

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES:

WEAVER

Weaver is one of those places you may never have heard of. Mention the name and you immediately think of the river or of Weaverham, near Northwich. But a few miles south of Winsford on the west bank of the river there is a township that bears the same name. Road maps don't mention the place save for large scale maps which mention Weaver Hall Farm and Weaverwood Farm and Weaver Park Farm. There are no road signs leading you to it and as you drive along the road from Church Minshull to Winsford you wouldn't know you were passing it save for a sign built into a brick wall mentioning Weaver Wood Farm and the sign for the Weaver Methodist Chapel.

Weaver is historically an interesting place having two separate entries in Domesday; being a township that was once detached from its hundred and later lay in a different hundred to that of the parish to which it belonged; and by being one of the homes of one of Cheshire's most powerful families - the Stanleys.

Weaver's Location and Topography

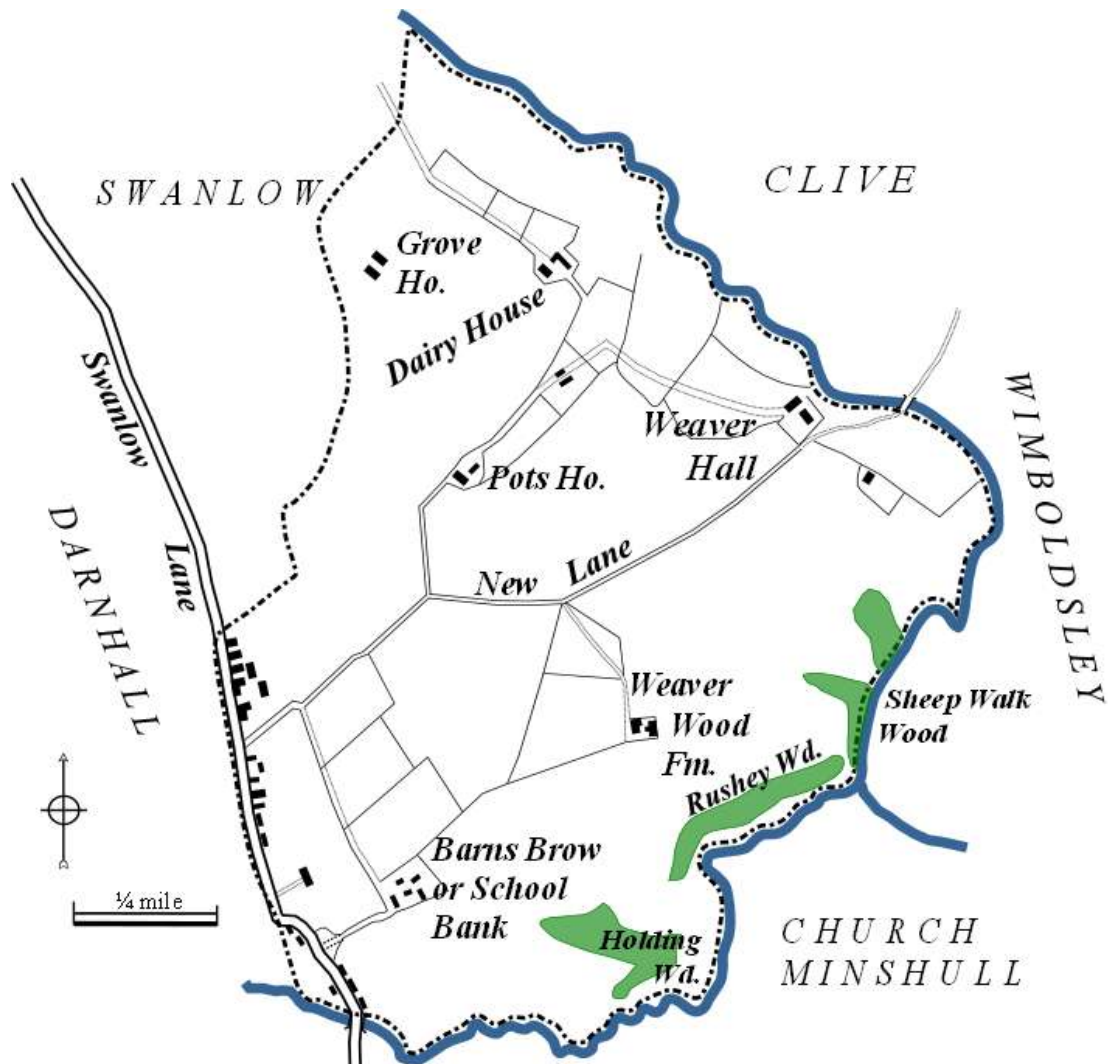
The township and former manor of Weaver is situated on the west bank of the river of the same name between two large expanses of water known as 'Top Flash' and Bottom Flash'. In area Weaver consists of about 965 acres of fairly flat land with steep banks that fall away to the river and its tributary. Its southern border is formed by the Ash Brook. To the west the division with neighbouring Darnhall is formed by the road leading through Swanlow into Over (Winsford), apart from a triangle of land immediately west of the road near to the Ashbrook Bridge. To the north a stream, part of the Firwood Brook, and a series of hedgerows mark the boundary with Swanlow.

The main route way for Weaver is Swanlow Lane which heads north from the bridge across the Ash Brook, rising and winding up a steep bank known as Chivey Hill before levelling and straightening as it heads north for a further ½ mile to the boundary with Swanlow. Off this there runs a private road to Weaver Hall: a distance of just over one mile. On the 1831 map this lane is called 'New Lane' and seems to have been made to replace one which arched slightly north past Pots house to approach the hall from a northerly direction. Both lanes once continued on past the hall to cross the river by a single track bridge and into the township of Clive. When subsidence caused the river to widen at this point the bridge was replaced by a ferry. Within the township there were numerous footpaths linking the five farms and also heading off into Swanlow and towards St Chad's church. Running parallel to Swanlow Lane between the lane to Weaver Hall and School Bank there was a track which has the appearance of a typical 'back lane' which may have marked the limit of long narrow strips of land associated with cottages fronting the main road.

The 'lakes' or flashes were created in the late nineteenth century as a result of subsidence caused by the extraction, or natural erosion, of brine and rock salt below the surface. They are first noticed on the ordnance survey map of 1875 but are not shown on the Bryant's map of 1831. It seems that the ground was liable to subsidence much earlier. On Sunday 3 April 1713, at a point where there were gates to the barns of Weaver Hall, the ground suddenly gave way creating a two yards diameter hole. A rumbling sound could be heard over the next two days and the hole got gradually wider until it was several yards wide; its depth as such that it could not 'be fathomed by a pole of twelve feet'.¹ The hole became full of salt water but cannot have been so big as it did not feature on a map of 1725.² Brian Curzon in his book about Winsford tells a slightly different story which occurred in 1731 when picknickers were disturbed by rumblings and barely escaped when a vast chasm opened up allowing the waters of the Weaver to fill what became known as the Top Flash.³ However, if this is a different story it would have been the formation of another salt water pond because the flash was not

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: WEAVER

created until the 1850s. A farmer who worked land at Austerson near Nantwich noted in his account book on 10 February 1785 that there had been 'a Big flood at Weaver' and also made similar entries for 20 May 1773 and for 31 December 1789.⁴ From 1804 Bottom Flash began to grow from a small pond of less than an ½ acre; to this was added the sinking of a portion of a field in Clive in 1833 and further subsidence below Stocks Stairs somewhat later. Top Flash began to form in 1856 and by 1899 twenty-eight acres of land was covered by water. There was also a Middle Flash of some 6 acres and Bottom Flash which covered 64 acres of land.⁵



The township of Weaver from Bryant's Map of Cheshire 1831

A number of streams run off the flat land through narrow wooded valleys to join the river Weaver. One of these, the Firwood Brook, flows past Weaver Dairy House Farm. At this location the map maker Burdett recorded the presence of a mill here in 1777. The small areas of woodland, that line the streams are named as Shaw's Wood, Badger Wood, Hop Yard Wood, Rookery Wood (previously known as Sheep Yard Wood), Trelfa's Wood (previously Rushey Wood), and Owens Wood (previously Holding Wood). These are remnants of a once much larger and continuous expanse of ancient woodland. In 1353 the 'boscus de Wevre' is first recorded with the 'Weverwode' being mentioned fourteen years later.⁶

Much of the land was used for agriculture. A list of field names exists from 1606. Besides the hall, mills and smithies there were many closes as follows:

'Milne Meadow, the two Barn Crofts, "the poolside where the old house did stand as it is now enclosed", the Cheritree Crofts, the High lees, Paddocks

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: WEAVER

Moore, the Coningree and “the field wherein the new house standeth”, the Clay Crofts, Nicksons Field, Lardens Field, the Woodfield, the Great Woodcock’s Lake, Longley Flatt, Longley Flatte Meadow, vicars Meadow, the Milne Field, “Holland’s eye with the cow fold adjoining”, Robinsons meadow, the weare eye, Maynwarings Meadow, the great eye, the marled croft, the sand croft, the Chapell croft, How medow, Holden and Carrington’s meadow’. Also ‘Wevor Woods’ and Holden Soutwoods’.⁷

The Clay Crofts is interesting and may relate to ‘le Cleyerudying’ of 1357. Paddocks Moore, meaning ‘frogs’ marsh’ also occurs at an early date in 1331. Other medieval field names are: ‘le Dopenclowe’ (the deep dell) in 1331; ‘le grene’ in 1347; ‘Horestansich’ (stream by the old grey stone) in 1331; ‘pons de Wevre’ in 1357, which is not the Ash Brook bridge as Dodgson assumed, but the bridge over the river Weaver linking Clive and Wimboldsley; ‘Wylmotteshurst’ (Wilmot’s small wood) 1331; and ‘Weever Mills Salthouses’ 1671. The names of Nickson, Holland Robinson, Mainwaring and Carrington refer to families who have lived in or been associated with the township, particularly the latter who had custody of the manor in the fourteenth century.

Another source of field names is the inventory of the goods and chattels of Richard Cornes who died on 30 March 1631. This records that he had ‘tacks’ (leases) of parcels of land in ‘the out wood’, ‘the wheate field’, ‘the within Crofte’ and barn croft’ owned by Thomas Pott; ‘the sandye croft’, ‘the further mill bancke’, ‘the neere milne bancke’, ‘the Sicilye Croft’, ‘the Kellsall Crofte’, and ‘the further milne banke’ all held for terms of years from John Holland.⁸ These seem to add to the earlier list

Weaver Hall was in the early nineteenth century somewhat dilapidated having only one wing standing. Its architecture of brick with some timber and plaster was of the early seventeenth century which is confirmed by a description of the manor dated 1606 (see below). It had large bay windows, gables, battlements and tall chimneys. It was said that in appearance it was taller than most Cheshire country houses and appeared even loftier in view of its position on elevated ground. Alongside the hall there were earthworks of the former hall.⁹ In 1906 the hall formed part of one of the wings of the old hall and had been partly rebuilt in 1847.¹⁰

At one time there was a house called ‘Pots House’ a short distance west of Weaver Hall. This property, long since gone, was once the home of Thomas Pott who dwelt there in the late sixteenth century by virtue of a grant from Sir Thomas Stanley, the lord of the manor.¹¹ Thomas Pott paid £3 8s tax on his goods in 1626.¹²

Domesday Weaver

In the eleventh century the township lay in the Middlewich (later Northwich) Hundred. However it was separated from the hundred by the river Weaver and geographically lay in the south-eastern corner of the Domesday hundred of ‘Risetone’ which, when combined with the neighbouring hundred of ‘Roelau’, formed the Eddisbury Hundred which then persisted as an administrative district of the county. From the medieval period until the early twentieth century Weaver was recognised as being in Eddisbury Hundred. Why Weaver was recorded as being in Middlewich Hundred is not clear. It is possible that the original Weaver township was on the other side of the river and subsequently spread across to new territory.

Despite its proximity to the parish church of St. Chad’s, Over, Weaver lay in the parish of St. Michael’s, Middlewich and this may have something to do with its being initially in that hundred. It is noted that the parish of Over lay within the ancient Deanery of Middlewich which was approximately co-terminus with the hundred and stretched from the Cheshire boundary beyond Sandbach in the south-east, across to Eddisbury Hill in what was Delamere Forest.

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: WEAVER

As a manor Weaver, then spelt Wevre, is recorded twice. In the first entry Weaver is one of six manors grouped together and held directly by the earl of Chester. The others are Sandbach, Clive, Sutton (near Middlewich), Wimboldsley and Occleston, which apart from Sandbach form a block of land on the eastern side of the Weaver. The parts of the entry relating to Weaver say:

‘The same earl holds.....Weaver of one virgate of taxable land..... half an acre of meadow and a fourth part of a wood which is one league long and as wide.

So on this small manor there was a piece of meadow land, presumably down by the river and a piece of woodland which measured a few miles across in each direction and was part of a much larger wood part of which was in Wimboldsley. We are also informed that each of the manors had been held by unnamed Saxon freemen and that here there was enough arable land in total for seven ploughteams (about four hundred Cheshire acres (850 statute acres) and when taken into the earl's hands were all waste (i.e. rendered no profit) and remained so when the Domesday Survey was compiled.

The second entry is more specific:

‘The same Bigot holds Wevre. Stenulf held it and was a freeman. One virgate of land paid tax. Land is half a ploughland. It is there with a radman, one villain and two bordars. Woodland is one furlong long and as wide. There one hay. The value was two shillings, now three shillings.’

A Saxon named Stenulf held the manor and he may have been the unnamed Saxon who held the other manor. A man of the same name also held the manors of Clotton and Tilstone. The land and its resources paid tax assessed at one virgate. Here there was land enough for one plough which was being utilised by a ‘radman’ (a trusted servant who performed services on horseback for his lord), a ‘villain’ (a person of low status tied to the manor) and two ‘bordars’ (smallholders working an area on the fringes of the manor, probably on newly cultivated land). Here there was a small wood with a hedged enclosure for animals

Bigot, the new Norman lord of Weaver, also held the manors of Farndon, Thornton and Lea in West Cheshire; Mobberley, Norbury, Alderley, Siddington, Congleton, Rode and half of Northenden in East Cheshire; Sandbach, Sutton, Wimboldsley and Clive in the centre of the county. His possession of the contiguous manors of Weaver, Wimboldsley, Sutton and Clive on the each side of the river gave him a block of territory in the very heart of Cheshire. Though a tenant-in-chief of the earl his estates were never recognised as one of the seven Cheshire Norman baronies. Later, about 1130, these manors with some additions, such as Gawsworth, became the basis of an estate known as ‘the fee of Alford’ with its base at the castle there.

Bigot was a Norman who came from Les Loges, Calvados, and was in all probability a member of the family of Roger Bigot, earl of Norfolk and lord of Les Loges. A Bigot de Loges was the name of a knight who accompanied William the Conqueror in 1066. In the church of Dives-sur-Mer, where Duke William and his companions said mass before setting sail for England, there is a plaque listing those who took part in the invasion which includes his name. Bigot's son seems to have been Hugh who received the grant of Gawsworth about 1140. During the reign of Henry II (1154- 1189) the lord of the fee was Robert de Aldford – perhaps a descendant as later, in the early thirteenth century, a Richard de Aldford granted Gawsworth to Herbert d’Orreby. The fee of Aldford, and therefore Weaver, eventually became the property of the Arderne family.

Returning to Domesday Weaver. What is not clear is whether the two Domesday manors were eventually combined: it is perhaps likely given that Bigot held the same manors as those retained by the earl in the first entry.

Lords of the Manor -the Weaver Family

The manor of Weaver became the possession of a family which bore the same name. Whether the family were descended from Bigot is a matter of conjecture, what is more likely is that they were descended from the unnamed 'radman' of 1086. The first with the family name to appear in records is William de Weaver who about 1225 witnessed the earl of Chester's grant of land in the Hepden area of Darnhall to Robert Woodford.¹³ But it is as under-foresters of Mondrem that they appear in the records most frequently.

The hereditary forestership of Mondrem was an office held by the Grosvenors of Little Budworth.¹⁴ The master foresters were assisted by a number of officials known as under-foresters. In the forests of Mara and Mondrem (Delamere) there were eight under-foresters and two servants distributed around the forest areas. They were required to make periodic inspections of the forest and to deal with those who transgressed the forest laws and were entitled to board and lodging from any householder who held more than an acre of land in the forest. One such family of foresters was that of Weaver, who held lands in Weaver, Aston (near Nantwich) and Rushton. Henry de Weaver in 1240 paid 12d for a bovate of land in Rushton, as part of his forestership.¹⁵ In 1271 he was fined £5 by the justiciar of Chester, then Reginald de Grey, for his poor keeping of the forest and the destruction of woodland. He again occurs as a forester the following year. It was found in 1310 that Henry de Weaver had held his forestership by finding one armed footman to keep the forest and that this office was worth forty shillings a year to be taken in food at various accustomed places in Mondrem.¹⁶ These may have been those where under-foresters could take puture.¹⁷ Henry seems to have been followed by Thomas of Weaver, who, for some reason or another, probably to do with some infringement of the forest laws and his duties, was imprisoned at Chester and his release ordered in 1280.

In 1282 Thomas de Weaver sued Richard son of Henry de Weaver in the County Court at Chester. It was stated that certain land in the manor had been in possession of Henry de Weaver during King John's reign and that these had descended to his son and heir who was also named Henry, the plaintiff's father. Richard had taken possession of the land through another Henry who had wrongly deprived the plaintiff's grandfather. The end result of the hearing was that Richard's right to the land was acknowledged.¹⁸ From this it would seem there were two distinct, though related, lines of the Weaver family at this time who shared the forestership. In 1302/3 a Richard de Weaver was allowed a moiety of the forestership of Mondrem by the court hearing matters concerning the forests that year.¹⁹

In 1287 Thomas was again before the County Court this time suing the Abbot of Vale Royal who had occupied eight acres of land in Weaver. His mother Margery joined him in the action. The Abbot, who was lord of the neighbouring manor of Over, claimed he held the land by virtue of a grant from Thomas. The plaintiff and his mother had to agree and Thomas was consequently fined 40d for his false suit and his mother 2s.²⁰ That same year a Hancock de Weaver was fined for causing an uproar within the precincts of the court and was fine 12d.²¹ What the nature of this incident was the records are silent; it may have been connected with Thomas' case and Hancock may have been a relation. In May 1288, Thomas was subject of writ being sought by Nicholas de Crewe and was also a member of the jury at the County Court.²² In 1279/80 Thomas paid 10 marks to the office of the Chamberlain for various transgressions.²³ Thomas and his wife Rose, who may have been a member of the Crewe family, held a third share of four messuages and a bovate of land in Aston juxta Mondrem.²⁴

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: WEAVER

Members of the Weaver family regularly appear as jurors in the Middlewich Court rolls about this time. Henry de Weaver occurs several times in the 1250s and 1260s.²⁵ Thomas is listed in the 1280s and 90s.²⁶ Another Henry occurs in the 1290s and 1300s.²⁷

Thomas de Weaver may have died in the first few years of the fourteenth century for in 1303 William Venables had had the keeping of Thomas' forestership for eighteen months without pay or 'puture' (i.e. the sustenance for the forester and his horse taken within the forest precincts) and was accordingly paid 100s.²⁸ In 1311/2 Thomas' widow, Rose, sued William de Venables of Bradwall, who had the custody of her late husband's estate and the wardship of her son Henry, for her dower. She claimed, and eventually had assigned, seven messuages and a mill in Weaver along with associated interests in Clive and Middlewich.²⁹ Thomas de Weaver was succeeded as lord by a son or brother named Henry de Weaver who does not seem to have enjoyed the manor for very long.

At a date sometime before 1297 John le Minor granted to Henry de Weaver, 'his chief lord', 8d of annual rent which the monks of Dieulacres paid him, in return for a single payment of 5s. Henry's father, Henry senior, was a witness to the deed.³⁰ Around the year 1300 Hugh Venables, baron of Kinderton, granted a lease of land in 'Williamsholme' at a rent of 5s and a salt house in Middlewich to Henry de Weaver. In 1303/4 Henry 'son of Thomas de Wevre' paid 40d in fines to the County Court as did William in the sum of ½ mark, Margerey in the sum of 5s, and John for non attendance 12d.³¹ Sometime later, and after 1311, Sir Hugh's widow, Agatha, sued Henry's son, Thomas, for her dower, namely a third of the property.³² Both Henry de Weaver and his son Henry occur as witnesses to a deed dated 8 May 1309 by which Richard, lord of Minshull, leased a meadow next to Wimboldsley Bridge to Randle de Spurstow.³³

In March 1311 an inquisition post mortem was held on Henry de Weaver which found that his son and heir was his twelve years old Thomas. The findings were that Henry had held his manor of Weaver from Sir John de Arderne by finding two footmen to serve at the lord's castle of Aldford for forty days at the lord's expense and a payment of 8s 6d a year. He also held a bovate of land in the manor of Rushton for a rent of 2s a year and attending the lord of the manor's court at Rushton twice a year. The inquisition also confirmed that he held the office of forester of Mondrem through homage and fealty to the earl of Chester and employing one footman with horn, bow and arrows to keep the forest. The office was worth 40s a year in 'puture'.³⁴ A year or so later Henry's widow Mabell sued both her mother-in-law Rose and William Venables, who was then Thomas' guardian.³⁵ Her claim against Rose was for a third of the manor of Weaver, a messuage, a rent of 19d, a salt house in Middlewich and a water-mill in Clive. Against Venables she claimed two parts of the manor of Weaver, a rent of 2s in 'Curtishulme', two parts of the water-mill in Clive, a messuage and bovate of land in Rushton, a salthouse and two parts of another together with a rent of 3s 1d in Middlewich and a messuage with twenty-three acres of land, and acre of wood and an acre of meadow in 'Bretherhulm'.

In 1314, in the County Court, Thomas charged his ex-guardian William Venables of Bradwall of ousting him from his tenement in Kinderton which included 6 acres of land and 1 acre of wood. Thomas lost the case.³⁶ Thomas may have married a lady named Ellen for in 1335/6 she was described as his widow when she sued Henry Weaver of Kinderton for a messuage and a carucate of land in Kinderton and vouched to warranty her son Richard.³⁷

In 1322 Thomas obtained from his mother Mabell and her new husband David de Calveley two parts of the manor of Weaver, a third part of two salt houses, a total of 36 in rents from Middlewich, Curtishulme and Clive.³⁸ Thomas had married Alice a daughter of the neighbouring Minshull family and then a lady named Mabell who survived him and was paid a dower of £4 a year.³⁹ By one or other of his wives he had a son and heir named Richard born about 1326.⁴⁰

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: WEAVER

In 1342 an inquiry before the escheator of Chester, Hugh Hopewas, found that Richard's marriage had been arranged by the previous escheator, Peter Arderne, in favour of his own daughter, Margaret. Sir John de Arderne, the paramount lord of Weaver, had claimed the marriage and then sold it to Peter for 50 marks. Afterwards the earl claimed rights over the marriage and called the Ardernes to account. Peter said that the manor, the parcel of land in Rushton and the forestership were in the holding of both the Arderne family (for the manor of Weaver) and Roger Grey (for the manor of Rushton), and as escheator he had delivered it to them. In fact Peter had been in possession of the marriage as early as the latter months of 1333. The Ardernes lost their argument and were fined.⁴¹ Richard's marriage was a particularly fortuitous one as he eventually became heir to the Arderne estates. Both his brother-in-law, Peter, and his sister-in-law, who married John Fitton of Bollin, died without children and therefore he became lord of Weaver in his own right.

In 1347 Thomas Weaver was charged with destroying the vert by assarting and his office and lands were confiscated by the Black Prince and had not been re-instated by the time of his death which probably occurred shortly afterwards.⁴²

In 1349/50 and the following year, 8 shillings was charged to the Chamberlain of Chester's accounts for the issues of one messuage and one bovate of land belonging to the bailiwick of Mondrem which had belonged to Thomas Weaver, as his son and heir, Richard, was still under age. A note says that the due to the pestilence the house was unoccupied and the land was fresh and uncultivated, and that damage had been done to the forest by 'assarts'.⁴³

On 28 November 1353 as a result of a petition from Richard declaring that he was the son and heir of Thomas and then of full age, he was required to appear before the County Court to prove his entitlement to the bailiwick and the bovate of land.⁴⁴ Richard was successful and took over his father's responsibilities and in 1356.

In 1356/7 Richard de Weaver had the town of Middlewich at farm from the earldom: paying part of the £50 farm was £18. The following year he paid 44s 6½d as bailiff and farmer of the town in part payment of arrears due.⁴⁵ This Richard occurs once as a juror in Middlewich in 1366.⁴⁶

There are other Weavers at this time who are in all probability closely related. A Rannulph de Weaver was on the Rheims campaign of 1359. Richard son of Ralph de Weaver and Richard Weaver of Bowden were archers of the Crown in the late fourteenth century. Thomas de Weaver had an annuity of 100s for life from King Richard II and John de Weaver had his grant during the king's pleasure.

On 8 April 1367 by an indenture Richard de Weaver and his wife Margaret granted to Sir Robert Fouleshurst the marriage of their son Thomas to Annabel, his daughter, along with lands in Macclesfield Hundred. Sir Robert agreed to pay 100 marks of silver to the exchequer at Chester for the privilege. Sir Robert was required to keep Thomas and Annabel in clothing and food for the next eleven years until Thomas became of full age. There was an agreement that Sir Robert was to pay the fine if in England and not overseas otherwise Richard would pay.⁴⁷ It seems that this Thomas may have died young and that the marriage never took place and that subsequently another son was born and given the same name, for on 29 August 1378 the wardship and marriage of Thomas son of Richard Weaver was granted by the earl to Sir William Carrington.⁴⁸

About 1368 Richard had a licence from the earl of Chester, which cost him £100, to enclose and cultivate Weaver Wood which lay within the bounds of the forest of Mondrem, something not normally allowed in the forest areas.⁴⁹ This may have been something he had been anxious to do for some time for when Richard made the marriage contract with Robert

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: WEAVER

Fouleshurst in 1367 it was stipulated that Robert would make every effort to disafforest 'Weverwood' at his own cost.

The year of Richard's death is not known as the *inquisition post mortem* is undated. It states that Richard held Weaver and a moiety of the forestership of Mondrem and of 2s rent from property in Rushton and that Thomas, his heir, was aged three years when his father died. As Sir William Carrington was granted the wardship of Thomas Weaver from August 1378 this suggests that Richard was dead by then. Thomas' proof of age was held at Nantwich in February 1392 and that found that he had been twenty-one years old in mid-January and had been baptized at Over church in 1371 which suggests his father died in 1374. A writ was issued by the king on 31 May 1392 to have enquiries made into what lands Thomas' father had held when he died, and on 20 July the same year Thomas had a writ allowing him to also inherit his mother's family's estate. Her lands consisted of property in Woodlegh (Bredbury) worth 100s a year, which the guardian had leased to a William Hulme. An inquisition dated 17 September 1399 recorded that Isabel Weaver held in dower five messuages, 200 acres of land twenty acres of meadow and two acres of wood in Woodlegh and that her late husband Thomas had held it jointly with Margaret widow of Hugh Weaver, presumably Thomas' brother.

Thomas received an annuity of 100s from the king as he had been retained in royal service for life. Thomas Weaver died in 1399 when he was in possession of the manor of Weaver worth £16 10s a year; lands in Rushton, Over Alderley, Nether Alderley Middlewich, Clive and Woodlegh. His son and heir was Edward though he did have another son named Thomas who settled at Aston juxta Mondrem. Shortly before his death he granted the custody of his son, Edward, and the manor of Weaver to John son of Thomas del Booth. Keeping it in the family the widow Isabel re-married Thomas del Booth. As this marriage was without the earl's licence and inquiry was held in 1402.

Edward applied to receive his inheritance out of the hands of his guardian, Thomas del Booth, in March 1413 and duly received the same that June. This suggests that he was born about 1392. He was knighted at some time before 2 April 1422 when he occurs as about to go to France in the retinue of Queen Katherine.

Edward may have had a brother named Hugh who went abroad on the king's service in 1415. Both Edward and Hugh, along with William Clive, entered into a recognisance for 24s with the Prioress of Chester at about the same time presumably to do with lands in Wharton where the nuns had an estate. In 1416 Edward and others entered into a bond of £200 to keep the peace towards members of the Brereton and Furnival families.

In 1422 Sir Edward granted his mother Isabel and her then husband Thomas del Booth the manor of Woodlegh and lands in Bredbury and Romiley.

Sir Edward seems to have died in September 1434. An inquiry held that on the day he died he held the manor of Weaver, worth £12, from the earl of Chester; a bovate of land worth 2s in Rushton; two messuages and thirty eight acres in Clive and Newton worth 40s; four messuages, a toft and rents in Middlewich worth 30s; a rent of 6s 8d from property in Manley; 5s rent in 'Barretspole'; three messuages and 170 acres in Nether Alderley, worth £8; eight messuages and 370 acres in Over Alderley worth £10; five messuages and 226 acres in Woodlegh worth £6 13s 4d; one messuage and ten acres in Upton near Macclesfield worth 5s. His eldest son, Richard, seems to have pre-deceased his father and, though married to Elizabeth Whitmore about 1417, had no children. The heir was declared to be Thomas Weaver, a second son, then aged at least 24 years. Edward seems to have had another son named William who resided in Middlewich.

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: WEAVER

The next generation was Thomas Weaver who married a lady named Elizabeth and had by her an only daughter also named Elizabeth. This Thomas occurs on a number of occasions concerning disputes between gentry families. On 2 March 1439 he entered into a bond to pay 8 marks to Joan the widow of Thomas del Holt.⁵⁰ On 24 October 1441 Thomas Weaver and Thomas Fitton settled a dispute between the Mainwaring family and the Leghs of Booths.⁵¹ Likewise on 30 November 1445 Sir Edmund Trafford and Thomas Weaver made an award in the case between the Leghs and the Carrington family.⁵² In September 1443 Thomas Weaver took the lease of the office of chamberlain of Middlewich for six years at £12 3s 4d a year. As chamberlain he would account for all the revenues due to the crown from the salt workings and the town. He died in 1446. In that same year an award was made by Sir Thomas Stanley settling a dispute between the abbot of Vale Royal and Randal Weaver concerning certain trespasses. Randal was required to pay £21 4s 8d. It seems that the abbot had been bound in the sum of £50 to Randal's brother Thomas.⁵³

With Thomas' death his daughter and heiress became a ward of King Henry VI who then, in 1446, granted her wardship to Sir Thomas Stanley of Lathom, the controller of the royal household, later the first Lord Stanley. He then arranged for her to marry his third son, Sir John Stanley, a younger brother of Thomas, the first Earl of Derby. After his death in the early 1480s she remarried to Sir John Done of Utkinton.

Later Weavers

It seems that from an early date a branch of the Weaver family resided in Kinderton and in and around Middlewich.

A John Weaver was a witness to a Middlewich deed in 1427 and 1438.⁵⁴ A William occurs as a witness to various Middlewich deeds in 1309, 1360, 1477, 1482, 1484, 1486, 1491 and 1494.⁵⁵ In 1496 William had licence to boil salt in 2 salt houses which cost him 20s, though it was said he was not then a burgess of the town.⁵⁶ Yet he is listed as a burgess in 1470, 1476, and 1488.⁵⁷ In 1495 he occupied the salt house once the property of the Order of St John.⁵⁸

On 28 June 1487 Sir John Done granted a lease for 5s a year to William Weaver, son of Sir Edward Weaver, a messuage along Lewin Street in Middlewich. William also had a grant of a salt house from James Duncalfe of Foxwist in December 1488. William then in 1510 granted to Thomas Venables the same messuage along with the salt house, paying the same rent. William's son William confirmed the grant and released all his rights in the property eight years later.⁵⁹

The Stanleys of Weaver

Sir John Stanley and his wife Elizabeth were succeeded by Thomas (I) Stanley who styled himself as 'of Weaver' and may well have used the old hall as his main home despite the family's holdings in Alderley: he died in April 1526 and was buried at Middlewich. His inquisition post mortem was sealed and delivered 'in the marled field next the orchard of Wevre'. Besides his eldest son Thomas (II) who succeeded him Thomas senior had four other sons: Randle, John, Richard and William who were all alive in 1520.

Thomas (II) who died in January 1557 aged about 51 years, had brothers named John and Randle. He was followed by another Thomas (III) who was born in 1530, served as sheriff of Cheshire in 1571-2, died on 1 August 1591 and was buried at Alderley; he apparently rebuilt or improved the manor houses at Alderley and Weaver. The father and son both occur in the muster rolls for Weaver for the year 1548. The father both were described as 'billmen' the father having a horse and 'harness' (armour) and the son just having armour. At the same time John and William Stanley, no doubt close relations who also lived at Weaver, were also listed as billmen who lacked any 'harness'.



*Weaver Hall standing above the river Weaver
(From a print in Ormerod's 'History of Cheshire')*

Thomas (III) left a son named Randle who was then at least thirty years old. Randle, who served for a time as Governor of the Isle of Man and married Margaret daughter and heiress of Thomas Maisteron of Nantwich. He died at Middlewich on 17 June 1595 leaving an eighteen years old son named Thomas (IV). This Randle made a grant of land to a Thomas Pott from whom the nineteenth century house called 'Pots House' derives its name.

Thomas (IV) was knighted and died on 21 November 1605 who was aged eight at the time of his father's death. He married Elizabeth daughter and heiress of Sir Peter Warburton, Chief Justice of the Common Pleas. He was perhaps the last of the family to live at Weaver. His son, another Thomas (V), became sheriff of Cheshire in 1631 and was created a baronet in 1660: he resided at Alderley Park. In 1626 Sir Thomas Stanley paid £6 13s 4d for his lands in Weaver towards the mize (tax) collected that year.⁶⁰

Sir Peter Stanley, the second baronet, who succeeded his father Sir Thomas, was High Sheriff of Cheshire in 1678. During the lifetime of Sir Thomas Stanley, elder son and heir of Sir Peter, the old timber-framed Weaver Hall, which until then had remained in the family, was sold to Randle Wilbraham of Townshend, Nantwich about 1710.

The Early Modern Township

According to the muster rolls of 1548 there were fourteen men of military age residing in Weaver. Assuming that each represented a household we may assume a population of about seventy. The names of those listed, with their equipment details, are:

Thomas Stanley, a billman, a horse and harness
Thomas Stanley, junior, harnessed, a billman

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: WEAVER

William Haywood, an archer, horse and harness
Hugh Wishaw, an archer, horse and harness
John Stanley, a billman, no harness
William Stanley, a billman, wanting harness
Randolph Percevall, a billman, wanting harness
John Beyment, a billman, no harness
William Walley, an archer wanting harness
John Heyworth, a billman, no harness
Peter Lawton, a billman, no harness
John Harden, a billman, wanting harness
Thomas Downes, a billman, wanting harness
Raffe Hassall, an archer wanting harness.

With regards to this list of men from Weaver it is clear that the Stanleys are members of the family who were lords of the manor and resided at Weaver Hall and Randoll Percevall (also spelt with a middle 'i' and one 'l') represents a family which lived in the township for a further hundred years. The remaining family names do not seem to have survived in the area.

The earliest surviving will is that of Hugh Robinson dated 24 January 1617/8: he was buried at Over in April 1618. In view of the fact that a later generation seems to have lived at Weaver Hall it seems he may have been a tenant there holding it from the Stanley family. Although he resided in Weaver he had leases of lands in Over from Thomas Newall, Ann Newall and John Stanley all of which he set to his wife Joanne and after her death to his children: Thomas, Alice Margaret and Ann equally. He also had a married daughter named Frances, wife of Thomas Greastie (Gresty), who received two shillings, whilst her daughter Margaret was to receive five shillings.⁶¹ Son Thomas was bequeathed his 'bakes (books), deske, cheiste, all the tables, formes, bedstidde and dishboard'. He was to pay each of his three sisters £3 6s 8d within twelve months of marrying 'any woman'. Once his debts had been cleared and his funeral expenses paid, half of anything remaining went to his widow with the other half to Thomas and his three sisters. Hugh's brother John, who was appointed as an overseer of the will, witnessed it along with John Kell 'clericus' who was vicar of Church Minshull.

Accompanying the will there is an inventory of his goods and chattels drafted on 8 April 1618. The total value amounted to £58 11s. His dozen cattle totalled £27 16s 8d and his horses £6 10s. Other livestock included a gander, two geese and two hens. He had a stack of hay and corn worth £4 in his barn and the house. The items of furniture granted to his son were worth 26s 8d.

Two other early wills are those of William Percival, which was proved in 1619, and of Richard Minshull in 1620. Minshull's will was dated 16th March 1620 and according to its terms his illegitimate son Richard was to receive his clothes and a cow with £10 when and if his mother remarried – if she didn't he was to have the £10 when she died if she had sufficient funds to pay the sum. His servant Elizabeth Hitchin was to have a cow and £10 on the same conditions. Once funeral expenses and debts had been discharged anything left went to his wife Anne Minshull.

The Cornes family occur in Weaver during the first half of the seventeenth century. Ann Cornes, widow of Robert Cornes, paid 8d tax in 1626.⁶² He seems to be the same Robert Cornes who was one of the appraisers of Richard Minshull's inventory in 1620. Whilst there are no wills remaining for the Cornes family there are two extant inventories. The first of these was made following Robert Cornes death in 1631. Significant amongst his possession were twenty-six cows and fifteen calves valued at £80 with a further £43 worth of cattle besides a couple of horses, sheep and swine worth £14 6s. He had quantities of wheat, rye, oats, barley, hay, malt, and beans. In foodstuff he had £20 worth of cheese along with bacon

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: WEAVER

and beef. With his household goods and furniture and the value of his leases on various plots of land, altogether his inventory amounted to ????? Two years later the inventory of Richard Cornes was drafted, one of the appraisers being a Randle Cornes who was probably a close relative. In view of the fact that Richard had twenty cows worth £70 along with other cattle it is likely that he was the son of Robert and had inherited the animals.

By 1664 the number of households had increased significantly as indicated by the Hearth Tax returns of that year.

<i>Chargeable</i>		Margaret Greens	1
Edmund Dickins	6	Steven Pott	1
Thomas Robinson	9	Humphrey Charter	1
Richard Walker	2	Richard Chatterton	1
Edward Jackson	1		
William Heath	1	<i>Not Chargeable</i>	
John Holland	1	Owen Joynson	1
Samuel Hope	1	Hughe Houlse	1
Thomas Holland	1	Ralphe Houlse	1
William Heaward	1	Jane Houlse	1
Arthur Shalcrosse	1	Raphe Hunt	1
Randle Royle	1	Richard Oulton	1
Randle Walker	1	Thomas Mesterson	1
Richard Chatterton	1	John Browne	1
		Fardenando Pott	1

The returns tell us that there were two substantial houses in the township: one, presumably being Weaver Hall, with its nine hearths and the other with six hearths. Another house, of more modest proportions, had two hearths, whilst the rest were poor single-hearthed cottages. Nine households were too poor to pay the shilling a year tax. The twenty-six households would suggest a population of about 130, almost doubling the population in seventy years.

Nineteenth Century Weaver

Weaver became a civil parish in 1866 and in 1892 the whole of Weaver was added to the township and civil parish of Darnhall. The population rose from 129 in 1810 to 159 by 1881 and the number of residential properties varied between 35 and 29 throughout the century.

The 1810 census reckoned that there were sixty-seven males and sixty-four females among twenty-eight families living in twenty houses. Of the families the majority earned their living by means of agriculture with only six being involved in trade.

The main area of residential property was Swanlow Lane with cottages stretched along the east side of the lane and on both sides down the hill to the Ash Brook. Most of the cottages on the Swanlow Lane had disappeared by 1900.

Land ownership at this time was in the hands of the Wilbraham family of Nantwich and Delamere Lodge. George Wilbraham (1741-1813) was sheriff of Cheshire in 1791 as lord of the manor held the vast majority of the land, with his brother Roger (1743-1829) having possession of two properties. George's lands were divided into seven farms occupied in 1809 by John Williamson (Weaver Hall), Thomas Williamson (School Bank), Samuel Trelfa (Weaver Wood), Joseph Shaw, Joseph Gittins (Dairy House?), Thomas Cornes (Weaver Grove), and another occupied by Thomas Cornes. Roger Wilbraham's two farms were both occupied by John Wood which by 1830 had been consolidated into one known, later, as Court

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: WEAVER

House Farm. The farms occupied by Thomas Cornes and that of Joseph Shaw were also consolidated by 1830 into one occupied by Shaw at Weaver Grove

There were five freehold estates in the township. In between at least 1809 and 1830 these were held by John Baker, for a property once known as 'Hewitts'; Joseph Darlington, Richard Darlington and John Towers, for a property once known as 'Jacksons'; Thomas Tomlinson (who sublet to John Wrench) and Thomas Stones on a property known as 'Wittening Yard'; and lastly Thomas and Peter Joynson for a property known as 'Chivey Hill'. These are likely to have been small parcels of land with houses.

Weaver in 1841

In 1841 the main centres of agricultural business and occupation were the six farms: Weaver Hall, Dairy House, Grove House, Wood House, School Bank and Court House. Another farm, Pots House shown on Bryant's map of 1831 seems to have ceased working by this time.

Of the heads of household the majority were involved in agriculture either as farmers or farm labourers, but significantly eight men were employed as salt makers in nearby Winsford. Two people, Ann Jarvis and John Wrench were probably employed at the weaving mill in Haigh Street, Over, as a wool carder and a weaver. Two men, Samuel Pickering and Peter Joynson were employed as an iron miller and a joiner. John Foxley ran a grocer's shop where the Methodist chapel now stands.

On School Bank there was a school for young girls. This was run by Caroline Maddock, aged at least sixty and her sister, or daughter, aged at least forty. In the school house there lived a twelve years old boy, an eleven years old girl and eight girls aged between three and nine years. There is no reference to the school in later years.

Weaver in 1851

By 1851 there were 140 people living in 31 houses: by this time the number of houses equalled that of families. The 1851 census, held in the first week of April, provides a detailed analysis of who lived here. Unlike the census held ten years earlier it gives more details as regards ages, relationships, occupation and places of birth.

There were six substantial farms containing 843 acres of land. Weaver Hall was home to forty years old John Tomlinson who farmed 200 acres. He had a wife, Martha, and three sons and three daughters aged between six and sixteen. He employed four household servants as well as two labourers who lived elsewhere. At Dairy House Farm Joseph and Ann Owen farmed 88 acres and had a family of six young children. They were assisted by four servants and two 'out-door' labourers. Joseph and Jane Shaw, both in their seventies, farmed 100 acres at Weaver Grove. They lived with their daughter and three grandchildren and had three servants and two labourers who lived away from the premises. The next farm was Weaver Wood occupied by John and Ann Trelfa. To work this 180 acre farm he had four servants and an 'out door' labourer. Along Swanlow Lane there was another farm of 75 acres (known as Pear Tree Farm). This was occupied by William and Jane Moseley, their daughter and step-son and two servants. On the top of the Ash Bank there was a farm known as School Bank (later it was said this contained 200 acres).⁶³ Here there lived an Elizabeth Broster who was a fifty-six years old housekeeper; her nineteen years old daughter who was a house servant; a twenty seven years old servant who was described as a waggoner and another servant, a sixteen years old agricultural labourer. The house was owned by John Lee of Over. In fact thirty-five years old Lee lived at Grove Cottage, Swanlow, with his wife, their son and a servant: his occupation was given as farmer of School Bank farm in Weaver.

The majority of residents lived along the east side of Swanlow Lane. Starting at the southern end we have the following heads of household: John Foxley, (aged 55) a grocer; John Buckley, (65) a salt boiler; William Mason, (43) a gardener; Samuel Buckley (28) an

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: WEAVER

agricultural labourer; Mathew Hodkinson (53) a salt boiler; Thomas Benion, (55) an agricultural labourer; Robert Noden, (42) a salt boiler; William Egerton, (25) a brick maker; Edward Williamson, (62) an agricultural labourer who lived with a daughter who was a dressmaker and a son who was a wheelwright; Joseph Alberson, (40) a pan smith; and lastly Samuel Slack (66) who farmed a three-acre smallholding.

Down the hill to the Ashbrook there were several cottages occupied by: Sarah Joynson, (53) a farmer of three acres; Richard Jackson, (56) an agricultural labourer; John Ollier, (53) a shoemaker who employed two men; Samuel Wilkinson, (26) an agricultural labourer; Ralph Davies, (73) an agricultural labourer; William Palin, (25) an agricultural labourer; Samuel Dodd, (70) a pauper; and William Williamson (73) a thatcher who lived with his thirty years old grandson who was an agricultural labourer.

Weaver in 1871

Although there was a census in 1861 that for 1871 is a little more meaningful given that twenty years had elapsed. Now the township was home to 154 people (87 men and 67 women) living in 31 houses.

The first property to be mentioned is Weaver Grove Farm which was home to Joseph Shaw (56) and his family of two sons and a daughter all of whom had been born in Weaver. They had one male servant. Next door was a property just titled 'Farm Weaver' which had 80 acres (in 1851 this was Dairy House Farm) and was worked by Charles Tomlinson (26). Weaver Hall was still the home of John Tomlinson (64) and his daughter Annie (27). They had four male servants and two female servants to assist in the running of their 200 acres estate. Weaver Wood Farm was still in the hands of the Trelfa family though now Thomas had the 190 acres with his wife and their three young sons. They were assisted by seven servants. Joseph (52) and Ann Owen had moved from Dairy House to farm 200 acres at School Bank. This was home to their six children and three servants all of whom were born in Darnhall, Weaver or Over.

The census now moves on to the cottages at Ashbrook on what was called Chivey Hill. The cottages were on both sides of the lane going up the hill. First John Foster (32) a shoemaker and his family. Next, John Sumner (24), a labourer, and his wife and young child. John Oakes (49) a salt boiler and his wife and five children lived in the next cottage. Finally Edward Bate (28) a labourer and his family.

On to Swanlow Lane where the cottages were only along the right hand side when travelling towards Over (Winsford). The first cottage was occupied by William Clarke (42) a labourer and his family including an eight years old grandson! Widow Martha Jackson (71) lived next door with her daughter and a lodger who was employed as a stone carver. Joseph Sumner (47) a farm labourer; Thomas Williamson (51) a game keeper; Rowland Waring (33) an agricultural labourer; George Holland (36) a stone mason; William Egerton (45) a bricklayer; John Holland (31) a shopkeeper and farmer; John Williams (38) a salt maker; William Jerrie (29) a labourer; Matthew Hodkinson (73) who was 'out of employ'; Thomas Bennion (73) a labourer; James Bostock (53) a stone breaker; James Walton (37) a labourer; Samuel Sproson (81) a waterman; and lastly on this section Samuel Bebbington (38) a salt maker.

At Pear Tree Farm William Moseley was still tenant of 72 acres. He now lived with his daughter Ann, son-in-law Samuel Waddington and their children and one servant. The next cottage along Swanlow Lane was home to salt maker William Joynson's (47) family of a wife and six children. Then came three other salt makers' families: Job Pace (34); Joseph Young (56); John Thomas (53).

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: WEAVER

On Swanlow Lane there is a Methodist Chapel. The present building was erected in 1899 but there was an earlier building on this site. In 1881 the Chapel was also used as a grocer's shop occupied by John Holland. He was there ten years earlier as recorded above. In 1861 Ann Moss had been a grocer at this location and John Foxley prior to her as early as 1841.



The Township of Weaver in the late 19th century

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- ¹ G. Ormerod, *A History of the County Palatine of Chester*, vol 11, (ed. T. Helsby), p. 210
- ² G. Ormerod, *A History of the County Palatine of Chester*, vol 11, (ed. T. Helsby), p. 210
- ³ B. Curzon, *The Book of Winsford* (1997), p. 13.
- ⁴ CRO: DDX 150 'The Account Book of Thomas Furber of Austerson, farmer, 1767-1796'
- ⁵ Calvert, *Salt in Cheshire* (19) pp. 317, 478
- ⁶
- ⁷ *Cheshire Inquisitions Post Mortem* p. 65
- ⁸ CRO: WS 1633 – Richard Cornes
- ⁹ Ormerod, p. 210
- ¹⁰ Kelly's *Directory of Cheshire 1906*, p. 491
- ¹¹ *Ibid*
- ¹² CRO: CR 63/25/1
- ¹³ J. Brownbill, ed., *The Ledger Book of Vale Royal Abbey*, Record Society, vol. 68 (1911), p. 30
- ¹⁴ The forest of Mondrem covered an area roughly bounded as follows: Chester Road, between Stamford Bridge and Northwich, the Weaver, the Darley Brook, the bounds between Rushton and Oulton to Yanelegh and then along the boundary between Eaton and Alpraham (the Wettenhall Brook) as far as Tarporley, and thence along the road from Tarporley back to Stamford Bridge. An area which included the township of Weaver.
- ¹⁵ R. Stewart-Brown, ed., *Cheshire in the Pipe Rolls, 1158-1301*, Record Society, vol. 92 (1938), p.57
- ¹⁶ VCH, p.174; Cal.Inq.p.m., v, pp.170-1
- ¹⁷ Ormerod, ii, 108
- ¹⁸ R. Stewart-Brown, ed., *Calendar of County Court, City Court and Eyre Rolls of Chester, 1259-1297*, (1925), p. 41
- ¹⁹ Ormerod, p. 206
- ²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 71
- ²¹ *Ibid*, p.73
- ²² *Ibid*, p.94/5
- ²³ *Pipe Rolls*, p. 142
- ²⁴ Ormerod, iii, p. 363
- ²⁵ J. Varley, ed., *A Middlewich Chartulary*, Part I, Chetham Society, N.S. vol 105 (1941) pp.105,115,117
- ²⁶ *Middlewich Chartulary*, Part I, pp.70,110,118,122
- ²⁷ *Middlewich Chartulary*, Part I, pp.71,104,148
- ²⁸ R. Stewart-Brown, ed., *Accounts of The Chamberlains and other Officers of The County of Chester, 1301-1360*, Record Society, vol 59 (1910), p.41
- ²⁹ Ormerod, p. 206
- ³⁰ J. Varley, ed., *A Middlewich Chartulary*, Part II, Chetham Society, N.S. vol 108 (1944) p.342
- ³¹ *Chamberlains Accounts*, pp.52,54,57
- ³² *Middlewich Chartulary*, Part I, p.180
- ³³ Ch Sheaf, March 1944, xxxix p. 31
- ³⁴ Cal. Inq Ed II, vol v, no. 292 (Cheshire Sheaf, June 1920, pp 52-3); Ormerod, p. 207
- ³⁵ *Ibid*
- ³⁶ *Middlewich Chartulary*, Part II, p.259
- ³⁷ Ormerod, III, p. 201
- ³⁸ Ormerod, II, p. 207. Ormerod gives 1342 but this must be wrong and a misreading of the regnal year.
- ³⁹ Ormerod, II, p. 208
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid*
- ⁴¹ Ch. Sheaf, xxvi, September 1929, p. 67
- ⁴² VCH; BPR, iii, p.134
- ⁴³ *Chamberlains Accounts*, pp.150, 203
- ⁴⁴ BPR, iii, 134
- ⁴⁵ *Chamberlains Accounts*, pp.232, 244
- ⁴⁶ *Middlewich Chartulary*, Part II, p.284
- ⁴⁷ Ch Sheaf June 1950 vol xlv p28
- ⁴⁸ ChRR, p85
- ⁴⁹ Ormerod, p. 208
- ⁵⁰ F. Taylor, *Hand-list of the Legh of Booths Charters in the John Rylands Library* (1950), no. 331

⁵¹ *Ibid*, no. 332

⁵² *Ibid*, no. 335

⁵³ Ch Sheaf June 1937, vol xxxii, p 55

⁵⁴ *Middlewich Chartulary*, Part II, pp.344 359

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, Part I, pp. 83, 86, 149, 150; Part II, pp. 324, 345, 348, 383

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, Part I, p.191

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 207/8

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 187

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, Part I, pp. 93-4

⁶⁰ CRO: CR 63/25/1

⁶¹ She was christened at Over on 22 November 1599, daughter of Hugh Olton alias Robinson and Anne. Frances and Thomas Gresty were married at Over on 27 December 1614 when she would have been aged fifteen.

⁶² CRO: CR 63/25/1

⁶³ Today this is the site of Weaver Park Farm