Brief history of Oxton, by John Green

The beginnings

Oxton appears to have been included with Eastham in the Domesday Survey. Held by one Hugh de Mara (alias Fitz Norman) it passed through his brother to the barons of Montalt (Mold). By the thirteenth century Oxton emerged as a separate manor under a younger line of this family, the Domvilles of Brimstage. Through the marriage of female heirs, the manor passed through other Cheshire families – the de Holes (or Hulses) of Raby and the Troutbecks of Dunham.

Shortly after Sir John Talbot of Albrighton married Margaret Troutbeck, they conveyed it to his first cousin, George Talbot, 4th Earl of Shrewsbury. A grandson of Sir John Talbot entered the line of earls in 1619 as the 9th when his predecessor died without issue and likewise a ninth generation descendent became the 18th Earl in 1856. It remained under successive earls until in 1990 when at the time of the 22nd Earl, the manorial title was put up for sale by auction.

The association with the Shrewsbury family is commemorated in the sequence of road names derived from subsidiary titles: Alton, Chetwyn, Ingestre, Shrewsbury, Talbot, Waterford and Wexford.

Business and expansion

Thus, with the growth of Liverpool commerce and the introduction of a much improved steam ferry service, it became a practical option for wealthy businessmen to commute from the Wirral. Furthermore, Oxton's elevated position afforded a spectacular view if the Mersey and beyond, allowing merchants visual intelligence of incoming shipping and cargoes.

The expansion was facilitated by the initial policy of successive Earls to lease building plots at a modest annual rental, rather than selling them outright and so allowing incoming residents to spend more on the construction of their new homes. The advent of building societies was a further factor.

As the working-classes moved into Birkenhead, their middle-class counterparts colonised Oxton, which expanded from its ridge-top position, eastward towards Birkenhead. By 1851 the population had just passed the 2000 point and awaited 1891 for this figure to double.

The township of Oxton had been part of the parish of Woodchurch, so that church attendance on Sundays required a long walk by lanes or field tracks that were often muddy and slippery. In 1844 a barn on the present site of St. Saviours, at the village centre, had been converted for use as a place of worship, and a church, consecrated in 185l followed. With the needs of an expanding population, this building was replaced by the present church, consecrated in 1891.

Steam ferries first ran from Tranmere in 1817, Birkenhead in 1820 and Woodside in 1822. The railway from Chester to Grange Lane station opened in 1840 but was not extended to Woodside until 1878. Horse-drawn omnibuses operated in the 1840s and 1850s, including services to meet the Woodside ferries from both the Talbot Hotel and the Queen's Arms. Horse-drawn trams operated from 1861 – the first in Europe – the stables situated at the top of Palm Grove. A steam train service through the Mersey Tunnel became available in 1868, being electrified in 1903. Electric trams replaced the earlier form in 1901, continuing until 1937. Motor busses were introduced in 1919.

For most of Oxton's history local government was in the hands of the Woodchurch Vestry, subject to the JPs at their Quarter and petty Sessions, but from 1859 to 1863 a group meeting in Oxton seemed to function as an informal local board. An official Local Board of Health was constituted in 1863, at first meeting in a Claughton Firs house, until 1874 when a purpose-built office was built in Village road, at the head of Alton Road . The Board ceased to function in 1877, when Oxton was incorporated into Birkenhead.

Oxton after 1900

Oxton reached its peak as a fashionable dwelling place at the end of the nineteenth century. Between the two wars many elegant houses were made into flats, and after the **second war** this growth of flats and consequent vehicle proliferation accelerated, as many of the old large and fine houses fell into decay or were demolished, and large gardens fell into the hands of developers prone to producing replacements quite out of character with the locality.

The distinctive features of Oxton are not to be so readily subdued and persist in its position on high ground, the mix of architectural style, the generous tree cover, the high random rubble sandstone walls with continuity of colour and texture, and its several unmetalled roads and narrow lanes.

It was in consideration of the value of these characteristics to Oxton residents formed The Oxton Society in 1979. The Conservation Area was also designated by Wirral Borough Council in 1979, leading to the founding of the Oxton Society.