

OXTON ROAD NAMES *by Bob Knowles*

Who are the people whose names appear as road names on the letters and parcels delivered in Oxton? Who were Fairclough, Cearns, Willan and Newburn? Why Ingestre Road, Mill Hill, Palm Hill and Claughton Firs?

Many of Oxton's roads seem old and settled, their names almost timeless. But just over 170 years ago there were few road names and actually none whatsoever were recorded as addresses in the census of 1841. The population of some 250 people, mostly living in small, basic agricultural cottages simply had the address "Oxton". Although there were some notable houses or mansions already established or under construction.

The roads that were recorded in a map of 1847 included Village Road. This was the road that led to the old Oxton Village built around St Saviours Church and the Caernarvon Castle, made up of shops, houses and farms, that housed many of the Oxton community of mid-Victorian times.

Soon after, many of the roads were given names and we can see names familiar to us appearing all over Oxton. Many were named after the builders who undertook the development work or the rich, successful merchants and landowners who inhabited the houses. Williams Lane for instance was named after the builder who built and lived in cottages at the back of the Queens. This was later renamed Birch Road (although it has also been recorded as Beech Road). Hughes Lane was named after Thomas Hughes an agricultural labourer from Bidston, who became the licensee of the Queens Arms in the mid nineteenth century – in fact it was known as The Hughes Hotel.

Samuel Cearns was a successful wine and spirit merchant who was also a member of the Local Board – the parish council. He lived in South Hill Grove, off Fairview Road. And of course he gave his name to Cearns Road. And this was typical of those times. Edward Willan built the stone houses in Willan Street, John Newburn, a land and quarry owner, as well as a builder, gave his name to Newburns Lane. The Lane originally extended along what is now called Rose Mount to the junction with Mount Pleasant. Fairclough Lane has changed its name three times, that we know of - from Butlers Lane to Staceys Lane and finally to Fairclough Lane - all three families resident there at one time. Prices Lane was dedicated to Thomas Price, a builder, and you can see his initials on a wall plaque set into the sandstone terrace, that he built on Claughton Firs – it reads "TP 1845". Claughton Firs itself was originally named Shrewsbury Road, and was likely to have been renamed to highlight the fact that it was actually in the Parish of Claughton and sported a bank of fir trees

Other roads were named after important features such as the availability of water. So Oxton had Well Lane, which became Gerald Road, Spring Villas, and Well Cottages off Roslin Road. And there is of course still water underneath us. In Oxton Village every so often you can see water gushing across the pavement and down the gutter, an automatic mechanism emptying an unused well in the premises of Brimark Signs.

The biggest influence on Oxton's road names is though the Shrewsbury family. In a future article I shall look at the influence of the Shrewsbury family, their names and titles, now familiar to us as the names of many of Oxton's roads.