A SHORT HISTORY OF OXTON 1800-1900 BY RAY JOHNSON

A Short Diversion

The modern town of Birkenhead stands upon what was once the wooded headland jutting out into the River Mersey. The name Birkenhead is probably descriptive of the ancient place in that it is most likely meaning is the "headland of birch trees". Great areas of the Wirral were once heavily forested and almost its entire Mersey shoreline must then have looked something like the scene we can still see today in the area of Eastham Ferry. Here great trees sweep down to the River Mersey and balance themselves at the very edge of rocky banks. The wooded headland that is now Birkenhead would once have been just like that.

The headland must have seemed like a finger of land pointing out into the River Mersey towards the Liverpool bank, for there was, on the other side of it, a large natural pool. On the south side, the Tranmere Pool ran inland for almost a mile and it is believed that this place was the Somreford (ie Some Ford) referred to in the Domesday Book, since it is known that it was possible to cross the Pool at time of lower summer tides, by stepping on stepping stones. It is also known that the stepping stones were still in use in 1790 when an embankment was built to replace them and to carry the new Chester Road across the pool. To the north of the headland lay the Wallasey Pool - 1 mile wide at its mouth and stretching so far inland that it almost cut across the Wirral completely.

There is no mention of Birkenhead in the Domesday Book, although many other settlements and villages on the Wirral are listed in some detail. It is therefore unlikely that a community of any size existed on the wooded headland at the time of the Norman Conquest. Perhaps it was because of this remoteness that Hamon de Mascy chose the headland nearly a hundred years later, as the site of the Priory that he built for a small community of monks. Once the Priory was established, the monks being of the Benedictine Order, took upon themselves the charitable duties of providing food and shelter to travellers and ferrying them across the River Mersey to Liverpool, if they so required. Perhaps it is this last duty of the monks that gives us the real reason for the choice of Birkenhead as the site for the Priory. For here was certainly the shortest and safest crossing of the River and the pools that lay either side of the headland provided shelter, into which the ferryboats could safely run, if the weather was against them.

There are some records that show that the Priory was well-known and well used for many centuries after its founding. For example, King Edward I paid two visits to Birkenhead (the first in 1275 and then again in 1277) and on both occasions he stayed several days at the Priory. On his second visit, at the height of a war with the Welsh, he was accompanied by Queen Eleanor, a royal retinue and many knights. There are also a number of interesting references to Birkenhead and its Priory among some 15th and 16th century records. One from 1436 tells how a certain William Poole of Liverpool abducted a young widow, Isabel, from her home near Warrington and carried her away, half naked, into the wilds of Wales. He later brought her, against her will of course, to Birkenhead before dragging her to Bidston church. There, upon pain of death, he forced the poor lady to marry him before an equally terrified priest. But as with all good "tales of olde", the heroine was rescued by the good Sir Thomas Stanley and the wicked William Poole eventually got his just desserts. No such timely rescue for Nicolas Barbour of Tranmere though. This poor misguided soul broke into the Priory on the night of July the fourth 1508 and stole silver ring worth 3s 4d. He was later arrested, taken to Chester Castle, tried, found guilty and hanged.

While the monks remained at the Priory, Birkenhead had a community of sorts and occasionally there were moments of excitement. But in the 16th century when Henry VIII's Dissolution closed the Priory forever, Birkenhead slipped back into its slumbering ways. It would be many centuries more before it would be truly reawakened, except for one brief but exciting episode in 1643. At the height of the Civil War, Colonel Sir Thomas Tyldsley arrived in Birkenhead with a troop of Cavaliers and proceeded to find his cannons across the river at the Roundheads who, at that time, held Liverpool's 13th century castle. The castle survived this particular bombardment only to be

replaced by church in 1743 and later by the Queen Victoria Monument in 1897. Castle Street is the only trace that Liverpool now has of its ancient castle.

Any study of the later history and development of Birkenhead will reveal all the excitement and activity of the town, which sprang up, literally from nothing, to become within no more than half a century one of the wonders of the Victorian Age. Perhaps you might think "wonder" too strong a word, but I have no reservations in using it. Birkenhead must surely have been a most wonderful place during the early years of the 19 century, for it was being transformed from a sleepy hamlet (who's few, poor cottages provided for little more than a hundred folk) into a fine and grand new town. Indeed its population would soon be counted in thousands and then tens of thousands. Benjamin Disraeli writing in his novel "Tancred", published in 1847, said of Damascus that it was "always young and always rich" but then he went on to say "as yet, the disciples of progress have not been able to match this instance of Damascus - but it is said they have great faith in the future of Birkenhead".

Birkenhead in the 19th century was certainly a place of great activity in change. Very early in its development an ambitious plan had been drawn up for the town by Gillespie Graham, a Scottish architect, on the instruction of William Laird, the shipbuilder, setting out a gridiron of wide streets, flanked by imposing buildings. Unfortunately not all of these plans were to be realised, but Hamilton Square, which is built on land that was once part of the ancient Bridge End Farm, still stands as proof of that man's vision of Birkenhead. Building began on the first houses in The Square in 1826, but it was some 20 years before all were completed. Hamilton Square, built from stone taken from the Storeton Quarries, has long been considered to be one of the finest of its type in the country.

In 1840, the Birkenhead to Chester Railway was opened to give the town fast and efficient connection to all parts of the kingdom and putting an end to the veritable scramble of heavily laden stagecoaches that ran between the two. To meet this particular demand the Woodside Hotel had been built in 1834, with stabling for a hundred horses. Soon after the railway started, work began on the laying out of Birkenhead Park, the world's first municipal park and copied as Central Park in New York. In 1845 a grand Market Hall was opened and all the time houses, shops, schools and churches were being built on every piece of available land. The population of Birkenhead continued to grow with its development further aided by the opening of the docks in the Great Float (Wallasey Pool) and in the 1850s, John Laird's new ship building yard, built to replace the original yard, which was on Wallasey pool, was opened on the south side of Woodside Ferry. The town of Birkenhead was growing, both in size and importance, soon boasting, thanks to the American Mr Train, the first horse drawn street trams in Europe.

However, I did not set out intending to write a history of Birkenhead but a book about Oxton, so you might therefore ask why I have taken up so much of your time in referring to Birkenhead's history. I believe that the answer to any such question is simply that in order to understand the Oxton of the period to which the latter part of this book refers, it is essential to first understand the development of Birkenhead during the early years of the 19th century. Oxton began to grow at that time and for many of the same reasons that caused to Birkenhead to grow, but it grew in a different way. We would need therefore, to return briefly to the development of Birkenhead, and indeed Liverpool, to fully explain the growth and development of Oxton.

A Green and Pleasant Land

During the 18th century, Liverpool had grown into one of the major ports in the British Isles, but as the 19th century opened, it had become a sprawling, squalid place with narrow streets and living accommodation wherever it could be found. The ever-richer growing merchants of that time must have looked across the River Mersey to the Birkenhead bank with longing, for there was still to be found an unspoiled coast, a wooded headland and the ruins of an ancient Priory. They could not

however consider living on this side of the river, simply because the crossing was long and dangerous in bad weather.

The ferry across the River Mersey at that time was nothing more substantial than an open boat, as it had always been since its 12th century beginnings. Human, animal and other cargoes would be packed together in these flimsy craft, for what might be a crossing of several hours depending on the whims and fancies of the winds and weather, or upon the strength of the oarsman's arms. There was nothing, in fact, to say that the crossing would be completed at all and the merchants of Liverpool thought that this was not a very satisfactory way of commuting to and from their places of work. Time to them was after all money.

As Liverpool expanded almost to breaking point, Birkenhead slumbered on. At the time of the 1801 census there were only 110 people living in Birkenhead, in 16 houses. 10 years later, this number had fallen to 105. But about that time a series of events began the transformation of the sleepy hamlet on the wooded headland, into a thriving town whose name would become known the world over.

In 1810, a young Scotsman arrived in Liverpool from Greenock. His name was William Laird and he had been sent south to build up an order book for his father's rope works. He was not successful in that particular endeavour but his natural drive and business sense ensured that he did not fail entirely. Before long he had established himself as a director of two shipping companies, as an agent for James Watt's steam engines and as the owner of a sugar house. He too looked across the River to the unspoiled Wirral bank and what he saw there was potential rather than natural beauty. In pools that lay at either side of Birkenhead's wooded headland, William Laird saw docks to relieve the mounting pressure on the Liverpool quays. In the acres of open fields he saw development of an industrial nature and at the water's edge he dreamt of a city of stone to equal, if not surpass, the splendours of London. He was also involved in a plan to strike a canal through the Wallasey Pool and out across the Wirral, to allow vessels to approach Liverpool from the River Dee, rather than negotiate the deadly sandbanks at the mouth of the River Mersey. The canal, like some other of Laird's great plans was never to be but, in any case, before anything could be attempted there was still one major problem to solve – how to cross the River Mersey quickly and safely. The solution to this particular problem was soon to hand

On Wednesday the 30th of June 1815 a small vessel arrived in the River Mersey having come down from the River Clyde via Ramsay, Isle of Man. There may not seem to be anything exceptional in this event but there was. The vessel, Elizabeth, was a steamboat and the first of that type to be seen in the Mersey. She was a mere 60 foot in length and her single engine could produce only eight horsepower. What was of most significance was that her cabin could accommodate a hundred passengers. For a short time she was used on a service between Liverpool and Runcorn (then a boating resort) but her boiler soon gave out and she was withdrawn. Nevertheless, the principal had been proved and steamboats that could carry large numbers of passengers were here to stay.

By 1816, there was a regular steam ferry between Liverpool and Eastham to connect with the Chester Stagecoach - and then on Whit Monday 1817, the first steam ferry to North Wirral crossed between the Queens Dock and Tranmere Pool. This tiny vessel, "Etna" must have seemed an ungainly craft - being constructed of two hulls (each about 60 feet in length) lashed either side of a single paddlewheel. Ungainly or not, "Etna" at last opened up the Birkenhead bank of the river to the merchants of Liverpool and it would not be long before they would take full advantage of its plentiful supply of unspoiled and unused land. William Laird could at last begin to realise some of his dreams.

The attractions that the Birkenhead bank of the river held for the Liverpool merchants was that it would give them the opportunity to build mansions and villas in spacious surroundings but away from the hustle, bustle and squalor of Liverpool, and now at only a short, safe distance away -

using the new regular steam ferry service. The first of the wealthy immigrants to the Wirral is believed to have been Mr Joseph Harrison, who moved across the River Mersey in 1820 to live in his new house built close to Woodside. He was soon joined by others, all believing that their wildest dreams had been answered - but had they? What those of little vision had not seen was the Birkenhead was set to grow and grow and grow.

In the years between 1801 and 1841 the number of houses in Birkenhead increased from 16 to 1361 and the population from a mere 110 souls to over 8000. What was once a green and pleasant land was fast turning into a major new town. The eyes of the Liverpool merchants were soon turned away from Birkenhead towards a nearby high and imposing hill, still green and relatively untouched. Here the land commanded views to the north of the River Mersey and beyond, and to the south of the River Dee and the Welsh hills. It does not take much consideration to conclude that up on that hill was clearly *the* place to live - and the hill was of course Oxton.

Old Oxton

In 1834 a haul of Roman coins, some bearing the head of Antonius and others of Victorinus, was found by quarrymen working at the Earl of Shrewsbury's stone quarry in Oxton (which is now part of the Arno Park). Whether or not the find is proof that the was a Roman settlement on Oxton Hill has not yet been be determined, but it was found in a prominent position, which commanded views of great distances and in all directions. Perhaps it is more likely that somebody chose this place to hide the coins because of its remoteness - we will never know. However, it is known that Storeton stone was highly valued and widely used by the Romans and this provides evidence from Chester that they were quarrying in Storeton around 50 AD. If that is the case, there is no reason to doubt that they also visited Oxton. Other than this most slender link with distant history, nothing else is known of Oxton until after the Norman Conquest.

Although not mentioned in the Domesday Book, Oxton is understood to have been given, along with the manor of Raby, to the Norman knight Hugh de Mara, following the Norman Conquest. In the middle of the 12th century however we find it in the hands of one of Cheshire's most powerful families the Domvilles, with Hugh de Domville recorded as Lord of Oxton (this exchange of ownership is not understood). Adam De Domville, the son of Hugh married Agatha, the daughter of Andrew de Brimstage, and their son William became the first Lord of both Brimstage and Oxton - a title that would remain within the Domville families for centuries. An extract from a manuscript written in 1278 states "Sir Roger Domville held the manors of Brunstath and Oxton from Richard de Montalt by military service". We now know Brunstath as Brimstage.

Oxton stayed with the Domvilles until 1397, when it passed to Sir Hugh Hulse (who was sergeant of the Bridge Gate Chester) on his marriage to Margery Domville, the sole heiress to the Domville's estates, after her only brother died unmarried. The only son from his marriage, Thomas, assumed the arms and title of Domville, but was once again without a male heir. All of his estates and titles (which locally included Raby, Barnston, Upton and part of Neston together with Oxton and Brimstage) passed to his daughter Margery on his death. Margery Hulse was still a minor and when her father died, she was made the ward of one William Troutbeck. His son, Sir John Troutback she later married in 1432. Sir John was killed in 1459, in bloody battle at Blore Heath, where over 2000 supporters of the House of Lancaster were slaughtered by the Yorkists, under the leadership of the Earl of Salisbury. Many of the dead that day, like Sir John Troutbeck, were from Cheshire, and I wonder quite how many of them were Sir John's own Oxton men.

Oxton changed hands finally when Sir John Colbert, Earl of Shrewsbury and Earl of Waterford and Wexford married Margaret Troutbeck, who was the great granddaughter of Sir John Troutbeck and Margery Hulse and the sole heiress to all of the family's estate. Oxton still rests with the Earls of Shrewsbury at the beginning of the 19th century. This historical connection is remembered today the names of Waterford Road, Wexford Road, Talbot Road, Alton Road, Ingestre Road and of

course Shrewsbury Road and by the Talbot and Shrewsbury Arms public houses. Other than this history of the exchange of ownership, little else is known of old Oxton, although a few references do exist.

It is known for instance that in the 13th century Hugh de Domville made grants to the Birkenhead Priory of Knavenebrec, a dwelling house in Oxton, together with some land, in what seems to have been an attempt to secure a place in Heaven for himself and, of course, for his heirs. Later in the same century, in 1282, a boundary dispute arose between Isabel, the lady of Oxton, her son Roger de Domville and the Prior of Birkenhead. This particular dispute ended with the Prior paying the Domville's 20 shillings in silver and with him agreeing that the boundary between Oxton and the Prior's land in Claughton would be "from Bottislowe to Swalewelowe and from thence by stones placed there in "Lingdale to the Raggedstone". Lingdale Lane ran from Oxton to Claughton very roughly where both of the Kingsmead Roads (North and South) now stand and was known that name until recent times. It is today remembered in Lingdale Road, Claughton, which is not in the same place.

Some records from the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries tell us about Oxton men being called for jury service in Chester, or involved in some boundary dispute or other, but there is very little that has come down to us over the centuries that tells us anything of mediaeval life in Oxton. In the 17th century we learn of the Rev Richard Sherlock DD. This gentleman, who was born in Oxton in 1641, paid the sum of £50 in 1677, so that a number of cows might be bought from the poor people of the township. Anybody who enjoyed the benefit of his charity, by keeping one of the cows, will be required to pay two shillings and sixpence per year. The profits from this arrangement would be used to maintain the number of cows at 15 and thereafter to give aid to the sick. Such practical charity was clearly needed in Oxton at the time of Dr Sherlock's donation. A description of the place, written about 1640 simply states that "between Tranmore and Oxton lyes a barren heath".

There have survived some 18th century records of baptisms, marriages and burials, for the chapel was then all that remained of the old Birkenhead Priory, and amongst these are to be found the names of a few Oxton folk. One record shows that on the 10th October 1721, William Gibson, a yeoman, and Mary Smith, a spinster, married at the Birkenhead Chapel. Both bride and groom were recorded as being from Oxton. Another entry tells us little Elizabeth Redding, was baptised in Birkenhead on September 11th, 1729. Her parents were John and Susannah, who lived in Oxton and indeed, that was where Elizabeth was born. John's occupation was given us Mariner and I wonder what fabulous tales he might have told to his young daughter, whenever he was home from sea - pirate ships, South Sea Islands and flying fish might have been everyday experiences for one who sailed as a contemporary of the Defoe's Robinson Crusoe. But to a little Oxton girl they must have seemed wondrous things indeed. One final reference in the 18th Century and again taken from the Birkenhead records, is about Mr Elijah Sarrat, a carpenter by trade who lived and worked in Oxton but was buried in Birkenhead in 1795. His only son lived but survived for only one year after his father's death. His daughter Elizabeth married one John Garner of Tranmere, who was also a carpenter and so the family business was continued into the 19th century.

In 1801, the census returns showed 137 people living in 26 dwellings in Oxton (in both respects more than in Birkenhead) and there were not many more 20 years later, when the Cheshire historian Ormerod wrote that it was still "small and mean, being composed of wretched straggling huts, among roads all but impassable". He was however complimentary towards the fine views from the top of Oxton Hill. At the same time that the new steam ferry boats were bringing changed to Birkenhead, Ormerod felt compelled to say further of the miserable township of Oxton that "no degree of civilisation or improvement" had yet reached this particular corner of Wirral. Ormerod may well have been overcritical of the place, though most of Oxton land was certainly not ideal for agriculture. A high sandstone ridge covered with bracken and "more suitable for game than the plough" would not have been an unkind description of Oxton Hill at that time.

20 years on from the time that Ormerod called Oxton the place of "extreme misery and destitution", it was beginning to change. In 1841 the population had risen from 546, living in 105 houses and by 1847 when Mortimer was writing his History of the Hundred of Wirral, the number of people living there had grown to over 1400 and the number of houses as 255. At that time Mortimer, referring to Ormerod's earlier criticism of Oxton said that, "it is now very different..... and it is studded with detached residences, to which every week witnesses the addition of others". Whatever the cause, Oxton was clearly no longer as "dreary and desolate" as Ormerod witnessed. In fact Mortimer went on to write about it that "few places indeed possess greater advantages of situation in Oxton; its elevated position, its ready access to the ferries; its proximity to the (Birkenhead) park and the total absence of all manufacture, will ever command of preference with those who wish for a near country retreat".

Of course, there were reasons for the quite sudden changes in Oxton that occur between the times of Ormerod's work and that of Mortimer's. First and foremost that there was a demand to satisfy and that demand, as we have already seen, was beginning to grow amongst those Liverpool merchants, who had earlier moved across the Mersey into the young town in Birkenhead. Now they wanted to move out of this fast-growing town to more pastoral surroundings and there were many more from Liverpool who would gladly join them. In any case, Birkenhead was now attracting its own merchants and industrialists. It is an interesting fact that of the 546 residence of Oxton in 1841, 228 were born outside of the County of Cheshire. Fortunately at the same time that the demand was increasing, the Earl of Shrewsbury granted fixed term building leases over large sections of Oxton. This provided any would-be resident with the opportunity of securing land at a very low cost and of therefore applying his capital to the grandeur of his house rather than the purchase of the land. The die was cast and Oxton was about to change forever.

Changing Fortunes

It is interesting to compare Oxton to Birkenhead during the closing years of the first half of the 19th century, for whilst both had grown in terms of population (and Birkenhead especially in this respect) since the turn of the century, Oxton was still very largely open heathland and raw in appearance. Here and there, houses were rising in Oxton but they were more of the mansion and villa variety, separated by large gardens, if not by large distances, from the next. In Birkenhead on the other hand the need to house a growing population (fast approaching 40,000) saw many fine plans for wide neatly laid out streets suddenly disappear beneath the builders bricks. Row upon row of poor quality back-to-back houses was what Birkenhead was getting.

Before looking in more detail of Oxton in the 1840s, a glance to the annals of Birkenhead during the same period will reveal the differences in nature of the two places at that time. A new decade was truly opened in Birkenhead on August 23, 1840, when the first railway train ran between the town and Chester (the newly constructed line had been planned by no greater man than George Stephenson himself). Perhaps this permanent road to the outside world was to be the making of Birkenhead, and certainly the town was about to grow beyond the expectations of anybody who had witnessed its development so far. By comparison, of course, Liverpool had also grown during the same years and on a scale even the residents of Birkenhead could not comprehend. For example, as this new decade began Liverpool was already boasting 2274 drinking houses.

	1831	1841	1851	1861
Birkenhead	2569	8223	24,285	35,929
Oxton	234	546	2007	2670
Tranmere	1168	2554	6519	9918
Claughton	224	240	714	1584
Noctorum	28	30	32	31
Bidston	251	291	293	282

Storeton	192	214	233	256
Prenton	104	110	99	123

In June of 1841 the Birkenhead and Claughton Gas and Water Works were opened to supply the growing town. In 1843 Claughton, together with part of Oxton, was incorporated into Birkenhead, as this new town continued to spread ever outwards. In 1844 the foundation stone of the Birkenhead dock system was laid - one year before Liverpool's Albert Dock was opened - and in 1845, Birkenhead's new and grand Market Hall (arguably the finest in the North of England but sadly no longer standing) was opened with great rejoicing. Mention has already been made of Birkenhead's municipal park, which was completed in 1847 but it is interesting to note that at the very time Birkenhead was laying out parkland for the health of his residents, Liverpool was festering with cholera - the spread of the disease no doubt hastened by the squalid living conditions that prevailed in that place. In the 12 months ending July 1848, Liverpool received 296,231 Irish immigrants fleeing from poverty and starvation in their own country. These poor souls were forced to search for accommodation in Liverpool, wherever it might be found, usually in a damp cellar room shared by number of families. There would certainly not have been any sanitary facilities in the cellars and once cholera had taken hold, the epidemic spread like wildfire.

As the 1840s came to a close, all was not quite well in Birkenhead either. Many grand schemes were running short of money and backers. It must have seemed that the bubble was about to burst, as all the town's buildings were left half completed and men were laid off in their thousands. By 1851 the population of Birkenhead had fallen from 40,000 to nearer to 25,000 and grass and weeds grew between the paving slabs along fine new streets. One contemporary writer commented that "Price Street grew a notable crop of dog daisies and its sole occupants were donkeys and geese". The depression was short lived however, and Birkenhead soon regathered its unstoppable momentum but just for a while perhaps, there must have been those who thought that the end had come. As a consequence of the depression, many of the grand plans the Birkenhead were simply discarded and instead of buildings fit to grace the city of the future, Birkenhead started to get whatever the jerry builder threw up. Those must have been tough times for the men who had come to Birkenhead to fulfil the dream of building a city more beautiful than Damascus.

In these times of great industrial activity on both banks of the River Mersey, on Oxton Hill there was still to be found and almost country way of life. Certainly the population of the township had increased (from 137 in 1801 two 546 in 1841) and a number of fine new residences are being put up. But Oxton was still mostly fields and farmland. Of the 802 acres that comprised the township in 1845, 694 acres were described in a contemporary Tithe Listing as being "land, fields or crofts". However, the process of change had begun and once the Earl of Shrewsbury had announced his intention to grant a fixed term building leases over the greater part of his holding in Oxton, it was not long before the trickle of builders became a flood. If we briefly return to Mortimer's "Hundred of Wirral" we can read firsthand descriptions of the place in the mid-1840s. He tells us that Oxton was "flourishing" and that many new houses were being built… but not in any old fashion. In fact, he says there were "restrictions on the style and character of the houses, whereby a pleasing appearance will be preserved". Mortimer goes on to describe the roads in the township as being now of the highest quality and condition, and with one road, Shrewsbury Road, he is most taken saying "it is hardly exceeded by any in this part of the kingdom, being about 2000 yards in length and 20 yards in width".

Amongst the Oxton tenants of the Earl of Shrewsbury at that time were to be found men who are today remembered in the names of the roads of the township - John Newburn owned a timber yard together with a block of cottages in what we now know as Newburns Lane. Thomas Bennett, after whom Bennetts Hill is named, kept the Royal Hotel (which stands at the bottom of Bennetts Hill) in addition to holding various pieces of land. Edward Willan lived in a house in Willan Street. William

Parr lived in a house in Mount Pleasant but he also owned a block of cottages, which are still standing, in what today is Parrs Road, although older Oxton residents still use its more familiar name of Parr's Lane. Thomas Hughes, from which we have Hughes Lane, ran the Queen's Arms and owned cottages nearby. James Fairclough held land in the area where Fairclough Lane now runs. James Ball, after whom Balls Road is named, lived in a house on the corner of Palm Hill (then Ball's Lane) and Christchurch Road. Mr Ball owned ferryboats that ran between Liverpool and the Birkenhead Hotel (i.e. Monks Ferry) and to distinguish his boat from many others, he had a large ball fitted to the tops of their masts.

Perhaps the biggest tenant to occupy Oxton at that time was Mr William Potter, the Liverpool merchant, who would account for 150 of its 800 acres. Although he is not remembered in any road or street name in Oxton, he has his memorial Christchurch, which he built in 1847. This church, built on the then Claughton/Oxton border, with sandstone taken from the nearby Claughton Firs quarry, has beneath it a large room, which was used as a school until the 1880s. William Potter was clearly a most influential man in respect of Oxton's early development, although he didn't lived there until the late 1860s (when we find him in Hampden Villa, Rose Mount). He was though a resident of Birkenhead, living in Hamilton Square in those early years. His name pops up a number of times as being involved in some major project or other, including the Birkenhead dock scheme. Most notably he was one of the original supporters for the establishment of St Aidan's Theological College, which was opened in Birkenhead in 1847. However if William Potter could claim to be Oxton's biggest tenants, Joseph Pim could probably claim to be the oddest. This particular gentleman, who was both farmer and shipowner, was so convinced of the superiority of Irish soil compared to the English that he insisted that whenever his vessels were in Ireland and requiring ballast, they should take on soil, rather than the customary stone. Returning to their home port, Pim's vessels would discharge and the precious cargo carried to his Oxton farmlands - there to be spread in the hope, no doubt, of bumper crops.

I would not wish to give the impression that Oxton had become totally a suburban district before 1850, although it is true that a lot of building was going on. Many new residences had been completed in Oxton and Birkenhead was fast creeping up the Hill, as it spread further and further in its hunger for land. Its summer skies were still filled with songs of wild birds. Change was coming to Oxton, but gracefully. She had more of the emerging butterfly about her than the poor ugly duckling that was Birkenhead.

Fields and Lanes

In any township of ancient origin, the names of fields and meadows can provide clues to the distant past. They can linger on to suggest, perhaps, a former but long forgotten activity or to record the names of men who live there long ago. On the other hand they can be at a puzzle to us, as we cannot interpret them all and will probably never fully understand from whence they came. In this respect the study of field names is worthy of a lifetime's commitment, with those in Oxton being no different.

There are those, I am sure, who would say that they can easily explain how and from where place names have come down to us over the centuries. But I prefer to keep a more open mind. For example Oxton has always been given as meaning the township (or in its earliest forms farmstead) of oxen. And whilst this might be so, the ox found in the name of the town of Oxted in Surrey refers to oak trees and not oxen. Is it any more likely then that Oxton was once renowned for its oxen rather than its oak trees? Perhaps it was, but we shall see.

In the period following the last glaciation (5500 - 2500 BCE) and before the changing climate or the coming of man had begun to change the landscape, Wirral was heavily wooded. Of all the trees of the forest, oak was prevalent, with the common oak preferring the moist low land areas of the smaller Durmast variety preferring the poor soils of the higher ground. Prehistoric Oxton was one of these latter places. Anglo-Saxon Oxton (some 4000 or 5000 years later) was much the same,

except that some of its woodland areas had by this time disappeared (either naturally or through being cleared) and had been replaced by farmland. No doubt, oxen would've been used to do the heavy work on those early farmsteads amongst the oak trees. So from me, the question remains, does the ox in Oxton referred to oak trees or oxen? With this uncertainty in mind, we shall set out upon a ramble along the lanes and through the fields of 19th century Oxton.

Entering Oxton from its boundary with Prenton, at the crossroads were stood Daniel Hough's beerhouse, The Halfway House, and climbing up towards the Queen's Arms, all land to the left of Storeton Road was known as the Arno. Indeed the Arno entirely covered the area bordered by Woodchurch Road, Storeton Road, Ingestre Road and what is now called Duck Pond Lane, Both names referred to the fact that until very recently, there was a duck pond at the bottom of the lane near to its junction with Woodchurch Road. The most likely and probable meaning of the name Arno is the "Hill of Eagles" (old English erne = eagle and ho = hill) and it is quite easy to see in one's mind, this high, stony place being just that. The Arno Park as we know it today was laid out in 1912 but it occupies just a small section of this once greater area. Within the park can still easily be recognised the hollow that was the Earl of Shrewsbury's stone quarry. There were a number of stone quarries in Oxton during the 19 century and it is a fact that many houses on Oxton Hill are built *of* Oxton Hill.

Across Storeton Road from the Arno was to be found Heath Heys stretching across to Arno Road in a broad sweep of green. Its name suggests that once it was a wild open land covered with heather - but now its progress up the hill has been checked by a narrow lane, Croft Edge, which leads to a cluster of small crofts huddling between Storeton Road and Birch Road and from which the lane got its name. In later years a fine house was built of the junction of Arno Road and Woodchurch Road, which was given the name Heath Heys - in recognition surely, of this once great heathland. Unfortunately the old house was taken down some 20 years ago having spent his later years as the headquarters of the local Boy Scouts. The original gateposts to the main driveway of Heath Heys are still to be found in Arno Road.

From the top of Mill Hill and travelling down Holm Lane to the south and as far as Woodchurch Road, lay Higher and Lower Mill Heys. St Saviours primary school occupies the upper part of the Higher Mill Heys today, although the original school stood in Storeton Road next in Arno's formal rose garden (this building was pulled down in 1967, after 114 years of service to the township). The names Mill Hill and Mill Heys tell something of the history of this part of Oxton - simply that a windmill stood on this high point for many years. The last mill, a peg mill, was pulled down in 1850 and the house and gardens of Point of Ayr were built on the site. There is a tale that says that when the workmen were preparing the foundations of the house, they dug up a large wooden beam (a relic of the old Mill) which they took away and turned into several chairs**.** Like the mill before it, the house has now been pulled down and only its garden remains and is now a miniature Park, known locally as The Little Arno.

Holm Lane runs almost parallel to Woodchurch Road and also leads down towards the Fender Valley in the direction of the township of Woodchurch. The Fender Brook has long been the natural boundary between Woodchurch and Oxton and in the name of Holm Lane there is a suggestion that perhaps this boundary was once less easily crossed that it is today. Holm or Holme has come to mean raised ground, and usually in moorland or marsh, and is derived from the Norse "holmr" meaning an island. The suggestion then is that the valley through which the Fender Brook runs was once a great marsh, which naturally formed a boundary between the two townships. That the Fender Brook was probably never ever a raging torrent is further proven in the very meaning of its name - a slow-moving stream.

In the 19th century, Holm Lane led (probably as it had done since before the Norman Conquest) down to the Holme Crofts and Holme Fields. The names of the other fields that were to be found between Oxton and Woodchurch can be just as suggestive as is Holm Lane, or more simply interpreted as in the names Long Meadow, Little Meadow, Holm Hey and Carr Bridge Meadow.

Where these once stony places (from the Celtic "kar" meaning rocky all stony) or was a simple rough stone bridge across the Fender Brook there? Perhaps it is more likely that the Middle English "carr" which meant marsh, gave them their name. In the same way, there was once a man called Youland, who left us his name in Youlands Hey. There was certainly a man called Richardson, who is remembered in Richardsons Wood).

Before moving on, it is worthy of mention that the road names within the modern housing estate at Woodchurch, quite accurately remember the old names of the fields and meadows, that once formed that township - something which unfortunately did not happen fully in Oxton. Ackers, Hoole, Grass Wood, Common Field, New Hey, and Orretts Meadow, all have roads named after them at Woodchurch. But of most interest is the fact that the road which forms the eastern border of the housing estate (and which almost follows the line of the Fender Brook) is named Carr Bridge Road. I suspect that Carr Bridge Meadow once crossed the boundary between Oxton and Woodchurch. The truth is that township boundries are nothing more than lines drawn on a map and I'm sure that our forefathers knew nothing of such niceties.

Between the north side of Holm Lane, in the direction of Townfield Lane, and the township of Noctorum was to be found a collection of field names which perhaps seem today to be the most puzzling of all in Oxton. Townfield (a common field where all citizens could graze their cattle), the Knowles (literally a high wooded ridge) New Hey and Lower Hey are easy to understand and very simple in their descriptiveness. But others can now surely only serve to draw further veils between today and the past. The meaning of the names of Spath, Fotherings, Crook Loon, Potts, Head Butts and Short Shoots are a little more obscure.

In the Middle Ages the typical English agricultural community would have shared two or three common fields for the growing of crops and raise their cattle or sheep on a common meadow known literally as The Common.

This system of sharing common, open fields became less popular over the centuries until it was finally ended in the Act of Enclosure. In the early 19th century the communal sharing of fields, and the growing of crops had in fact ceased, though the sharing of grazing land was still popular in some townships. Those once ancient fields used for this purposes now came to be called Town Fields. Thus was Townfield named in Oxton and some other fields nearby were named from being close to, or part of, this Great Field. Head Butts was literally a piece of land that butted onto the head or top of the Great Field. Crook Loon describes a piece of land along its ridges and Short Shoots remembers the ancient custom of dividing up the Great Field into strips at the time of each hay harvest by driving pegs into the ground. In this way, each family in the township could equally share the hay. However as for Spath and Potts I have no explanation and only a suggestion that Fotherings might be a corruption of fodder.

One last name must be mentioned before we move across towards the township of Claughton, and that name for me is certainly the prettiest of them all. At the very top of Holm Lane, just across from Mill Heys and stretching equally as far down Holm Lane, there was still in the 19th century a quite extensively wooded area. What pleasing visions can be brought to mind when one speaks the name of the place – Lilly Wood?

The final ramble will take us along Bidston road towards Bidston Hill, with to the left Oxton's boundary with Noctorum and to our right that with Claughton. The Oxton/Noctorum boundary area is interesting in as much that the word "mere" occurs frequently there, in Mere Farm Road, Mere Farm Lane and Mere Hall. There are references to a once substantial body of water, which in ancient times covered several acres but more recently was reduced to nothing more than a bog. Approximately where the greens of the Wirral Ladies Golf Club are now, there was to be found the name of Thurstons. What this name refers to can only be guessed at but it might be relevant say that in the name Thurstaston there is a suggestion that the Vikings thought to honour Thor, their

god of thunder. Perhaps the same could be said of Thurstons or was it simply the Vikings settler named Thor once farmed this land.

Between Village Road, Bidston Road and Shrewsbury Road, the fields were simply named as Sand Heys, Bottom Heys, Old Fields and Barn Croft but there is one last name to conjure with, in this part of Oxton and that is Kiln Heys. The name of this field, which was in the general area of Bidston Road and Beresford Road, seems to record a long forgotten occupation in Oxton. One wonders if the potter's wheel was once as common as the plough on Oxton Hill. Or was it that the builders made their bricks there? Or was it that Oxton was just plain sandy?

Oxton in the Fifties

In a "Directory of the Wirral Hundred" published in 1850 the following description of Oxton can be found – "the district is now covered with elegant villa residences and terraces, which are chiefly occupied by the merchants and tradesmen of Liverpool". Indeed, there were now 360 houses in the township along with six inns and two beer houses and during the next half-century the population would continue to grow. From the 2,007 residents in Oxton at the time of the 1851 Census, there would be an increase to over 4,500 by the time the first days of the 20th Century dawned.

There were also two distinct centres of village life by 1850 and at some distance apart. One, gathered around the Carnarvon Castle, was mainly a collection of farm cottages and buildings, though now with the addition of some newer, finer residences. Strung along Bidston Road and at the top of Village Road this area was the Oxton Village of old and it is here in fact that Oxton's oldest building can be found. Oxton Old Hall, as it has later become known, which stands at the corner of Village Road and Bidston Road, built in the 17 Century. It is said that it was once used by the Earls of Shrewsbury as a hunting lodge – something which is difficult to imagine in the Oxton of today. Why this particular area became the centre of the first Oxton Village is probably explained by the name of the once narrow sandy track that is now become Gerald Road. This lane was still known as "Well Lane" until the turn-of-the-century and probably proved the point that villages were built around wells, or water supply rather than for any other reason. In fact it was just a lane from Wellington Road upwards at that time.

Oxton's other centre, at this time, was less concentrated, being generally contained within the area bordered by Storeton Road, Rose Mount, Claughton Firs and Fairview Road. This area and especially Rose Mount and Claughton Firs, has become Oxton Village as we know it today. But it has a Victorian origin. It was an obvious area for development, given that it was a corner of the township that was immediately accessible via the Oxton Road out of Birkenhead. Of further interest is that at the corner of Woodchurch Road and Heathfield Road there was still in the 19th Century, a Toll House. Heathfield Road of course reminds us once again of Heath Heys.

The area around Fairview Road was possibly one of the first areas of Oxton to become residential. With an easterly outlook towards the River Mersey, and it's easy access from the town of Birkenhead and its ferries, it was almost destined to be built upon. Houses built in this corner of Oxton would have had a fair view indeed. By 1850 there was already a line of houses along Fairview Road between the Shrewsbury Arms and Arno Road. Other new houses (rather than simple cottages) could be found in Arno Road, Victoria Mount, Poplar Road, Mount Pleasant and at the top of Rose Mount, although it is true to say that they were few and far between. However from its junction with Fairclough Lane and down as far as Claughton Firs, Rose Mount still ran through the open fields of Mr Fairclough on one side and Mr Taylor on the other.

In the immediate area beneath and the other side of the Queens Arms, there was a cluster of simple cottages and a beer house (for the use of the lower classes) at the junction of Storeton Road and Birch Road. Most of these cottages are still standing today as is the beer house, which

has been used as cottages, a shop and now a beauty salon, right up to present times. The steps leading down into the cellar of the beer house are still visible. This particular corner of township is probably the one remaining area that can give us today an impression of what the mid Victorian Oxton must have looked like. A short walk from the Queens Arms, down Storeton Road and into Birch Road, turning up Parrs Road and then back along Hughes Lane to the Queens Arms is, in all, a most worthwhile ramble for anyone truly interested in the history of Oxton - although the whole circuit covers not much more than one quarter of a mile.

Sandy lanes and sandstone cottages prevail in this quarter, and perhaps the prettiest cottages of them all are those in the terrace found in Newburn's Lane and which have long been known as "Dolly Tub Row". Probably they were given that delightful name for the fact that, because these cottages have no back gardens, clothes lines were strung along full-length of their front gardens and almost every day, the whole row would seem to be hidden behind billowing freshly washed clothes and linen. Alternatively they might have taken their name from the fact that for many, many years the occupation of some of their inhabitants was that of washing clothes for their new neighbours. Not that all of their new neighbours were particularly grand though. At about this time Oxton was apparently also known to the trades people of Birkenhead as "Swindle Hill", because of the quite frequent forgetfulness of some of its inhabitants who, having made their fortunes, decided to move on, leaving town without paying their bills.

It would be useful at this point to pause a while to consider how the roadways in Oxton were being laid down, as the population and number of houses increased. Of course some of the older, or indeed ancient roads and pathways had by now become the main thoroughfares of the township. But as more and more land was being given over to residential use, some new roads where required. By 1850 all the major roads in the area, as we know them today, where well-established, and perhaps another guided tour of the township would help in describing them. However I will restrict myself to describing the major roads unless there is something particularly interesting to mention about the minor roads en route.

Once again, we shall enter Oxton from the south, where Storeton (sometimes spelt Stourton) Road has its junction with Woodchurch Road and where the Halfway House stands. From this point, Slush Lane ran off to the east to follow the general direction of what is now Woodchurch Road and then into what is now Oxton Road until it came to an end at Charing Cross. For part of its way Slush Lane was clearly the eastern boundary of Oxton, but how it got its name (which was sometimes written as Snuff) is a mystery. Storeton Road however climbed away to the north from the Halfway House, up to the top of Arno Hill where stood Mr Hughes Queens Arms. Here it met, to the right, with Park Road (now the upper section of Rose Mount) and to the left with Mount Olive (now called Ingestre Road, named after yet another of the Earl of Shrewsbury titles – Viscount Ingestre). Just below the summit of Arno Hill at the point where the old beer house stood, the Lane (sometimes known as Williams Lane) ran off at an angle. This lane has now become Birch Road.

Rose Mount, Mount Pleasant, Poplar Road, Roslin Road, Willan Street (then Willan Terrace), Victoria Mount (then Victoria Road) and Claughton Firs were all established by 1850, but not as heavily built up as Fairview Road. Arno Road was similarly established but also included what is now Hughes Lane in its length. Hughes Lane, which is named after the Hughes family who owned the Queens Arms and the number of cottages in the fifties, was not named separately until this century.

We have already learned that Holm Lane ran down through the fields of the Mill Heys and passed Lilly Wood, but now the Peg Mill had gone from the top of the hill and a fine new house with gardens was standing its place. From here at the top of Mill Hill, Dawbarns Lane (now Talbot Road) led to the old Village clustered of the top of Village Road. Dawbarns Lane was so named after the man who owned the house which sat alongside the old mill. From the centre of the old Village, Village Road ran back towards Birkenhead in one direction, whilst the road to Bidston ran

in the other. Bidston Road ran past the site of another (and possibly even older village well, where that most ancient of Oxton's pathways, Lingdale Lane joined to it.

Lingdale Lane his possibly named from the old English word Leah meaning any clearing, which is quite likely given that the Lane ran through a very heavily wooded area, even as late as 1850. Perhaps the Lane ran down to a clearing in a dale (as the name suggests) set deeply within this forest. Certainly Forest Road, Claughton, which runs close to where the old Lingdale Lane ran, is yet another clue to just how heavily wooded the area might have been. Harry B. Nielsen, writing his memoirs in Auld Lang Syne, remembers moving to Forest Road in 1863 into a new house that was built on land "covered with fir trees" at a cost to his father of 3/6d per square yard. He goes on to say though that he also remembered that in the clearing is in this forest "ling flourished". Ling is another name for heather and we already know that Oxton was a place where heather grew in quite some quantity. Was Lingdale Lane therefore simply a lane that ran through a forest, to a clearing where the wild heather grew?

Taking note of some more of Mr Nielsen's memories, we can piece together a picture of Oxton before it became, in any true sense, residential. I should point out that although Nielsen was writing about his boyhood in Claughton in the 1860s, he knew Oxton just as well, and it is true to say that when he is describing Claughton, he is just as accurately describing Oxton. He tells us for example of the great sward that spread from Claughton into Oxton and up and over Bidston Hill. It is conceivable that once, the whole area to either side of Bidston Road, that is to say to the west towards Noctorum, to the east towards Claughton and to the north towards Bidston, was once the forest. Bidston Hill is all that is now left of this area in its wild and natural state, but it gives us today an impression of how the greater part of Oxton must have once been. There were also patches of gorse and heather in Oxton but of course it was on the south side of Oxton Hill, on the Heath Heys, that the heather grew in the greatest quantity. By 1860, the forest had shrunk down to become nothing more than wood, but well-stocked with rowan, birch, oak and beech, in addition to its many many firs probably why Claughton Firs in Oxton is so named. Harry Nielsen remembers that the woods were teeming with wildlife and especially "wildcats", which had once been tame and had escaped from the houses down in the town of Birkenhead, to return to the wild in the woods. It seems that at that time, no pigeon loft was safe from these four-legged night-time marauders.

There were few other roads or pathways of note in the township of Oxton, except perhaps the one we now know as Townfield Lane. That this lane should be so named today is understandable given that we know that it led to the town fields of old, but in the 1850s the Lane was also known as Shoe Lane and sometimes Crooked Lane. Why it should have been once called Shoe Lane is not known, although Crooked Lane seems obvious given its once, and indeed recent, crooked path. However it does not take much to interpret the name that the locals knew it by then – Lovers Lane.

Oxton Complete

There was a church of sorts in Oxton in 1850, if it could be called a church at all, for the building that was being used was nothing more than old barn which stood on Bidston Road near to the Caernarfon Castle. At this time Oxton was still part of the Parish of Woodchurch, but rather than attempt the long trek across muddy fields, especially in winter, to the church of the Holy Cross in Woodchurch, the goodly people of Oxton preferred to use this simple barn as their place of worship Although their patience sometimes gave out. A number of churches were being, or had already been built recently in the immediate area. Most notably Christchurch, built to serve the township of Claughton. And the residents of Oxton thought that they should have their own. The Rev Joshua King at Woodchurch was sympathetic to their pleas and on the 19th May 1851, on land provided by the Earl of Shrewsbury the first St Saviours Church was consecrated by the Bishop of Chester and the Parish of Oxton came into being. The Church was small and relatively simple compared to others in the district but it was truly welcomed and served Oxton well until it was pulled down in 1891, when the present St Saviours was built on the same site.

Amongst that early congregation of the Rev William Cockcroft was to be found a most amazing cross-section of everyday life. There were of course the Oxton folk whose families had lived on the Hill for generations but they had been now been joined by the shipbuilders, shipowners and merchants of almost everything and anything from porter to paper, sugar to slate. There were also brokers of insurance, stocks and shares, cotton and tea, and in addition, here and there, a surgeon, a solicitor, a number of Master Mariner's, John Matthews the county constable, Louis Hubert the French teacher and Robert Caton the ropemaker (whose ropewalk was situated behind the St Saviours Church). There is one other Oxtonian of the 1850s that I feel I must mention but of whom I have unfortunately very little information. His name was William Knowles and all that I know of him is that he is known as a "lunatic". And it seems that he shot a policeman in Oxton on the September 4th 1854. Why he committed such an act I do not know, nor do I know what happened to him afterwards or if his victim survived the shooting, but I do wonder if the policeman he shot was the same John Matthews earlier mentioned.

To meet the needs of its growing community, Oxton had its own collection of tradespeople and they were now beginning to gather together into what was to become the new Oxton Village. At the heart of the village along Rose Mount and in Claughton Firs, there can be found the premises of William Ballantine, tailor and draper; Elizabeth Lloyd chemist and druggist; John Williams the baker; Hiram Wright the butcher and many others. The new Village centre could also boast a hosier, a greengrocer, provision merchants and soon almost every type of shop and trade. At the top of Rose Mount, in a yard of the rear of Newburns Lane (Dolly Tub Row), George Hatton the village blacksmith practised his art, and in Rose Mount itself could be found Mr Thomas Blissett the gunmaker. To name all the locals of Oxton in the 1850s or indeed all the events that occurred there would fill a book in itself. However there are just one or two interesting items more to mention, before we leave this period of Oxton's development.

In 1850 a young Liverpool grocer moved into this most desirable residential area. Whilst only 30 years of age, he already owns three successful grocery shops, two in Liverpool and his latest acquisition in the thriving new town of Birkenhead. He was typical of many who had made their name and their money in those heady days of early Victorian enterprise - the son of a Lancashire minister, apprenticed at 13 years old, owning his first shop at 20, a wealthy man and living in Oxton by 30 -but this man was not quite so typical. He soon sold his grocery shops, bought into sugar refining and then proceeded to make himself an enormous fortune. In later years he collected together some of the finest works of art to be housed in his great gift to the nation, the National Gallery. It is hardly ever known by that name. It is, of course, better known as The Tate.

Two years after Oxton got its own church, it also got its own school. The Earl of Shrewsbury gave the land for the school, which was part of The Arno, as he did for the church, and he also gave the stone out of his Arno quarry from which it was built. The cost of the building was £1500 raised in part from public donations and in part from government grants. In the 19th Century, education for the young was not compulsory even as late as the 1850s and indeed for the children of the poorer working classes it was almost unheard of. Most of these children would be put to work of some sort, as soon as they could be, and it made no difference as to whether they were town or country folk - there was work to be done in the fields as well as in the mills and the factories. Because of this practice, the National Society was formed in 1811 to "promote the education of the poor in the principles of the Established Church". By the 1830s the Society had cause to be built nearly 700 church schools throughout the country - all of which came to be known as National Schools. Oxton School was also built as a result of the efforts of the National Society and it opened its doors to the first time in 1853. The school had accommodation for up to 120 boys and 120 girls (separated of course by partitions) and 60 infants. Mr and Mrs Henry Holloway and Miss Louisa Passmore, the teaching staff, would certainly have had their work cut out in those early years with such a great number of children to care for. Over the next 114 years St Saviours School was either loved or hated by generations of Oxton children including my father and myself, until it was pulled down in 1967, having been replaced by new building in Holm Lane.

Another item of interest from these times began with a public meeting, held in the Birkenhead Town Hall in May 1859. It was there agreed that a Volunteer Rifle Corps should be raised from the Hundred of Wirral and that Colonel Vincent King (of Oxton of course and a nephew of the Rev Joshua of Woodchurch), should be its commanding officer. There were to be eight companies of Volunteers and the first to be formed was the Oxton and Claughton Company. This fine body of men drilled at 6 a.m. every day in the summer months in a field in Bidston Road and of the top of Lingdale Lane. Those Oxton volunteers must have been very dedicated towards their duties, for they were required to provide their own rifles and guns (Supplied by Mr Blissett of Rose Mount?) cast their own shot, provide their own uniforms (made by Mr Ballantyne of Rose Mount?) and on top of all that pay one guinea each year as a subscription. At first their uniforms were dark green but in the 1860s they changed this to what was to become their famous silver grey with scarlet facings - and thereafter become known as "the Cheshire Greys". This Battalion was the first of its kind in the country to undergo annual training and its first camp under canvas, was at Hooton in 1863. After a change of name in 1882 to the first Volunteer Battalion, the Cheshire Regiment, the Greys first saw action in the Boer War. The later histories and honourable deeds of these "Cheshires" need, I am sure, no further mention from me.

As the 1850s closed, Oxton was compact, almost self-contained and certainly a most desirable residential area. The day-to-day management of the township was the responsibility of its own Local Board, which ran and kept the place to their own liking. About 1860, the members of the Local Board, under the Chairmanship of R.W. Goodwin were Charles Nosworthy, a tobacco merchant who lived in South Bank, Francis Habord, a businessman also of South Bank, John Thomas who had a joinery shop in Village Road, Benjamin Sproule who lived in Rose Mount and whose business was general provisions and ships chandlery, James de Wolf, another merchant from Shrewsbury Road, Thomas Houghton, who held Oxton's largest farm at the top of Townfield Lane (as did his family well into the 20th Century), John Cropper Esq, of Apsley House, Rose Mount, and Charles Breach of Fairview Road yet another merchant. These gentlemen would regularly sit down together to deliberate upon the rules and regulations for the building of new houses in Oxton, the laying out of the new roads or indeed almost anything that affected the township. For example they decreed that any new road must be 30 feet in width if it was expected to be "a cart way", or else it should be 18 feet in width. They laid down very specific regulations governing new buildings which included the thickness of the walls, the standard of materials used, the free space between each house (a minimum of 150 square feet), and even the number of windows that each house should have.

Dealing with some of the more sensitive issues of everyday life the Board ruled that night soil could only be taken away from privies between the hours of midnight and 6 a.m. during the period 25th March to 25th September and between 11 p.m. and 8 a.m. otherwise. Whoever these people of the night were that found their occupation in this most essential services, the Local Board had not much sympathy for them nor did they take any account of their task. For example if they failed to clear up any spillage, which they might have caused, (whilst working you should remember in the pitch dark of night), the Board decided that they should be liable for a fine of £5 each man.

Amongst other things, the Local Board were also responsible for issuing licences to the hackney carriages within the township and the setting of regulations that governed their activities. The cabs were strictly controlled and could only operate in an area measured in any direction 5 miles from St Saviours Church. Furthermore they could not stand waiting for higher anywhere other than of the corner of Rose Mount and Village Road -except of course in their owner's yard. Fare charges were set by the Board, ranging from one shilling for up to 1 mile to five shillings for 5 miles. Coaches (i.e. four wheeled carriages) could charge more than a hackney cab. Four example 7s 6d as against 5s for a five-mile journey. In all cases however, luggage travelled free of charge and the cabbies could be fined for overcharging or indeed for behaving in any way badly towards their customers.

Everything was certainly very well in Oxton at the end of the 1850s and there was now a certain correctness to living there. The incoming post arrived with Victorian precision (daily at 9 a.m.) at Jacob Jacobson's Post Office in Rose Mount. Outgoing mail was collected at 10.30 each morning and 4.30 each and every afternoon in an equally dependable manner. To ensure the religious well-being of the children of Oxton, the Sunday School was established in 1858 by Mr Francis Morton timber merchant of the Hermitage, Ingestre Road. Originally known as the Hermitage Sunday School, this establishment later became in 1871 a School in every sense of the word. Situated on Woodchurch Road close to its junction with Carlton Road, Mr Morton's Sunday School was renamed the Hermitage British School and continued its educational role until it was closed in 1894. At that time it was realised that a larger School was required and plans were laid to build a replacement. The outcome was Woodchurch Road School which was opened in 1901. The same Mr Morton also started a savings bank, called The Cottagers Penny Savings Bank, no doubt to teach the simpler folk of Victorian Oxton that thriftiness was next to godliness.

The Pride of Order Lodge of the United Order of Odd Fellows now met regularly at the York Tavern in the old Village and all in all, all was well with the world. Oxton had truly grown into a place of beauty, just like the butterfly. But like the butterfly, her frivolous independence was to be short lived.

Oxton in the 1860s

During the 1860s and 1870s Oxton took on the shape and style that would carry her into the 20th century. There were still green fields in the township, as there would be for many years to come. But now the elegant villas and terraces of the newcomers were hung in clusters on the Hill like jewels in a crown. The butterfly had completed its transformation and was truly something to behold.

The number of new residences in the township continued to increase during the 1860s, as did the population, and now there were a number of quite distinct classes of Oxtonians in the community. There were, of course, the original Oxton folk - those whose families had lived and farmed on the Hill for centuries - but added to these were the newcomers, who, with varying degrees of wealth, resided in the newly constructed houses - in varying degrees of grandeur. To pamper and serve these elite of Oxtonians, a whole new population came into the township. These were the cooks and servant girls, grooms and gardeners, nursemaids and nannies, who were employed in the "big" houses. Some came in to the area to find work, but others were no doubt the sons and daughters of local people, for whom the opportunity for employment in agricultural activities was lessening, as the area became more or residential. Finally, there were the tradespeople and shopkeepers who served the whole community and whose number and diversity grew with equal pace to that of the population.

If we once again refer to some contemporary directories, we find that Oxton, in the early 1860s was being described as "elegant and commanding" and just "two miles west from Birkenhead railway station". Its Gothic stone church (with organ, bell and painted windows) and its "handsome National School" were praised at some length in these directories, as indeed was the whole township. It was in fact very well appointed in every sense of the word and these descriptions of the place were not just fine words as one might find today a travel brochure. They were truly descriptive.

For the busy businessmen, Evans Omnibuses left the Talbot Hotel, at regular half hourly intervals, to run down to Woodside to connect with the ferries and trains. But there were also those who rode there and back in their own gigs and coaches - and quite a sight they must have been. To give an impression of how splendid this twice daily procession must have seemed, I will return to Harry Nielsen's reminiscences recorded in his book " Auld Lang Syne", I have already mentioned that Nielsen was a Claughton man (although he was actually born in Birkenhead in 1861) and that he was generally writing about Claughton in the early 1870s but he also wrote of Oxton and

Noctorum. It is also fair to say that the scenes he described were as true of the sixties as they were of the seventies.

Population 1861 to 1891 Birkenhead compared to surrounding townships

	1861	1871	1881	1891
Birkenhead	35,929	42,997	51,610	58,287
Oxton	2670	2610	3312	4429
Tranmere	9918	16,143	23,987	30,680
Claughton	1584	2437	2934	3510
Noctorum	31	63	121	202
Bidston	282	286	270	254
Storeton	256	268	244	256
Prenton	123	106	111	267

Harry Nielsen tells us that his greatest delight as a boy was to see the many fine carriages making their twice daily trips into Birkenhead and back again. He claimed to have known every coach, every coachman and every horse by sight and by name. Some, he says, were simple gigs. Others were grand coaches pulled by matching pairs with uniformed coachman and (especially in the case of the most elite) a matching pair of dalmatian dogs running alongside. He tells us for example of Mr Stewart of Claughton Firs whose gig was pulled by a great raking trotter of a horse, which had been imported from America, and also of Mr Wilson of The Hermitage, who also made the daily trips. Of the horses of two other gentlemen, Mr Tetley of St Aidan's Terrace and Mr Clover of Lingdale, Nielsen says that they were alike as "two peas in a pod" - and so they should have been for they were sisters! One last tale from Harry Nielsen's book tells us about Mr Samuel Stitt, a shipowner, of The Grange, Claughton. This gentleman provided the funds for a Mission Hall to be built in Newburns Lane in the 1850s. His coachman Maconomy, was still living (at a ripe old age no doubt) in Rose Mount in 1900.

Oxton was beginning to change during the 1860s and the people there were also changing. Thomas Hughes was no longer at the Queens Arms but he was still living in Oxton in a house in Poplar Road. John Andrews was now the incumbent of this old Oxton hotel. The Caernarfon Castle was in the hands of one John Knowles (but I do not know if this particular gentleman was in any way related to William Knowles, the lunatic who shot the policeman in 1854). There is a similar mystery to me in a discovery that I made when reading through a Directory of Oxton which was dated 1865. I found there one "Hugh Swan - beer retailer" living in Holm Lane but I am yet to prove that this gentleman was the founder of the Swan Hotel, which is still at the bottom of Holm Lane of course - although I suspect that he was.

For the lady of the house, Oxton Village now provided almost every facility: grocer, a baker, milliner, shoemaker, draper and druggist could all be found there. There would however have still have been a need for regular excursions into Birkenhead to visit its market and shops and also that very special something - a visit to Liverpool, which was even then the thing to do. We should not assume however that such a visit was an every day and simple excursion. It is true that travel, at least locally, was now relatively safe and comfortable but the 1860s it was still in dangerous and violent times. In this respect, Merseyside was no different from anywhere else, and Oxton life must have seemed idyllic by comparison. Perhaps a short summary of some of the events of the 1860s will make this point better.

In 1860, Queen Victoria reigned supreme. Abraham Lincoln was the newly elected President of the United States of America and Birkenhead boasted the first street tramway in Europe. On Good Friday of that year, 40,000 passengers enjoyed steamboat rides between Birkenhead and Liverpool and all might have seemed well with the world - but it most certainly was not. Within a

year civil war had broken out in those not so *United* States and there would be devastating repercussions in the North of England as a result (Oxton would not be untouched by this event but more of that later). In 1862 Birkenhead was subjected to a spate of the most violent rioting (known as the Garibaldi Riots) which resulted in five constables being injured, a mounted section of the police force being formed and an order are being issued that "40 accomplices, 12 cavalry swords and 1000 good greenheart staves" should be kept always at the ready. When one also considers what rough places the quays and waterfront on both sides of the River Mersey must have been, at least by the standards of a refined Oxton lady, then I believe that I am correct in assuming that a simple shopping visit to Liverpool was not that simple at all. To add to all that, in 1866, cholera was again rampant in Liverpool. Charles Dickens made the first of a number of visits to Liverpool in 1862 and on this occasion also visited Birkenhead Park. I feel sure that his experiences of the lives of ordinary folk, which undoubtedly compelled him to write of them in the way that he did, were as much gained on Merseyside as they were in the East End of London.

While father was busy with his daily to-ing and fro-ing to his business in Birkenhead or Liverpool and mother was concerning herself with the day-to-day running of the house (or with the aforementioned shopping expeditions) what of the children of Oxton? Well, there was no escaping school - even in those days. For the children of the poorer folk, there was of course the National School (later St Saviours) in Storeton Road, were now William and Elizabeth Holloway ably assisted by Mr Louise Passmore and later by the Misses Annette Lappin and Edith King. All saw to their educational and religious well-being. Of course for the sons of the gentlefolk there was the Birkenhead School (at first in Park Road North, but from 1871 in Oxton at its present location, at the junction of Beresford Road and Shrewsbury Road) and for young ladies there were a number of Academies. These particular establishments were either "day or boarding" and were usually run by (married) reverend gentlemen or by misses.

It would have been at such Academies that the young ladies of Oxton were taught what little they needed to know in terms of general education but *all* that they needed to know in terms of the social graces and being ladylike. One such establishment was Lingdale House, which stood on Bidston Road and which was specifically for young Roman Catholic ladies. There were however half a dozen or so other Academies in Oxton during the 1860s. Families who could afford to do so might have chosen to put their daughters into the care of the Reverend John Rathbone Cowdrey at his Poplar Road establishment, or with Miss Mary Ann and Miss Fanny Rose in Talbot Road. Miss Eleanor Todd's Academy was at first in Storeton Road but later she moved to Fairview Road where also were to be found (separately of course) Miss Ann Hill and Mr Charles Harwood – the latter being a "Professor of Dancing", who no doubt put the absolute finishing touches to the education of Oxton's young ladies. Other Academies could be found in Claughton Firs, Village Road and Rose Mount (where also resided Mr John Steel Professor of Music, an organist at Christ Church).They completed the selection for those who did not depend upon the National School in Storeton Road for the education of their children.

There is one final story about Oxton in the 1860s which will, I believe, more than any other prove how influential some Oxtonians were in those years (and not just locally, but nationally and internationally). Oxton had come a long way by 1860. No longer was the township populated by simple countryfolk hard-pressed to make ends meet. Now there were those who lived there whose influence extended not just across the River Mersey into Liverpool, but out across the oceans of the world. I have already made mention of the American Civil War, which was contended during the early years of this particular decade and which had, at its very core, the issue of slavery in the cotton growing Southern States. I shall now explain how this dreadful conflict, afford many thousands of miles away had some Oxton connections.

The growth of the port of Liverpool during a first half of the 19th century was as much to do with the importation of American cotton as with any other commodity, and perhaps more so. Certainly, much of the wealth that was accumulated on Merseyside during that period was cotton based and of course we have already seen that many of the wealthy (and cotton rich) Liverpudlians had

moved across the Mersey during these years to live in Birkenhead and Oxton. In fact in the 1860s Oxton had as its residents a veritable population of cotton people, together with those whose business was either to do with ships or shipping (which almost certainly meant that it was also to do with cotton) At the very height of the American Civil War, there were seven sea captains, two shipowners, eleven gentleman described variously as brokers, provisioners or chandlers for shipping, together with two or three dozen merchants of one sort or another living in Oxton. It would not be surprising therefore of these folks displayed some interest in current events in the United States.

When Civil War broke out between the Northern and Southern States of America in 1861, the more powerful Northern States immediately threw a naval blockade across the Southern ports. This blockade was to serve two purposes. Primarily, it was intended to prevent arms and ammunition getting into the Southern States, but it was also intended to prevent the South from exporting its cotton and thus earning the money to buy such arms in the first place. By and large, the blockade was very successful and the repercussions on Merseyside and in the northwest of England were horrendous. No cotton meant no work to thousands of Lancashire families and no work meant no wages and therefore nothing to eat. No doubt to certain Oxton gentleman, the situation could easily have resulted in financial ruin.

The Northern States were soon to realise that their blockade was causing terrible hardship in the mill towns of Lancashire and, in an attempt to relieve some of the misery that was it was causing, they dispatched shiploads of food and grain to Merseyside. However there were many on Merseyside whose sympathies tended to be with the Southern cause, for no other reason than that of some personal fortunes were at stake and for others, simple survival depended on a regular supply of cotton.

Into this Merseyside arena came a gentleman from the Southern States called James Dunwoody Bulloch. He was in today's terms, a secret agent for the South and his instructions were simply to buy ships and arms to help the Southern cause. Working from his base in Liverpool, Bulloch was able to procure a number of vessels to run the blockade and carry much needed supplies into the Southern States. And of course to get cotton in and out of Liverpool. He was personally responsible for commissioning the building of the most famous fighting ship of the time the CSS Alabama. This vessel, built secretly at the Birkenhead yard of John Laird, sank over 60 Northern vessels in her two years on the high seas. Her exploits have filled many books and Bulloch is even today regarded as perhaps an early version of "James Bond". But what has this to do with Oxton? Well, vessels such as Alabama were generally believed to have been built with Confederate money but there is more than a suspicion that interested gentleman on both sides of the River Mersey might in those days have thought it expedient financially to support such initiatives.

When the American Civil War was over, and the North at last enjoyed victory, many men like James Bulloch could not return home to America. They chose instead to remain in Great Britain rather than face the consequences at home. Bulloch remained in Liverpool and became a cotton broker, of course, until his death in 1901, and he was by now a British citizen. When he formally applied for British citizenship in 1869, there were just two gentlemen who were his proposers - Mr Eugene Perrin and Mr John Armstrong, both of Shrewsbury Road Oxton.

The End of the Beginning

Even as late as the middle of the 1870s, the day-to-day management of Oxton was still in the hands of its own Local Board. Messrs Harboard, De Wolf, and Houghton - all of whom you will remember staunch Board members, were still active in that capacity. They had been joined over the years by a succession of other gentleman of the township and we now find operating under the chairmanship of Mr Henry Bulley. It was not only Oxton that continued to enjoy this system of home-rule however. Birkenhead, Claughton and Tranmere and indeed the other outlying districts

of Birkenhead, were still similarly controlled by either Boards of Commissioners or Local Boards. However all that was soon to change.

As early as 1846, a number of the most influential gentleman of Birkenhead had proposed that their growing township should be granted a Charter so that it could become truly a Town and be properly and fairly managed by Town Councillors. To date however they were without success. These gentlemen had expressed over the years a number of concerns. Firstly the law provided for only 21 Commissioners on the Birkenhead Board and they felt that so few could not now cope properly with all that was needed to be done. Secondly the rules concerning the eligibility of those who could vote for the Town's Commissioners (which were based upon the amount of rates one paid) were such that only a small section of the community could vote at all. It was generally felt therefore that the Commissioners were far from being representative of the people of Birkenhead. Finally there was a strong feeling that some of the outlying townships should be incorporated into Birkenhead. The argument for this particular requirement was that the people of Birkenhead suffered the cost of maintaining its roads and street lighting, the disposal of sewage and facilities such as the Birkenhead market. If, as seemed to be the case, the residents of Oxton, Tranmere and Higher Bebington used in enjoyed all of these just as much as the residents of Birkenhead, why then should they not also pay towards their upkeep?

In 1875 the proposal for Incorporation at last gained considerable support. The promoters for Incorporation, as they were to become known, were Mr Joseph Craven, Mr Charles Willmer (an eminent pioneer in the newspaper world whose son Frederick founded the Birkenhead News in 1877) and Messrs Fulton, Worrall and Bevan - all prominent local tradesmen. These gentlemen were, of course, ably assisted and encouraged by Mr John Laird. They canvassed support in the town and as you might expect, found it in almost every quarter and in great numbers. However the residents of Oxton, as you might expect, were to a man totally against any such idea of incorporation. To bring things to a head an Official Inquiry was held at the County Court, Birkenhead, in January 1877, before Major Donnelly,R.E.

Representing the views of the gentleman of Oxton at this inquiry, we find once again such notable Oxtonians as Mr William Potter, Mr James De Wolf, and Colonel Vincent King, and of course the promoters themselves, representing the views of the gentleman of Birkenhead. The whole proceedings were very correct and gentlemanly, as you might expect, but there was some lighter moments. For example, when it was suggested that a total stranger might not notice the difference if he were to pass between Birkenhead and Oxton, Mr James De Wolf replied that he most certainly would because of the better condition of the roads in Oxton. At this point, the Commissioner Major Donnelly said that he thought that an earlier witness had said that he could tell the difference "by the smell" to which the reply was "no sir, that was Tranmere". Colonel Vincent King was also put under question to determine if he could describe the essential difference between Oxton and Claughton (which you will remember had been incorporated into Birkenhead some 30 or so years earlier). Colonel King replied that he most certainly definitely could, simply because "I can find a hare occasionally for my beagles to hunt in Oxton, but you may go through Claughton for 12 months and not find one".

Not all of the arguments were quite so flippant. Major Barker, the Chief Constable of Birkenhead Police Force, expressed some real concerns about the restrictions placed upon his officers under the current law. Essentially his men were responsible for policing Birkenhead only. Oxton fell within the responsibility of the County Force and Birkenhead Police Officers could not cross its boundaries - not even in the pursuit of a criminal. Major Barker stated that "my boundary goes right through the centre of Oxton through the most important part, Claughton Firs. I have to watch one side of the street, the left-hand side and the County the right-hand side. I have no authority on the right-hand side". One of the problems that this arrangement presented was, according to the Major, that "I know that boys play pitch and toss on Sundays and run across the street and snap their fingers at us. As it is, I have to report them to the County Police. In addition to being a

delightfully comic cameo of Oxton life in the 1870s, the story also reminds us that the Oxton/Claughton border once ran straight down the middle of Claughton Firs.

The Official Inquiry lasted only three days but the decision of Her Majesty's Privy Council was not finally made until August 13. Therein, the continuing independence of Oxton and the other outlying townships of Tranmere and Higher Bebington was terminated thus "that the Inhabitants of the said Township of Birkenhead, embracing the several Districts of Claughton, Oxton Tranmere and part of the Township and District of Higher Bebington shall be one body politic and corporate". The first municipal election took place on November 14th and John Laird was elected as the first Mayor of the new borough. A year later a Grant of Arms was made to Birkenhead and the heraldic devices in the four quarters of the shield were chosen to represent the four incorporated townships. In fact the devices were those which appeared on the official Seals used by the Local Boards of the townships. From the Birkenhead Seal, they chose a Lion passant and Pastoral Staff (once part of the Priors Coat of Arms). From Tranmere they chose the Oak Tree, from Bebington the Star and from Oxton two Lion's passant.

Oxton was now finally and formally part of Birkenhead, but although there had been an end put to her independence, her growth continued. During the 1870s there had been a further increase the number of people living in Oxton taking the total to 3312 at the 1881 census and there had also been a continuing improvement to its facilities. Perhaps the ultimate facility, or so the gentleman of Oxton might have argued, was provided when the Oxton Cricket Club was founded in 1875. The club could originally boast that it provided for tennis, croquet, bowls and quoits, in addition to its obvious function. A fine pavilion was opened in 1878 to complete the scene - and of course the club is still very active today and still at his original location in Townfield Lane.

The recreational needs of the ladies however were not forgotten (although they were much longer in coming). In 1894 50 acres of boggy moorland that had once formed part of Oxton, was turned into a golf course - for ladies only! This great act of consideration for the fairer sex was carried out by one Mr Herbert Potter, with the assistance of friends and colleagues from the Royal Liverpool Golf Club at Hoylake. There were those of the time who generally applauded the thoughtfulness of this gentleman, though others who commented that they were simply trying to keep their wives away from their own golf course! The Wirral Ladies Golf Course, as it was to become known, is today one of Oxton's landmarks.

Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, the growth of Oxton continued on the grandness endured. There were no major events in those closing years of the 19th century. The wealthy Oxtonians continued to live out their lives in pampered style and there was now a proper school for young ladies, in a house at number 11 Village Road, and which replaced the services provided by those earlier Academies. This establishment moved to bigger (and still current) premises in 1901 and is today known as the Birkenhead High School for Girls.

The Oxton Concert Hall was opened in 1895. The building is still standing today in Rose Mount and gave some the entertainment no doubt to the working folk of Oxton and those who lived "downstairs". I am also certain of these same folk would have been eager customers of Mr Thomas Jeffs, a Cycle Maker, whose business at that time was in Claughton Firs, as that new machine grew in popularity. In those days, servants from the being houses were given very little time to themselves but what better way to spend a day off than on a cycle ride, perhaps to New Brighton.

The 20th Century was now fast approaching. Oxton had come along way from being a bleak and barren hill and was now truly established as the finest residential suburb of Birkenhead. Not all of her open land had fallen before the builder's onslaught though. It was not until the 1960s that houses were built where Oxton Hill sweeps down to the Fender Valley and the township of Woodchurch. Here where once there were to be found those ancient fields with such mysterious names as Crook Loon, Fotherings and Spath, there is today a modern housing estate. Much the

same fate had fallen to Sand Heys, Bottom Heys and Kiln Hey of the close of the 19th Century. In the northern and eastern quarters of Oxton, where these fields lay, the progress of the builder was rapid. The area that lay generally between Shrewsbury Road and Bidston Road will soon be covered with fine houses, as Beresford Road, Wellington Road and others in the area were completed. As you might expect Mr William Potter was involved with this particular development. Here again we find some references to the Earls of Shrewsbury in the names of some of these new roads – Alton and Chetwynd are both family names of the Earls.

A grand new Church was built in Oxton in 1891 to replace the earlier and simpler St Saviours. This must surely have seemed like the absolute finishing touch to the place at the time. The new Church was to be built on the same site is the first Church but the Earl of Shrewsbury had given an additional 3524 yd² of land to allow for a much grander structure to be planned. The foundation stone was laid on much the 26th March by Miss Catherine E. King (who was the daughter of Colonel Vincent King of whom we have heard a lot in these few pages) and the main body of the Church was completed two years later at a total cost of £9854. The tower was completed in 1892 at an additional cost of £1878. The reddish stone used to the building was not Oxton stone though. For this special building, a much harder and more durable stone from Runcorn was used. At the time of writing, this new St Saviours Church is celebrating a hundred years of service to the parish.

Such has been the continued development in Oxton that it would be very difficult to find just one or more of her many acres still green and open land, but there are some. One of these places, I would suggest, is very special indeed, for it sits like a time capsule on the very top of the Hill. There the Arno Park still gives today the slightest glimpse of Oxton Hill of centuries ago. Behind its formal rose gardens there is still some rough open ground, which escaped the Victorian's clutches. Perhaps this old stone quarry would have not been easily built upon, but whatever the reason was for it being disregarded by the builder, we should be grateful that it was. Here, beech, birch and wild gorse, with here and there some rocky outcrops, can still be found. How easily this place reminds us of the times when eagles soared in Oxton skies, wild horses ran across her open fields and simple folk lived simple lives there.

Chronicle of the 19th Century

1800 Union of England and Ireland forms the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland

1801 Population of Oxton 137 occupying 26 dwellings and giving a density of population of 17 persons per hundred acres in the township. Population of Birkenhead 110 occupying 16 dwellings.

1802 the Goree Warehouse, Liverpool, was burnt down with the loss of grain, sugar, coffee, bottom and other goods to the value of£323,000. The ruins continued to burnt three months.

1803 The start of the Napoleonic War, between Britain and France.

1804 In a duel between two gentlemen of Liverpool, Mr Grayson was killed by Mr Sparling

1805 Admiral Lord Nelson killed at the Battle of Trafalgar
Major Brooks killed by Colonel Bolton in a duel at Liverpool December the 20th

1806 The Prince of Wales visited Liverpool September the 18th

1807 The last of the Liverpool slavers, "Mary", sailed from West Africa for the Americas with 400 "Negroes"

1808 The Corn Exchange Liverpool was opened on August 4

1809 William Gladstone born at 62 Rodney Street Liverpool December the 29th

1810 William Laird arrived in Liverpool from Greenock, Scotland, to begin what was to become a lifetime's association with Birkenhead and shipbuilding

1811 Population of Oxton 128 population of Birkenhead 105

1812 Britain at war with the United States of America. Birth of Charles Dickens February 7

1813 Birth of daily living stone, the African explorer and missionary

1814 End of the War between Britain and United States of America

1815 Battle of Waterloo the steam vessel Elizabeth arrived in the River Mersey on June 30. This vessel had come down from the River Clyde via Ramsay, Isle of Man, and was the first steam vessel to be seen on the Mersey. Exports for the year from the port of Liverpool were £12 million. Imports were £8 million

1816 The Leeds Liverpool Canal was completed

1817 The steam vessel Etna crossed between Queens Dock Liverpool and Tranmere on Whit Monday and thus became the first steam ferry boat on the River Mersey.

1818 Following a period of severe storms, which finally abated on March 25 800 vessels left the port of Liverpool in the space of one week.

1819 The steamship "Savannah", the first steamship to cross the Atlantic, arrived Liverpool June 20 from Savannah in 26 Days

1820 Death of George III Accession of George IV

1821 Population of Oxton and 69, population of Birkenhead 200

1822 St. John's market Liverpool was opened on March 7

1823 Liverpool to Dublin packet boat Alert was lost on March 26 on the West Mouse Rock of the loss of over a hundred passengers

1824 Due to severe weather and strong gales on March 4 the steam ferry between Birkenhead in Liverpool took more than two hours on their crossings. William Laird set up The Birkenhead Ironworks on Wallasey Pool

1825 1073 people were in the workhouse in Liverpool at a cost of the town of 3s4d (about 17p in today's money) per person per week

1826 The first stone of the fort at Perch Rock, New Brighton was laid on March 31. Building began on the east side of Hamilton Square land that was formally part of Bridge End Farm

1827 The foundation stone of a lighthouse at Perch Rock, New Brighton was laid on June 8. Two gentlemen, Dr Bedale and Mr Vipond swam from the Queens Dock Liverpool to Runcorn on July 10 for a wager. Mr Bedale won in a time of three hours 35 minutes. A line of telegraph poles which ran between Holyhead in Liverpool (terminating on Bidston hill) started to operate on October 26. The first message to be telegraphed using this system was the arrival of the vessel Napoleon. The message passed between Holyhead in Liverpool in 15 minutes. Steam packet boat between Liverpool and Ireland started

1828 There were 1400 persons in the workhouse in Liverpool with a further 1070 outdoor poor

1829 First stone of the Grandstand at Aintree Racecourse laid by Lord Molyneux said there is a seventh. The Rocket, built by Mr Robert Stephenson, won the trials for the best steam locomotive at Rainhill Liverpool.

1830 Death of George the fourth, accession of William the fourth. The Liverpool to Manchester Railway opened September 15. The locomotive Planet travelled from Liverpool to Manchester in one hour on November the 22nd

1831 Population of Oxton 234. Population of Birkenhead 2589. Population of Liverpool 165,221. She the number of licensed public houses in the town was 1187 together with 585 beer houses. 460,000 passengers travelled on the Liverpool to Manchester Railway during the year. Foundation stone of St Catherine's Church Tranmere laid by Mr W. Hough, who also gave the land on which the Church was built.

1832 Birth of Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) January 17. Cholera broke out in Liverpool in May. 494 vessels, the greatest number ever accorded to date, arrived in Liverpool in one week during August.

1833 A new road was cut, to the plans of Mr Thomas Brassy, between Birkenhead and Chester, called the New Chester Road. It was made to accommodate the now very heavy coaching traffic between Chester and the Birkenhead ferries. Laird's first paddle steamer the Lady Lansdowne was built.

1834 Two boats returning to Liverpool from Rock Ferry and which were carrying passengers who had been spectators at first fight in Rock Ferry, overturned in the River with the loss of more than 40 lives. Woodside Hotel built. The hotel provides stabling for a hundred staging horses

1835 The vessel "Jumna", the first vessel belonging to Messrs Brocklebank arrived in Liverpool on March 13, having made the round-trip to count on China, in a record of only 10 months.

1836 First publication of Charles Dickens Pickwick Papers. The Railway Tunnel into Lime Street Station Liverpool was opened on August 15.

1837 death of William 4th, accession of Queen Victoria. The "Jane" and "Margaret", carrying 200 emigrants from Liverpool to New York were lost off the coast of Ireland. All on board perished. The first steeplechase at Aintree Racecourse was held.

1838 To celebrate the Coronation of Queen Victoria on 28 June, a regatta was held on the River Mersey, the foundation stone of St George's Hall Liverpool was laid and a grand firework display was held near the Clarence Dock.   A direct rail link was started between Liverpool and London.

1839 The first Cattle and Cheese Fair was held Birkenhead October 8th.

1840 The Penny Post Started January 10. Queen Victoria married Prince Albert. The Birkenhead to Chester Railway was opened August 23. The number of vessels using the port of Liverpool, inward and outward, during the year was 15,998.

1841 Population of Oxton 546. Population of Birkenhead 5223. Population of Liverpool 223,003. There were 32,079 inhabited houses, 10,223 recorded births and 5358 burials in this year. The number of licensed public houses in Liverpool was 1374, with another 900 beer houses. The Birkenhead in Claughton Gas and Water Works was formed. Foundation stone of St Peter's Church, Rock Ferry, laid April 14

1842 Woodside Ferry was purchased for the town by the Birkenhead Commissioners. A great fire in Liverpool. 6 acres of buildings in the area of Crompton Street, Formby Street and Neptune Street were destroyed.

1843 Part of Oxton, together with the whole of Claughton, was incorporated into Birkenhead. Birkenhead's first Water Works, Spring Hill, opened. The Works, in Balls Road and 120 feet above sea level, was on the site of the ancient Grange Farm of the Birkenhead Priory.

1844 Foundation stone of the new docks and Birkenhead was laid on October 23

1845 Birkenhead Market Hall opened July 12. The hall was lighted by 92 globe gas lamps, and an area at the rear of the Market was set aside for the sale of hay, straw and agricultural produce. Albert Dock, Liverpool opened. The first vessel to enter was the "Ariel", owned by T and J. Brocklebank March 15. Maiden voyage of the "Great Britain" was made from Liverpool on July 26, making New York in 15 days.

1846 Marriage of Robert Browning to Elizabeth Barrett. The Birkenhead, a paddle steamer of 1400 tonnes and built in Birkenhead by the Laird's for the British government, was launched. This vessel became famous when she went down some years later off Simons Bay, South Africa, whilst carrying British troops and their families. The troops on board the Birkenhead stood to attention on deck as the waves crashed over them, so that the women and children could get into the lifeboats first. This great act of discipline was later immortalised by Rudyard Kipling in his epic poem "Soldier an' Sailor Too". The "Birkenhead Drill", as their brave action was called, has now come to mean the ultimate act of disciplined courage.

1847 790,000 Irish people had arrived in Liverpool by April 17. Although fever sheds were opened in Liverpool, at Mount Pleasant, there were 15,000 deaths by fever and famine during the year. Birkenhead Park was officially opened April 5. The first of the Birkenhead docks opened. Greenwich Time, 12 minutes before that of Birkenhead, was adopted locally on December 1. 134,524 emigrants shipped out of Liverpool during the year. Dr Joseph Baylee DD, with the support of Mr William Potter, Mr Thomas Brassey and Messrs Richard and Henry Wilson, started St Aidan's Theological College, Birkenhead. The college was at first housed in Slatey Road.

1848 The total tonnage of vessels using Birkenhead docks during the year was 201,092 tonnes. 296,231 Irish people immigrated into Liverpool during the year. During the year 4318 vessels sailed from the port of Liverpool.

1850 The old Oxton peg mill which stood on Mill Hill, at the top of Holm Lane was pulled down. Death of Wordsworth, Tennyson becomes poet Laureate. The making of bricks for the expanding town of Birkenhead engaged more than 1000 workmen at this time.

1851 Population of Oxton 2007 giving a density of population of 248 persons per 100 acres in the township. Population of Birkenhead, including Claughton and part of Oxton 24,999. The first St Saviours Church Oxton, consecrated by the Bishop of Chester May 19.

1852 Gold from Australia imported into Liverpool to the first time (20,000 ounces) 299,099 emigrants shipped from Liverpool during the year.

1853 The National School, Storeton Road Oxton opened. Crimea war began, which saw the Charge of the Light Brigade and Florence Nightingale's Army Hospital reforms.

1854 Through route from Birkenhead to London opened by the Great Western Railway Company. On December 21, the vessel "Wildfire" left Birkenhead for the Crimea, loaded with the first consignment of the parts of a prefabricated Railway. The complete Railway, which comprised of

39 miles of track and 17 locomotives and rolling stock, was manufactured and assembled by the Birkenhead Company of Peto, Brassey and Betts in 12 days and shipped out in nine vessels, together with engineers and navvies. The intention was to lay a railway, overland from Balaclava, to relieve the Army of 30,000 British and French troops, who were besieging Sebastopol, and who were in desperate need of supplies. The entire Railway was laid in six weeks and was fully operational on April 7, 1855. On board "Wildfire" was Mr George Arkle, a member of an Oxton family, together with others who would oversee the project. A policeman was shot in Oxton September 4.

1855 Prisoners from the Borough Goal, moved to the new jail at Walton, Liverpool September 1

1856 Birth of George Bernard Shaw July 26. "Royal Charter" arrived Liverpool August 12 from Australia carrying gold valued at £734,000. A whale, 24 feet in length, caught in the River Mersey on October 9. On November 20 three vessels arrived in Liverpool carrying in excess off £1,500,000 in gold. The vessels were "Lightning" and "James Baines" from Australia and "Atlantic" from New York.

1857 The USS Niagra sailed from Birkenhead carrying half of the transatlantic telegraph cable, which had been manufactured by R.S Newall and Co, Cathcart Street, Birkenhead. The other half of the cable had been manufactured in London and was carried by HMS Agamemnon. The first message, from Queen Victoria to the President of the United States of America, was transmitted on August 10, 1858 of the cable ruptured on September 3 of that year and ceased to function.

1858 Dr David Livingstone sailed from Liverpool on board the steamer "Pearl", for an exploration of the Zambezi River March 10. The total value of British and Irish goods exported from the port of Liverpool during the year was £51,721,774. The Hermitage Sunday School opened in Oxton.

1859 The Oxton and Claughton Company of the Cheshire Volunteer Rifles (Cheshire Greys) formed. The frigate "Conway" given by the government as a training ship, on the River Mersey, for boys. The "Royal Charter" wrecked at Moelfre Bay, Anglesey, on October 26. The vessel was returning from Australia with 500 passengers and crew and carrying £400,000 in gold. No more than 35 in total were saved.

1860 Birth of JM Barry, who wrote Peter Pan, May 9. Birth of Arthur Conan Doyle May 22. Birkenhead Street tramway, designed by the American Mr George Francis Train, started on 30th of August. The cars pulled by pairs of horses could accommodate 24 seated and a number of standing passengers. 4360 passengers carried on the first day. Abraham Lincoln elected President of the United States of America. 40,000 passengers used to Woodside Ferry on Good Friday.

1861 Population of Oxton 2670. Population of Birkenhead 35,929. Birkenhead became a Parliamentary Borough with John Laird its first MP. The steamship "Great Eastern" arrived in the River Mersey for the first time on June 4, having crossed from New York in 9 days and 11 hours. American Civil War started.

1862 The Confederate steamer "Alabama", which accounted for over 60 Union vessels during her two years on the high seas, was built with great secrecy at Laird's Yard. The vessel left the River Mersey on July 29, disguised as a merchant ship and took on guns and crew have the Azores. Charles Dickens visited Birkenhead. He came over from Liverpool for "a little change of air". The Birkenhead Music Hall, Claughton Road Opened January 21. Foundation Stone of Birkenhead Borough Hospital, built entirely at the expense of John Laird MP, laid on November 24

1863 Birkenhead Borough Hospital opened. Two vessels from the United States of America arrived in Liverpool, the "George Griswold" February 9, and the "Achilles" February 22nd, with provisions for the starving mill workers of Lancashire. The food was the gift of the people of the

United States, and was given to relieve the deprivation caused by the closure of the mills. This was due to the shortage of cotton and was a result of the American Civil War.

1864 Birkenhead's first public library opened. The "Lotty Sleigh" bound for Africa and loaded with 11 tons of gunpowder, caught fire and exploded off Tranmere on January 15. The explosion caused great damage to the buildings on both sides of the River but especially in Birkenhead.

1865 The Confederate steamer "Shenandoah" surrendered off Tranmere to HMS Donegal on November 6. This was the last act of the American Civil War.

1866 Cholera outbreak in Liverpool, May. Birkenhead to Hoylake Railway opened June 18. Birth of H G Wells September 21.

1867 Dominion of Canada founded. "The One O'clock Gun" sited at Morpeth Dock Birkenhead, was first fired on September 21, to signify Greenwich Time to vessels in the River.

1868 St Peter's Church, Cathcart Street Birkenhead consecrated on March 21

1869 Suez Canal opened. The first British steam vessel to enter the canal, at the ceremonial opening, was the "Deerhound", built in Birkenhead by Messrs Laird.

1870 Mr John Laird offered 1000 yards of land on Conway Street Birkenhead for the building of a School of Art.

1871 Population of Oxton 2610. Population of Birkenhead 42,997. The Birkenhead School moved from Park Road North, where it was founded in 1860, to its present site on Shrewsbury Road.

1872 Excavations for a railway tunnel under the River Mersey started in Birkenhead March 22.

1873 Fire at British Patent Lubricating Oil Company, Duke Street Birkenhead May 15. Damage estimated at £5000.

1874 Central Station, Liverpool, opened on March 2.

1875 Oxton Cricket Club founded. Facilities included tennis, croquet, bowls and quoits. Club pavilion was opened in 1878 and extended in 1883 it cost of £320.

1876 General Custer, with 250 men, massacred by the Sioux Indians at the Little Big Horn.

1877 Oxton together with Tranmere incorporated into Birkenhead.

1878 An Eisteddfod held in Birkenhead September 17th to 20th

1879 Sheds to accommodate incoming cattle from the USA built in Birkenhead's Morpeth Dock. "The Lairage" in their first year received 32,000 cattle. This facility received in 1879 a record 281,740 cattle and 286,611 sheep from USA, Canada, Argentina, Spain, Chile, Iceland and the Falkland islands. The world's first mechanically propelled submarine was launched on November 26 at the Great Float Birkenhead. The vessel "Resurgam" was designed by the Rev George Garrett and built by Messrs Cochran & Co at the Britannia Ironworks, Birkenhead. The submarine, which has a displacement of 30 tons, was dragged from the builder's yard to the launching site, a distance of 300 yards, by 30 shire horses.

1880 Liverpool created a City May 11th

1881 Population of Oxton 3312. Population of Birkenhead 51,610.

1882 The famous American outlaw Jesse James was shot dead by Mr Ford, one of his gang, April 3. A Telephone Exchange set up at Number 1 Hamilton Square Birkenhead on April 22. Mr William Laird, Mayor of Birkenhead, was the first subscriber and the Laird shipbuilding yard was given the exchange number 2. Foundation stone of the Birkenhead Children's Hospital, Woodchurch Road, laid on July 1.

1883 Foundation stone of the new Town Hall, Hamilton Square Birkenhead, laid on October 10

1884 A party of gentleman walked through the Mersey railway tunnel from Liverpool to Birkenhead on January 17

1885 General Gordon killed at the fall of Khartoum. Birkenhead and Liverpool connected by telephone via a new railway tunnel. Mersey Park, Tranmere open July 25. Birth of D H. Lawrence September 11

1886 Mersey railway tunnel opened by the Prince of Wales on January 20. At first steam engines were used. The railway was electrified in 1903.

1887 First sod cut for the Manchester ship Canal on November 11 at Eastham.

1888 202,243 emigrants sailed from Liverpool to North America.

1889 Fires at warehouses in Liverpool during the year accounted for the loss of £65,000 worth of goods, mostly cotton.

1890 Liverpool dock strike. 20,000 Dock labourers marched in protest.

1891 Population of Oxton 4429. Population of Birkenhead 58,287. Second St Saviours Church Oxton completed, The tower completed in 1892. John Masefield, later to become Poet Laureate, arrived in Birkenhead to become a cadet on the training ship "Conway".

1892 Oxton Conservative Club founded. At first in Claughton Firs the club moved to its present building, in Village Road, in 1897.

1893 Opening of the Electric Overhead Railway in Liverpool February 4

1894 Wirral Ladies Golf Club, Oxton, opened. Queen Victoria opened the Manchester Ship Canal on May 25

1895 Birkenhead Fire Station, Whetstone Lane, opened

1896 Electricity generating station in Bentinck Street opened. 5 miles of cable were laid to supply 94 consumers.

1897 Bidston Hill bought by the Borough of Birkenhead for use as a recreation area

1898 Birkenhead Municipal Borough formed into a Civil Parish, which included Oxton, Claughton, Bebington and Tranmere.

1899 Beginning of the Boer War. A scheme to electrify the trams in Birkenhead was adopted by the Birkenhead Corporation. The training ship "Clarence" caught fire on July 26 at birth off Rock Ferry and burnt down to water level. The 235 officers and cadets on board were rescued by the ferryboats "Mersey" and "Firefly".