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# Introduction

In 1991, Christopher Train, CB, retired as Director General of the Prison Service, and came to live in Clunbury. His keen interest in local history brought him into membership of The South-West Shropshire Historical & Archaeological Society (SWSHAS). He held the post of Chairman until his untimely death in May 2007, maintaining and enhancing the Society's fine local reputation, and extending its range of interests and activities. He was also involved in historical research in Ludlow and Craven Arms, and published a number of highly acclaimed books on aspects of local history.

To honour his achievements, the Society's Committee and Membership have established an annual competition for essays/papers on any aspect of local history and archaeology in S.W. Shropshire. This last year (2009) there were three categories of entry - Adults; School Students 11-18; and School Students (under 11). The winners were:

*Adult:* Nicholas Harding (Aston-on-Clun).

*School 11-18:* Julu Lund (Colebatch).

*School under 11:* Taliesin Lund (Colebatch).

The Society's policy is to publish the winning entries, through our Journal or, as here, in a separate supplement.

I congratulate this year's winners on their fine achievements and hope that those reading them will be inspired to enter this year's competitions - entries to our Secretary not later than 1st December 2010.

David Preshous,  
SWSHAS President

# The Christopher Train Memorial Shields

The Society has established an annual competition for papers on any aspect of local history and archaeology in South West Shropshire to honour the memory of Christopher Train CB, late Chairman of the Society. The competition is open to all comers and consists of three categories -

1. For adults.
2. For Secondary School students (11-18 years).
3. For Primary School students.

Adult entries, which should be previously unpublished and show evidence of original research, should not exceed 3000 words. Illustrations, maps, etc. may be included. School students (Primary and Secondary) may enter any original project work or essay (any length) on a local historical or archaeological subject. The SWSHAS Committee will appoint a panel to judge the entries, and the winners announced and trophies presented on the occasion of the annual Ritherdon Lecture (usually held in April). The winner in each category will receive a Shield to be held for that year, as well as a prize of £30. It is hoped that the winning entries may be published in the Society's *Journal*, or as Occasional Papers, though the authors will retain publication rights. The Society hopes to be allowed to retain a copy of each entry for its own records. No reproduction or publication will be undertaken without the author's permission.

**Entries must be submitted not later than 1st December 2010 to the Society's Secretary: Mrs. Joye Minshall, 4 Alvaston Way, Rivermead, Monkmoor Road, Shrewsbury, SY2 5TJ. (e-mail: [jminshall29@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:jminshall29@tiscali.co.uk)) tel: 01743 235 907).**

**Entries should be submitted anonymously (the author's name and address being enclosed in a separate sealed envelope).**



*Nicholas Harding, Julu Lund and Taliesin Lund, winners of the 2010 Chris Train Memorial Shields with Maurice Young, Chairman of the Society and Mrs Sheila Train who presented the shields and prizes.*

# Aston Mill Farm and the Oaker Estate at Aston on Clun

*Nicholas Harding is a former professor of mathematics in the State University of New York and is now proprietor of the Kangaroo Inn, Aston on Clun, genealogist and alpaca farmer.*

## Introduction

*'On Arbor Day in 1786, local Squire John Marston of Oaker Estate married Mary Carter of Sibdon.'* [1]

This marriage is central to the modern Arbor Day celebration at Aston on Clun's famous black poplar. It is certain that John Marston married Mary Carter at Sibdon on 29 May 1786; the marriage is recorded in the Sibdon marriage registers and in the Bishop of Hereford's transcripts. However, John could not be *of Oaker Estate* since, as will be shown, the Oaker Estate only came into being after 1869. John Box in his study of the Arbor Tree states:

*'On the death of his father, Francis Marston of Cheney Longville, John Marston inherited all his land in the parish of Hopesay, including the farmhouse at Oaker where John and Mary lived.'* [2]

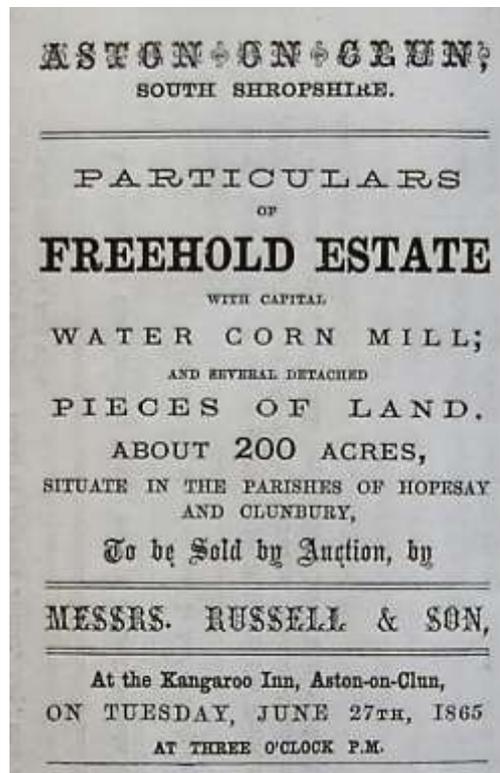
It will be shown that the present day farmhouse known as Oaker House (Fig.1) was in the ownership of the Whitefoot family before the marriage, and at the time of its sale to Richard Marston in 1869 it was known as Aston Mill Farm House acquiring its current name only after Marston took possession.



*Fig.1 Oaker House 1949*

## The sale of Aston Mill Farm

On Tuesday, 27 June 1865 Aston Mill Farm was scheduled to be auctioned at the Kangaroo Inn, Aston on Clun (Fig.2).



*Fig 2 Sale particulars: Aston Mill Farm [3]*

The main part was described as:

*A SUPERIOR House, fit for the residence of a genteel family, excellent walled Garden and Lawn, with drive opening on Turnpike Road, 3 miles from Craven Arms, First-class Station Shrewsbury and Hereford Railway, and one mile from Broome Station, with all requisite modern Farm-buildings, good Stabling and Coach-house, three good Labourers' Cottages, and 157 acres (more or less), of Rich Grass (part of which can be irrigated at pleasure) and capital Arable Land, well adapted for the growth of Turnips and Barley; the whole in a high state of cultivation; the Proprietor having within a few years expended upwards of Two Thousand Pounds in permanent Improvements on the Property.*

*Also, a Substantially Stone-built WATER CORN MILL, with a never-failing Supply of Water from the River "Clun" which runs through the Estate, and is celebrated for its Trout and Greyling Fishing; the Mill and Machinery are in complete repair and in thorough working order.*

*A very Comfortable DWELLING-HOUSE and GARDEN, conveniently situated to the Mill, with newly-erected Stabling, Cow-house, Wagon-house, &c., called and*

*known as “The Aston Farm,” occupied by the Proprietor, and “The Mill” by Mr. Merrell, as yearly Tenant.’*

This farm had been bought seven years previously by John Thomas, and in 1869 ownership passed to the Ludlow solicitor Richard Marston. It was about this time that Aston Mill Farmhouse was renamed Oaker House; the property known as Aston Mill at the time of the 1861 census was in 1871 called Oaker House. The renamed Oaker House remained in the hands of the Marston family until 1949 when the whole estate was auctioned off.

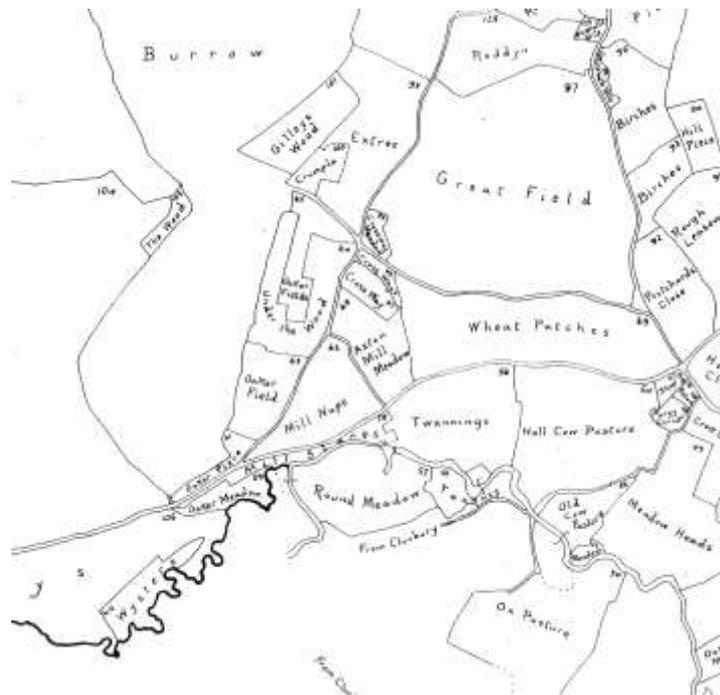
In 1856, John Thomas had acquired the Aston Mill property as a result of the death of Sarah Whitefoot. Her brother, John Whitefoot, died 19 May 1852, aged 87 years, leaving behind a rather complicated will (Appendix I). He made provision for the disposition of his estates in Stoke Saint Milborough and in nearby Clee Downton and left to his older spinster sister, Sarah Whitefoot, his estate in **Hopesay and Clunbury parishes**. Upon Sarah’s death the estate was to be divided amongst eleven of his relatives and their families. John Thomas of **Cholohey, Herefordshire**, and John’s cousin, **William Whitefoot of Droitwich, Worcestershire** were to act as executors of the will. In addition, John Thomas was given the right to purchase the Hopesay estate, subject to an independent valuation.

The valuation of the estate was submitted on 28 January 1857 by William Humphreys, land agent, and Edward Russell, auctioneer. They valued the farm, mill and five cottages containing together just over 188 acres at £6838.7s.0d with annual payments of £8.8s.7d [4]. The conveyance document of 25 March 1869 (John Thomas & another to Richard Marston) includes an estate map which is partially reproduced in Fig.3. The top of the map is north and the road running through from east to west is the Ludlow to Clun turnpike – the modern B4368. The large structure in the middle of the cluster of buildings is Aston Mill Farm House, the current Oaker House; to its west is the Mill House, now Mill Stream Cottage, and on the east the farm yard, including the late 17<sup>th</sup> century listed barns. The farm house itself is said to be early 17<sup>th</sup> century [6]. The confluence of the rivers Kemp and Clun and the mill race are clearly depicted.

Several fields on the north side of the Clun road were, at the time, already in the possession of Richard Marston. His field immediately above those numbered 18, 19 & 20 is named Oaker Field on the Hopesay Tithe Map of 1840 (Fig.4); and field number 17 is named Oaker Piece. The tithe map has two other pieces associated with the Oaker name: fields numbered 21 & 22 (not shown on Fig.3) are called Oaker Fields and land immediately south of 13 (in the possession of Beddoes) is called Oaker Meadow. Fields 12 & 13 are called Mill Slangs and those

numbered 18-20 Mill Naps. The area north of the Oaker Piece and south of Burrow Hill is today known as Oaker Wood and at the time of the Aston Mill sale was owned by the Earl of Powis. Since the Oaker name was well established when Richard decided to change the name of the main house, Oaker House would be natural, and certainly sounds a lot better than Aston Mill Farm House.

*Fig. 3 Aston Mill Estate Map 1869 [5]*



*Fig.4 Hopesay Tithe Map 1840 [7]*



In the period between his purchase of the estate in 1858 and its subsequent sale in 1869, Thomas consolidated it through an exchange of land made under the provisions of The Acts for the Inclosure Exchange and Improvement of Land of 1857. He exchanged four fields in two nearby parts of Aston for five adjacent to various parts of Aston Mill. Attached to the Order of Exchange is a very fine large scale map indicating the size and location of these nine fields and clearly shows the main Aston on Clun cross roads at the Arbor Tree (see Appendix II).

## The Whitefoot family of Aston on Clun

The Whitefoot family had lived in Aston since at least the time of George I [8]. **John's grandfather, Thomas Whitefoot, born circa 1689, is buried in Hopesay churchyard next to the grave of Francis Davies, the son of his widow, Elizabeth, who had remarried in circa 1745. Francis had died in 1768 and his grave is marked: 'late of Aston Mill.' Hardwicke has Thomas living at Aston Mill [9]; at the time of Hardwicke's visit to St. Mary's in the 1830s Thomas's remains lay beneath the aisle inside the church and he records:**

*In the Aisle  
Here lieth under  
neath this stone  
the body of Thomas  
Whitefoot of Aston Mill  
he resigned his soul to  
God the 26<sup>th</sup>. Day of No  
vember 1741 in the 52  
year of his age'*

Perhaps during the Victorian re-building of the church Thomas was moved outside and 'Aston Mill' was shortened to 'Aston' and 8 years added to his age, as the new memorial has his place of abode Aston and age 59 years.

Hardwicke has this to say about Aston:

*'About one mile to the south of the village of Hopesay is the manor and township of Aston which is stretched upon a pleasant and agreeable plain wherein are four farms. One formerly belonging to the respectable family of Whitchall but now to their descendant Thomas Nicholls Gent its occupier, another is the property of Francis Marston Gent and held by himself and Thomas Carter another is the estate of Thomas Wylde of Billingham co Hereford Gent who inherits it from his ancestors the*

*Gillys and held by John Carter and the other is the property of Edward Turner its occupier. Aston Mill and lands belong to John Whitefoot and held by himself Richard Davis and Edward Lewis.'*

At the time of the 1841 census John Whitefoot and sister Sarah were living at Aston Mill with two servants, one of whom was their cousin Henry Whitefoot. Ten years later another cousin, Elizabeth Whitefoot, had joined them. John and Sarah are buried together in St. Mary's churchyard, Hopesay, and both are said to be 'late of Aston Mill' [Fig.5]. The Whitefoot name lives on in the form of a charity administered by the Hopesay Parish Charities. John and Sarah both bequeathed the sum of £100 the interest and dividends on which was to be paid yearly to 'such poor Housekeepers of the said Parish for ever as the Minister & Churchwardens for the time being at their discretion shall think proper' [10]. In 1920 this amounted to £3.12s.4d, twenty percent of the total for that year, and allowed Widow Griffiths of Aston, for example, to receive 15/- that Christmas [11].



*Fig.5 Sarah Whitefoot's memorial*

The Marston home in 1786

If John Marston and his new bride, the former Mary Carter, had stopped at the Arbor Tree on their wedding day on the way to the bridal home, where would they have been going to? Convincing evidence has been presented to show it could not be the farm house now known as Oaker House. Robert Baugh's Shropshire map of 1808 suggests a possible answer (Fig.6). The Mill is shown by black blocks below the word Aston to the east of the confluence of the Kemp and Clun. Above the number 11 (miles along the turnpike to Ludlow) is Baugh's standard symbol for a mansion. It can be seen associated with Ferny Hall, Willey Court and dozens of other big houses. Aston's current 'big house' is Aston Hall located just west of the Hopesay road, and is situated in the same spot as Baugh's

mansion. Pevsner [13] has Aston Hall built about 1820-30, and English Heritage [14] has it circa 1830.

Unfortunately the early history of Aston Hall is unknown; in particular it is not known if it replaced an earlier building, but Baugh's map suggests the possibility. Could this have been Mary Carter's new home? John and Mary are both buried in St. Mary's churchyard, Hopesay - Mary in 1806 and John in 1831 - as is their infant daughter Ann, daughter Elizabeth Evans, John's second wife, Sarah, and several of their children.



*Fig.6 Aston on Clun 1808 [12]*

## Conclusion

Contrary to the Arbor Tree tradition, John Marston in 1786 did not take his bride to Oaker House. The documentary evidence has shown that:

1. The Whitefoot family were owner-occupiers of property known as Aston Mill Farm from 1741 to 1856.
2. Aston Mill Farm house is the same dwelling as the present Oaker House, and acquired this name in circa 1870.

There is also clear evidence that the Marston family had close ties to the village and were major land owners for two centuries or more. If John Marston and Mary Carter made a home in Aston in 1786 then it might have been at the old Aston Hall or more likely a family farm, perhaps the one mentioned in Hardwicke's survey.

Nicholas Harding

## APPENDIX I: John Whitefoot's Will

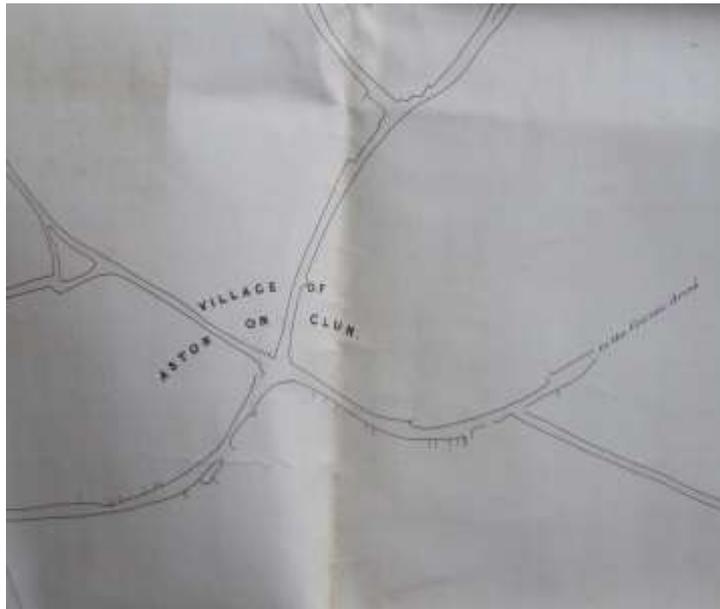
The Schedule

Quantity	Value	Total
One Black Horse	£100	£100
One Grey Horse	£80	£80
One White Horse	£70	£70
One Brown Horse	£60	£60
One Black Cow	£50	£50
One Grey Cow	£40	£40
One White Cow	£30	£30
One Brown Cow	£20	£20
One Black Pig	£10	£10
One Grey Pig	£8	£8
One White Pig	£7	£7
One Brown Pig	£6	£6
One Black Sheep	£5	£5
One Grey Sheep	£4	£4
One White Sheep	£3	£3
One Brown Sheep	£2	£2
One Black Lamb	£1	£1
One Grey Lamb	£1	£1
One White Lamb	£1	£1
One Brown Lamb	£1	£1

Fig.7 1858 deed [15]

John Whitefoot stipulated that upon his sister's death the Aston Mill Estate was to be sold off and, after the deduction of certain expenses, the proceeds were to be divided into eleven equal shares. John's will, made in 1846, directed that the eleven shares be given equally to seven living cousins and to the children of four who were not. Seven years later on 2 August 1852 the will was proven in the Consistory Court of Hereford. Sarah Whitefoot died in 1856 and the lawyers were left with the considerable task of identifying the members of the eleven families who were to share in the proceeds of the sale of the estate. The gathering of relevant certificates and affidavits took place over a period of more than a year and resulted in the construction of a large detailed Whitefoot family tree. One of the more curious documents is a letter from an official of the Saint Pancras Workhouse dated 26 April 1858 in which the discovery of the body of an unknown man found drowned in the Regents Canal is described [16]. It appears that he was Scipio Smallman, a son of John's cousin Elizabeth Smallman (nee Whitefoot) and inmate of the workhouse. The deed implementing the estate sale has a remarkable total of 33 signatures (Fig.7).

## APPENDIX II: Land Exchange 1862



*Fig.8 Exchange map 1862 [17]*

The Order of Exchange issued by the Enclosure Commissioners on 10 July 1862 is attached to a large scale map of the area containing the affected land. The road structure at the centre of Aston on Clun is shown in fine detail (Fig.8). The road branching to the top from the main junction is today known as Mill Street – there was another mill located on the north side of this road. The road bearing to the right at the top junction is now a public footpath to Sibdon Carwood. The main road, today's B4368, is marked as going 'to the Craven Arms;' here Craven Arms refers to the public house which gave its name to the town when the surrounding area was developed with the coming of the Shrewsbury & Hereford Railway; interestingly, the station at Craven Arms had opened ten years before on 21 April 1852. The fields gained by the Aston Mill Estate are shown on Fig.9. For some reason the dimensions of field number 54a - which borders the main road - are given, and in the unusual units of links (100 links = 1 chain)



*Fig.9 Exchange map 1862 [18]*

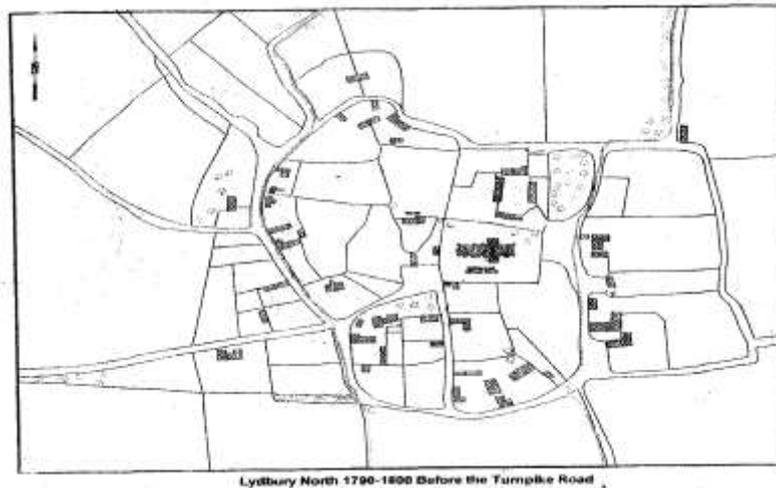
Notes:

1. Arbor Day web site: <http://www.arbortreeday.co.uk/>
2. Box, John. *Dressing the Arbor Tree*. Folklore 114 (2003): 13-28.
3. Powis Estate Collection. Shropshire Archives Ref. 552/30/231.
4. **Valuation document of 28 January 1857. [Author's collection].**
5. Conveyance dated 25 March 1869: Mr. John Thomas and another to Mr. **Richard Marston. [Author's collection].**
6. List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest: District of South Shropshire. Department of the Environment, 1987. [Shropshire Archives]
7. Field name map of Hopesay parish 1840. Shropshire County Council, 1976. [Shropshire Archives].
8. Mortgage deed. Shropshire Archives Ref. 1037/12/47
9. Hardwicke, W. *Collections for History of Shropshire*. Collated c. 1833-38, 6 vols. [William Salt Library, Stafford, WSL350/5/40].
10. *Benefactors to the Parish of Hopesay*. [Hopesay Parish Council].
11. *ibid.*
12. **Robert Baugh's Map of Shropshire 1808. Shropshire Archaeological Society, 1983.**
13. Pevsner, Nikolaus. *The Buildings of England: Shropshire*: 64. London: Penguin Books, 1958
14. *List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest: District of South Shropshire*. Department of the Environment, 1987. [Shropshire Archives]
15. Conveyance dated 12 May 1858: Miss Elizabeth Whitefoot and others to Mr. **John Thomas. [Author's collection].**
16. Letter dated 26 April 1858: Parish of St. Pancras Workhouse to J. Lloyd Esq., **Ludlow. [Author's collection].**
17. Order of Exchange dated 10 July 1862: Margaret Minor Nichols & John **Thomas. [Author's collection].**
18. *ibid*

# The History of Lydbury North

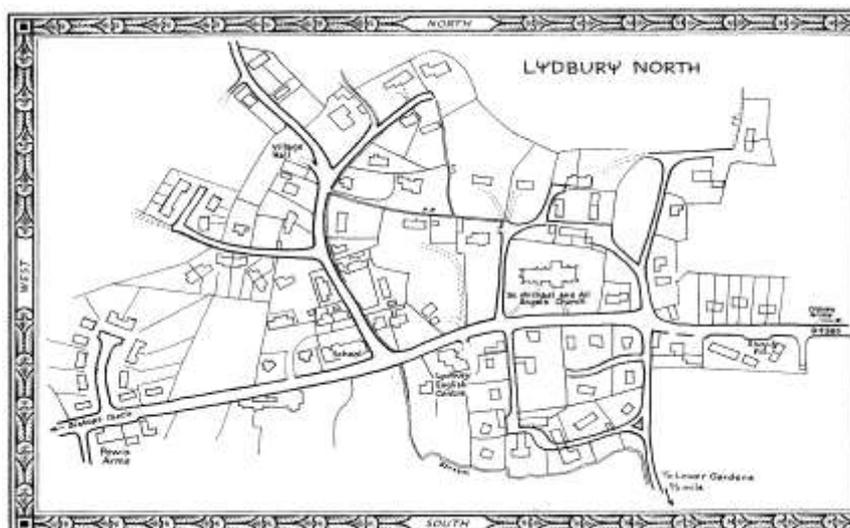
*Julu Lund, aged 12, is an enthusiastic young archaeologist. He is a member of the Lydbury North Young Archaeologists Group and is home educated.*

This is Lydbury North (fig no 1). The map shows Lydbury North somewhere between the times of 1790 and 1800.



*Fig 1: Lydbury North 1799 – 1800 © Lydbury field group*

If you compare it to the more recent map of Lydbury North (fig no 2) you will find the shape has not changed that much. You may also see that some of the old buildings are still there, the church for example. Another thing you might notice is that some of the old roads are not there and that a few new roads have been added. One difference in the maps is that in the older map there is no real main road and the new one has a very definite main road.



*Fig 2: Map of Lydbury North 2006 © Fred Averis*

I have been involved in an archaeological group called Lydbury North Young Archaeologists Group (LNYAG) lead by Mike and Teri Greene who are both archaeologists. With them we have explored all sorts of different forms of finding about the past such as dendrochronology. A sample is taken, a cylinder of wood about 15cm long, and the rings examined. Then they compare them to already known patterns of rings (a bit like bar codes) it can even tell you the season that the tree was felled in. Six of the houses in Lydbury North had it done by a man named Dan Miles from the Oxford dendrochronology unit. The oldest timber found is dated to 1418.

Mike and Teri told me about one of their excavations in Lydbury North. They were looking for the Anglo-Saxon origins and development of the village. They have found some 13<sup>th</sup> century pottery as well as a 20<sup>th</sup> century rubbish dump. In the rubbish dump they found a rubber car pedal, a plastic doll's leg, the springs of an old mattress, the base of an 19<sup>th</sup> century oil lamp complete with wick and lots of nails. While digging at the medieval green area they found cow bones covered in notches. It is possible that the animals were killed on site and the bones buried after the meat had been removed.

While looking at old maps the Greene's found what might be the sight [site] of a mill. They investigated, found which field the mill was in and asked the owner if they could excavate.

They got a group of people and started clearing the site of weeds, grass and rubbish (fig no 3). We then scraped away with trowels until we came across a layer of large stones. And next to the stones they found an old wall still with its lime mortar in place. Teri began digging on the other side of the stream that ran through the site and found another stone wall also still with lime mortar in.



*Fig. 3: Before Site Clearing © Lydbury field group*

A few months later they got together another group of people and did more excavating. First they had to clear the weeds that had grown over the site (fig no 4).



*Fig. 4: Clearing the weeds © Lydbury Field Group*

On the day that we joined them, we started scraping into the cracks between the large rocks and found a few lumps of vitrified stone (stone that has touched something very hot and has turned to glass) and some pottery. Teri uncovered an old home made brick and hopes to find the fire place it was made on. Mike hopes to find the grind stone and the kind of grind stone will tell him the kind of mill it was. I enjoyed taking part immensely.

With the Lydbury North Young Archaeologists Group we have also been stream walking (which is where you walk along a stream and keep your eyes open for archaeological finds). We divided the stream into four sections and had four people combing each section. We were instructed to slowly walk along the stream, keeping our eyes open, first one way then the other. This was to ensure that we hadn't missed anything and also to get a different angle of light. Anything we found we put into a small plastic tray which, when filled, was transferred to a bucket. We did this for about 45 minutes and then we went back up to the village hall. Most importantly, we made sure that we knew which area of the stream the finds had come from, by labelling the buckets from 1 to 4.

A few weeks later we had the chance to record the findings first we sorted them. Then we gave them all numbers gave a description and a type (e.g. Pottery, slate, mettle). Mike taught us how to tell the difference between earthenware and stoneware, earthenware is so soft that you can scratch it with your finger nail and it crumbles like sandstone. Stoneware on the other hand is a lot harder and will not crumble.

The church in Lydbury North has a Norman tower and a more recent main body. One part of it was used as a school at one point.

Near the north end of Lydbury North there is a holloway (or green lane) named Widows' Row (Fig no 5) Holloway (because it is next to Widows Row which is named because at one time the four houses that make it up each had a widow living in them). When we looked at it we were with a long time resident who gave us an aural history of the Holloway.



*Fig. 5: The Widow's Row Holloway © Lydbury Field Group*

Opposite the church there are the remains of a medieval road that lead to Walcott (fig no 6).



*Fig. 6: Remains of medieval road. © Lydbury Field Group.*

Finally here is a picture of Lydbury North taken from a hill just above the village (fig no 7).



*Fig. 7 View of Lydbury North ©. Fred Humphries*

Lydbury North has such an amazing history. Taking part in the archaeology of Lydbury North has been so interesting. I think I first got interested in it when I went to Vindolanda and talked to an archaeologist. Thank you for letting me share it with you.

Julu Lund

## Archaeology

*Taliesin Lund is 8 years old ,has the same enthusiasm for archaeology as his brother and is also a member of the Lydbury North Young Archaeologists Group. He is home educated.*

We made a hole in a corner of the garden and started digging. The first thing we found was a white piece of pottery with blue swirly patterns. After that we discovered lots of glass, pottery, brick and a bit of china with half a man on.

When we started our excavation we just used a big spade and started digging a hole in the corner. It wasn't a very good idea because we broke nearly all the pottery we found; there was hardly any big stuff. But then we heard about the Lydbury North Young Archaeologists' group. They taught us how you make a 1 metre square test pit to excavate an area.



*Fig. 1*

The next time we came to the Young Archaeologists' group we found that you scrape carefully with a trowel instead of just digging with a spade. When we scraped with a trowel we hardly broke any pottery but it was all broken anyway because in the old times, people chucked broken pottery away which got buried under the earth after time.

I eventually decided to make a 1 metre square test pit for myself and I started scraping the earth to uncover finds. This is shown in the pictures below:



I mostly found pottery as well as finding plastic, glass, also bits and bobs. I get better every time I do it because of practise scraping with the trowel.

Now I'll talk about some of the favourite pottery I found. One piece was black with a quarter of a circle, half a circle and half a curve. I also found a blue piece of pottery with 2 half rosettes and a yellow piece of pottery shaped black curved things on the yellow pottery not too far apart. some thick green glass pottery, a piece of pottery yellow with chips of it fallen of it, a thick piece of Elizabethan pottery (brown on one side, plain on the other side), a very big rusty handmade nail, a very nice smooth brown piece of pottery, and a yellow and brown rim. And that is the end of the words.

Taliesin Lund







