in lands and tithes was seized into royal hands and sold off. Darnhall was purchased by Rowland Hill, an alderman and merchant of London for £682 in 1541. A short time later, the Vale Royal Abbey buildings along with the lordships of Over, and all the associated lands, including Swanlow, were purchased by Thomas Holcroft, then a royal clerk in the office dealing with the dissolution at a cost of nearly £1000. This then became his family's home for three generations.

Prior to Vale Royal's dissolution several freehold farms were created and leased out to local people, who were quite possibly the original tenants. On 1 August 1527 James Knolles had a lease of a tenement called 'Kirkhill' which was to remain in force for eighty years after the deaths of his parents, Richard and Douce Knolles, who were then occupying the property. Ten years later the lease was renewed for half the period at an annual rent of 26s 8d.¹ The location of the tenement can be clearly identified with being located near to St Chad's church in an area still known as Church Hill. Sir William Venables had a grant from the abbot of the tithes of corn and grain in the manor of Darnhall and lands and tenements in Swanlow, Over, Knights and Bradford for sixty-one years from 1 July 1538 in consideration of a payment of £40 and a rent of £4 a year.²

In June 1542 the King, through the offices of the Court of Augmentations, which dealt with the disposal of monastic property, made grants to local men and then exactly four years later, the lord of the manor of Over, Thomas Holcroft re-issued the leases.³ Ralph Nickson of Swanlow, had a lease from the Crown, dated 22 June 1542 of a tenement containing a house, a barn or granary, and garden with 10 Cheshire acres (about 21 statute acres) of both arable and pasture land at a rent of 10s 1d. a year.⁴ Richard Nightingale, a husbandman of Over, also had a lease of a house, barn, garden and 40 acres of land (about 82 statute acres) land for 99 years at 17s 7d a year.⁵ On 22 June 1542, William Fletcher, Ralph Kettle and Robert Whittingham were joint lessees from the Court of Augmentations, of a 99 year lease of houses, barns, gardens and lands, each tenanted by them. The amount of arable and pasture land held by William is not given, but Ralph had 20 (42) acres and Robert had 80 (170) acres for which Fletcher paid 16s 2d., Kettle paid 21s 10d., and Whittingham 19s each year. Exactly where these farms were we cannot say now, however later evidence shows that both the Kettle and Whittingham families lived on Church Hill.⁶ Richard Cook of Swanlow had a lease of a house, barn

TONY BOSTOCK'S HISTORY NOTES

and garden with arable and pasture amounting to 15 acres (32 statute) for 17s 11d a year rent.⁷ Richard Leftwich had a lease of a house, garden and an orchard from the Abbot at an annual rent of 30s and these he seems to have sub-let to Nicholas Darlington, but its not known whether this relates to Swanlow or elsewhere in Over.

This series of leases tells us that towards the end of Henry VIII's reign the main land holders in Swanlow were James Kettle, Ralph Nickson, Richard Nightingale, William Fletcher, Ralph Kettle and Robert Whittingham. Previously these men had been tenants of the Abbot of Vale Royal and it is likely that their ancestors had farmed the same lands. In all the leases account for at least 165 Cheshire acres, perhaps about 400 statute acres.

From about this time we have a list of men from Swanlow who were recruited for military service. Their names appear in muster rolls for 1544 and 1546 when Swanlow provided 43 and 32 men respectively.⁸ It is likely that the men saw service in Scotland in those years as their lord, Thomas Holcroft was knighted at Leith in May 1544, and in 1546 he mustered 200 men for service in Scotland.



On 22 November 1546 the muster was held before Sir John Done, Sir Philip Egerton and John Birkenhead of Crowton, by virtue of the King's commission. Thirty-two men from Swanlow were paraded and considering that there were only twelve men from 'Owever', sixteen from Marton, and sixteen from Weever, it is likely that the township heading included Darnhall on this occasion. The lists of names by township, are followed by the description 'a bylman and harnyss', 'archer with harnyss', or the like where 'harness' refers to armour – not a complete suit of armour but more probably a helmet or 'sallet' along with steel arm defences and a padded jerkin. A 'bill' was a long handled weapon with a scythe-type blade at the end.

Richard Oake a billman harnesssed
Henry Hassall, a billman without harness
Ralph Kettle, a billman harnesssed
William Fletcher, a billman without harness
Ralph Nightingale, a billman with harness
Edward Holland, a billman with harness
Richard Nightingale, a billman with harness
Ralph Nickson, a billman with harness
Hugh Sumner', a billman with harness
Ralph Wilkockson, a billman without harness
William Clayfort, an archer without harness
John Clayfort, an archer without harness
John Bowden, a billman with harness
John Dudley, an archer without harness
Ralph Blackamore, an archer with harness
Bennett Okes, an archer without harness

Humphrey Verdon, an archer with harness
James Legh, a billman without harness
Rauffe Chawiner, an archer without harness
Richard Bawre, a billman with harness
Matthew Cokeson, a billman with harness
Ralph Cokeson, a billman without harness
Ralph Coke, a billman without harness
Laurence Forster, an archer without harness
Ralph Forster, a billman without harness
Edward Harrison, , a billman with harness
Bennett Barker, a billman without harness
James Whittingham, a billman without harness
Randolph Barker, a billman without harness
Ralph Barker, a billman without harness
John Heth, a billman with harness
John Allott, an archer without harness

This list of thirty-two men, who would have been aged between sixteen and sixty, suggests an adult population of about seventy and with children added perhaps a total of about 120 in the Swanlow and Darnhall areas, of whom the majority, perhaps about 100, will have lived in Swanlow.



TONY BOSTOCK'S HISTORY NOTES

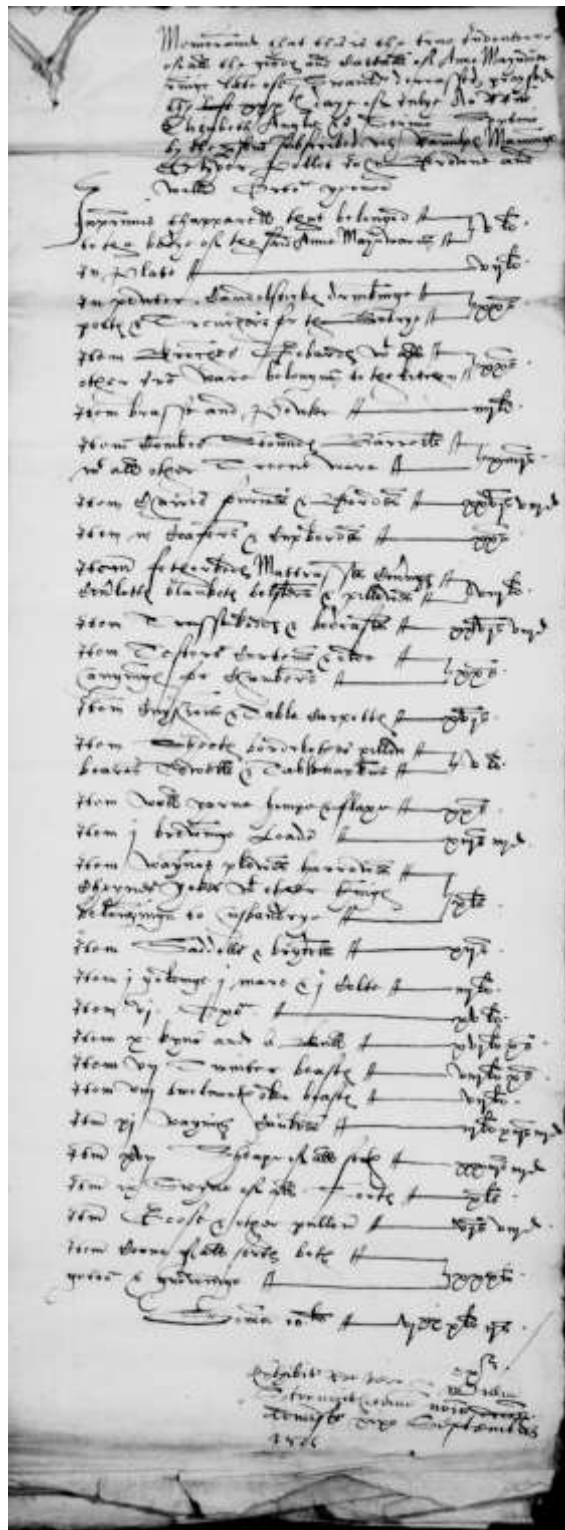
An entry in the *Visitation of Cheshire 1580* has a reference to a Jane Knightley of Swanlow Lane marrying Thomas Bostock of Moulton, but a Knightley family is not known, unless it is a misreading and misprinting of 'Nightingale': the marriage would have taken place sometime in the middle of the century.

A useful source for people who lived in the area are the probate records, wills and inventories, of the Consistory Court at Chester. The earliest probate documents referring to residents of Swanlow are those of two widows, Ann Whittingham and Ann Maynwaring, both dated 1575.

Ann Whittingham, a widow, wrote, or more probably had someone write, her will on 17 October 1575. After requesting burial at St Chad's church she gave her son Hugh a brass pot, sons John and Edward 10s each, daughters Cicelie and Katherine [?] half her corn, and to Thomas and Hugh the rest of her goods and chattles; Edward and Hugh Whittingham were named as her executors. The witnesses were Richard Halland, Robert Tommie, Edward Hunter, Margaret and Elizabeth Halland. On the same sheet of paper her inventory was written down thirteen days later which suggests that she died in the intervening period. Peter Nightingale, Richard Holland and Thomas Wilkinson were the appraisers. She had one hieffer worth 28s.; brass and pewter worth 20s.; boards, forms, tressles, a cupboard, and a bed case being very old worth 3s 8d.; napery ware worth 8d.; two and a half yards of white cloth worth 20d.; an old feather bed with 'appurtenances' worth 6s.; five geese worth 2s 6d.; four hens worth 9d.; a little pig worth 8d.; a quantity of rye worth 18d.; a ?????? pot worth 14d.; a hoop of barley worth 11d.; and a little hay worth 2s. In total goods worth just over £4.

Anne Maynwaring's will no longer exists but the inventory of her goods does. Recorded on 30 July by Rannulph Mainwaring, Oliver Pollet, John Brown and William Orton it lists twenty-eight items worth a total of £130 2s. There is no reference to Ann being a widow so presumably she died unmarried but was nevertheless in charge of a well stocked farm. Her corn 'of all sorts both gotten and growinge' was worth £30. She had thirty-six cows and calves, six oxen, three horses, seventeen sheep, nine pigs and an unspecified number of geese and hens; in all livestock worth just over £60. The remainder of the inventory lists the household furniture and other domestic items along with £5 worth of clothing.

There are a number of wills from the first quarter of the seventeenth century which specifically mention Swanlow as a place of residence suggesting that



Anne Maynwaring's Inventory, 1575

TONY BOSTOCK'S HISTORY NOTES

these people lived in the township during the Tudor period. These are James Whittingham, husbandman who died in August 1609 whose will was proved that year and Roger Nickson, husbandman, who died in April 1616 whose will was proved later that year.

Clearly Swanlow was a well populated area during the sixteenth century but unfortunately we cannot locate where any of the residents lived. Given that there were as many people then as there were in the mid-nineteenth century it is perhaps reasonable to assume that many of the farms and smallholdings that existed then were on similar sites to those of the earlier period.

DARNHALL

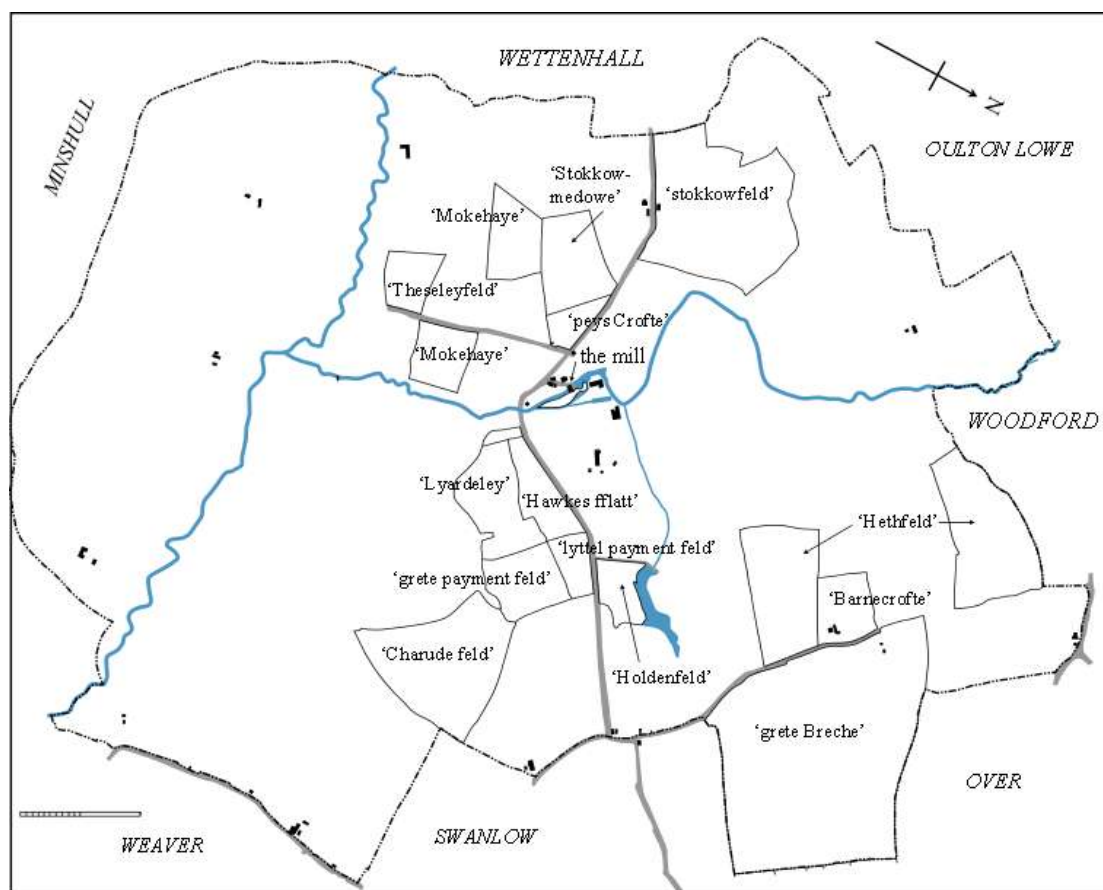
In 1537/8, on the eve of Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries, Lord Cromwell wrote to the Abbot of Vale Royal requesting, or perhaps demanding, that he have the 'farm of Darhall' with its demesne lands. It seems that the abbot was somewhat reluctant and Cromwell had to write again pointing out that the abbot had the manors or granges of Knights, Bradford Hefferston, and 'Connersley' (Whitegate), along with the tithes of Over and other assets with which to provide for the monastery. Whereupon the abbot replied that he had leased the granges out to various tenants and that the tithes of Over were only in his hands on a lease from the Prioress of Chester. Further the grounds around the abbey were of a sandy nature and therefore not good enough to grow wheat upon so he had to rely on the lands at Darnhall for that crop. He went on to say that if his lordship were to insist then he might have the manor except for the woodland, waters and the barn in which he stored the tithes of grain from Over. The compromise was rejected and on 7 September 1538 a deed of surrender was completed which purported to have been signed by the abbot. In March the following year Lord Cromwell travelled up to Cheshire and presided at a court held at Vale Royal during the last week of the month to hear various spurious charges against the abbot. At the dissolution of the abbey, Darnhall was valued at £4 6s 8d.

A valuation of Darnhall and other properties in 1544/5 showed that the lease of the demesne lands were then worth £26 a year, rents of property in the manor accounted for a further £4, profits of the woodland and waters were worth £13 and pannage brought in a further £1.⁹

A number of local gentlemen had interests in the manor or grange of Darnhall about the time of the dissolution. Sir William Venables had a grant from the abbot of the tithes of corn and grain in the manor of Darnhall and lands and tenements in Swanlow, Over, Knights and Bradford for sixty-one years from 1 July 1538 in consideration of a payment of £40 and a rent of £4 a year.¹⁰

In 1540 in a list of the lands of the dissolved house of Vale Royal we find '...the fishing of Darnehallepole, underwood and "lopp" of trees in Darnehallewode....' which had been leased by the abbot to Richard Grosvenor for seven years from October 1535 at a peppercorn rent. These were in addition to the manor or grange of 'Dernehall'.¹¹

A description of Darnhall Manor or Grange given in document which refers to a lease of certain fields in the manor dated April 1538 suggesting that Cromwell was in possession and had got his way as regards the manor.¹² The parcel of lands was worth £22 a year in rent for: 'Stokkowefeld', pastures called 'Mokehaye', and 'stokkowefeld'; a croft called 'Sond Crofte' and a croft of land, lately known as 'Warr[en]' in the holding of Thomas Burstowe; closes known as 'Theseleyfeld' and 'Mysefeld'; a pasture called 'Stokkowmedowe', land called 'peys Crofte', pastures called 'grete payment feld' and 'lyttel payment feld', 'Holdenfeld'; a croft called 'Charude feld'; parcels of land called 'Lyardeley', 'Hawkes fflatt', 'Barnecrofte', 'grete Breche', 'grete Stonefeld', 'polefeld' and 'Hethfeld'; and a mill with a meadow in the holding of Thomas Burstowe. Many of these fields may be identified with similar names in the description of the estate given in 1860, and are still a feature of the modern landscape (*see map*).



Tudor Field Names superimposed on 1860 estate plan

On 3 May 1541 Sir Rowland Hill, a mercer of the City of London, on payment of £682, received a grant of the manor of Darnhall from the Court of Augmentation; this included Darnhall Grange, Darnhall Park, Darnhall Barn and Darnhall Pool.¹³ He was required to pay an annual rent of £3 8s 4d to the Court.¹⁴ Robert Mainwaring of London received the tithes of the manor of Darnhall, along with those of Swanlow, Over, Knights and Bradford, on 14 May 1541. He was required to surrender two earlier leases issued by the abbot: that to Sir William Venables mentioned above, and the other to himself dated March 1538. On 10 February 1542, Robert Mainwaring had a lease of 'all woods, underwoods, loppes, toppes, and croppes of trees and hedgerows in Darnhall Park, except timber trees', on surrender of an 80 years' lease dated 13 July 1538 to Roger Harwar, of Nantwich, by Vale Royal Abbey.¹⁵

Hill was a prominent member of the Mercers' Company and the first Protestant Lord Mayor of London. On 2 December 1560 he commenced a suit to secure the title to the estate. It was declared that the manor would be to the use of himself for life, with a remainder to Alice Needham, a cousin, a further remainder to Reginald Corbet and his wife Alice in special tail, with final remainder to Alice (qy. Needham or Corbet). Hill's sister Jane married a John Gratwood whose daughter and co-heir, Alice (d. 1603) married Sir Reginald Corbet. This Sir Reginald was appointed as a Justice of Common Pleas on 16 October 1559. He left a will dated 26 August 1565. His handsome alabaster tomb is in St Peter's church, Stoke upon Tern, near Market Drayton, Salop; his son was Richard Corbet, esquire, who married Anne daughter of Lord Chancellor Thomas Bromley (d. 1587) who presided over the trial of Mary, Queen of Scots in 1587.¹⁶ Peter Corbet eventually sold the manor to Robert Bamfield who then sold it on to Thomas Lee, son of Henry Lee of Lee Hall, Wybunbury, who remained in possession for a number of generations.

TONY BOSTOCK'S HISTORY NOTES

It is difficult to record who lived in the Darnhall area during the Tudor period. One of the normal methods is to use the Tudor Muster Rolls which listed those men available for military service, but as mentioned above it seems that the men were listed under Swanlow. At Chester record Office there are two extant wills from the time: those of Richard Roe, yeoman, dated 1591 and Joyce Dutton, widow, dated 1598.

¹ CRO: DBC 1621/26/5, fo. 8

² CRO; EDA 3/1 (84)

³ PRO: 'Henry VIII: Appointments to Offices', *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 18 Part 1: January-July 1542* (1901), pp. 545-558

⁴ CRO: DBC 1621/26/5, fo.s 4, 5

⁵ *Ibid*, fo.s 6, 7

⁶ *Ibid* fo.s .9, 10

⁷ *Ibid* fo.s 17, 18

⁸ By way of comparison, at the same time Over provided 30 and 12; Over Marton, 23 and 16; Little Budworth, 43 and 16; Weaver, nil and then 16. For 1544 *L&P*, 19(i) & (ii) p.483 (ii) and for 22 November 1546, *L&P* 21(i) & (ii) p.205

⁹ Ormerod, ii, p. 172

¹⁰ Cheshire Record Office: EDA 3/1 (84)

¹¹ Public Record Office: S.C.6/Hen VIII/7384, ms.76, 79

¹² CRO: DCH/J/238

¹³ *Letters and Papers of the reign of Hen VIII*, vol. 16, p.420

¹⁴ Ormerod, G. *History of the County Palatine of Chester*, ii, p.180

¹⁵ *L&P Hen VIII*, vol. 16, 1540-1541 (1898), pp

¹⁶ Ormerod, ii, p. 181