

## Road Names of Oxton

All over the Wirral, in the villages and hamlets and towns, there can be found names of roads and lanes that can tell us much of the history of that particular place, if we were to ask *why* they were so named. Oxton is particularly rich in this respect and there is a story attached to most of the road names. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Oxton was described as a desolate place with just a few poor cottages. There were few road names and none whatsoever were recorded in the census of 1841, as everyone's address was simply "Oxton". There was no need for an address as we know it, as the postal service was only just beginning to operate at that time, with the introduction of the uniform penny post in 1840.

Some cottages, shops and a post office gathered around where now stand St Saviour's church and the Carnarvon Castle pub. Together they formed the original Oxton village. So *Village Road* led up to the 'old Village' and not down to the present centre. *Bidston Road* linked Oxton with Bidston village and *Storeton Road*, less obviously today, led to the village of that name. (Storeton Road was known as Toll Bar Road on some maps, as the government encouraged to establishment of such roads under private management to improve the road stock of the country without the use of tax money). *Townfield Lane* went down into the fields, an ancient pathway to arable land, where medieval folk could freely graze their animals. Often these fields were called Common Fields, and there is a road of this name in Woodchurch still. The road that we today call *Gerald Road* was once called *Well Lane*, the site of Oxton's village well. But perhaps Oxton's oldest roads are *Arno Road* and *Holm Lane*, as both are of Old Scandinavian origin.

*Arno Road* runs up from *Woodchurch Road*, which was partly known as Slush Lane, to the top of what was known as Arno Hill, where now the Queens Arms is now. That road was needed as it seems clear there was once a windmill of at the top. Today its existence is remembered from where it stood on or about *Mill Hill*. Arno Hill was once in the possession of a man with a Norse name, Arni. So, it was called *Arni Haugr* or Arni's hill. Through time its name changed until in 1795 it is first recorded as Arno. *Holm Lane* runs down from the top of Arno Hill to what were once the marsh-lands or *holmr* of the Fender valley.

As Oxton developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, roads were given names which we might think of in one of three groups, and the first of those could be called descriptive. From the top of Oxton Hill, *Fair View Road*, and *Rich View* must surely have given just that across to the hills of Wales one way and to Liverpool in the other. *Mount Pleasant*, *Poplar Road* and *Birch Road* seem obvious, a reflection of their trees and desirability. *Rose Mount* may have had wild roses growing there once, perhaps around Rose Mount Cottage at the top of the hill. But from Mount Pleasant to Storeton Road was for a while known as Park Lane, taking the new villagers towards the Arno park.. *Spring Villas* and *Well Cottages* remind us that sitting on a sandstone ridge, a water supply was easily obtained simply by sinking wells and connecting with the water table beneath. *Claughton Firs* tells us that it was once a part of the boundary between Oxton and Claughton. One side of the road being in Claughton and the other in Oxton. A fir tree wood from there down to Christchurch explains the second part of the name, notable for its fir trees.

The next group of road names remembers the local men of influence in Oxton's 19<sup>th</sup> century residential development. *Fairclough Lane*, *Newburns Lane*, *Willan Street*, *Hughes Lane* and *Bennetts Hill* are all evidence of their involvement in that process. Price, Newburn and Bennett were builders and/or quarry owners providing a valuable resource, tons of sandstone, to build the new houses and the walls as Oxton grew. Edward Willan, a book shop owner, lived in a house in *Willan Street*, while Thomas Hughes, an agricultural labourer from Bidston, became the licensee of the Queens Arms, and was so well thought of it was known as the 'Hughes Hotel' and he had a lane named after him.. *Prices Lane* was named to remember Thomas Price, a local builder whose initials on a stone wall plaque on the terrace that he built on *Claughton Firs* – it reads "TP 1845". *Birch Road*, was once known as *Williams Lane* after the builder, who once lived and built Williams Cottages there. Changes of name were not uncommon. They often changed as the families who lived there moved in and out. *Fairclough Lane* changed its name at least three times, from Butlers Lane to Staceys Lane and then to Fairclough Lane. The Post Office had to find a way of identifying a road, so chose to use the name of the current

occupant and as they changed so did the road name. Balls Road was named after a land and property owner James Ball. His name was also applied to Balls Lane, now known as Palm Hill; Cearns Road after Samuel Cearns, a merchant in wine and spirits and a Local Board Officer. Wellington Road was named after, or in celebration of the Duke of course.

The final group of Oxton's road names has to do with the Earls of Shrewsbury and the families that married into that dynasty. That family had ownership of Oxton from medieval times, but in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the then Earl sold off leases to the land to encourage residential development. It is not surprising that quite a number of Oxton's roads refer to that family's personal names or titles. *Shrewsbury Road* is obvious, but, *Waterford*, *Wexford* (both titles), *Ingestre*, *Alton*, (family seats) *Geral*, *Talbot* and *Chetwynd Roads* were family names, as was *Beresford Road* following the 18<sup>th</sup> Earls marriage to Lady Sarah Elizabeth Beresford. Applying the names and titles of the landowners can prove confusing to history researchers. Cloughton Firs was once called Shrewsbury Road before that name transferred to the altogether grander road we know now; it was seen as more fitting perhaps. Dawburns Lane, a farmer and landowner, was similarly renamed Talbot Road.

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