

OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF ALL STRETTON

The Norman Conquest and Domesday Book

After the Conquest, King William shared out the major divisions of his new realm among his chief supporters, and they in turn gave smaller sections of their domains to their lieutenants. These sections, which tended to be established Anglo-Saxon estates, became Norman manors. What we now think of as Shropshire was given to Roger, Earl of Montgomery, who chose to keep the manor known as Stretton for himself.

At the time of Edward the Confessor, the estate of Stretton, meaning 'the settlement by the Roman road' was held by Edwin, Earl of Mercia. The great land register of 1086 which we call Domesday Book, tells us that the estate had 18 villagers, eight smallholders, and a priest. There was a mill and a church. This modest amount of information points to a small settlement, centered on the church. This church served the entire estate, and the boundaries of the manor and of the ancient parish more or less coincide. Womerton, which at some time was a kind of sub-manor, had its own chapel, but it became included in the manor of Stretton, and its chapel eventually fell down.

Domesday Book mentions that the manor was divided into smaller units known as berewicks, and these became the townships we know today. The one with the church became known, not surprisingly, as Church Stretton. The township to the north was at some point, probably in the early 12th century, in the holding of a man called Alwred, and so it acquired the name 'Alwred's Stretton'. The name is a Norman phonetic spelling of the Anglo-Saxon name 'Alfred'. Try saying 'Alwred's Stretton' again and again: it soon becomes clear how the name ended up as 'All Stretton'. We know that for a time, probably during the early 1100s, a man whose name was given the spelling 'Alurid' held the neighbouring manor of Minton. There is a story about James I on progress from

Ludlow to Shrewsbury, enquiring about the name of each village in the Dale, and when he was told 'Stretton, Sire' for the third time, exclaimed 'Methinks it is all Stretton'. On the evidence, we may safely assume that this is nonsense. Documents drawn up 200 years before the time of Charles I refer to the place as 'All, alias Alured, Stretton'.



Farmer at the old Lower House barn now Barn Acre, c 1897

The Manor and its records

It is necessary for us to take a closer look at what the manor was and what its functions were. It was the manor that provided most of the evidence for research into the history of All Stretton, and the different ways in which manors were run explains much of the way that one community developed in comparison with others.

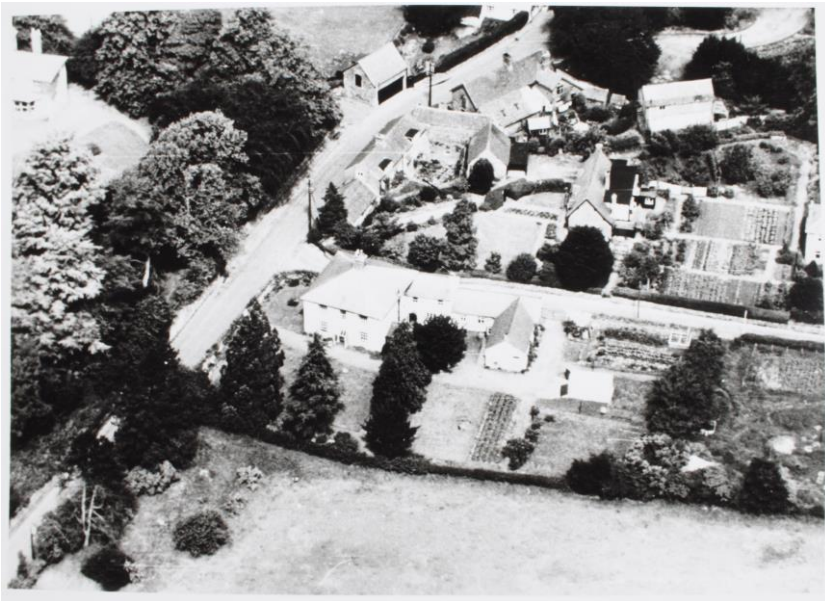
Manors were a form of local government at grass-roots level. The lord of the manor held court at regular intervals, partly to dispense justice in cases of disputes and various misdemeanours, and partly to make sure that changes in property ownership were properly recorded and carried out in

accordance with the traditions of the manor. The court sessions were presided over by the lord's steward, in the presence of a number of trusted holders of property within the manor. In courts that dealt with justice, some of these men formed a jury, and in the case of a session known as a court baron, which dealt with property, the steward was assisted by a smaller group called 'the homage'. The minutes of court proceedings were recorded, to begin with on pieces of parchment that were sewn together and rolled up, hence 'the court roll'; later on they were entered into ledger books. Where the manorial records survive, we find a rich source of information about people and property in the past. There are the court rolls or court books, and there are the suit rolls, which are lists of the people who were eligible for jury service.

There are two problems with these records: either they were lost, or their information is unclear or insufficient. The steward would be a solicitor, who kept the manor's records with those of his other clients, and a change of steward meant a transfer of records to another solicitor's office, which often led to loss or damage. In the case of the manor of Stretton-in-the-Dale, court books survive from 1721 onwards until the 1890s, but there are gaps where volumes have been lost or destroyed, and some of the information that is no longer available would have helped to explain significant changes in landownership and the fortunes of land-owning families. The few suit rolls that survive are from a short period in the 18th century.

The problems with understanding what the court books tell us are not necessarily to do with the fact that the earlier records were written in Latin. The real problem is caused by the system of using the homage to validate the court's decisions. This system was a survival from times when there were no written records; instead, people relied on memory. The local knowledge of the trusted men was handed down from generation to generation. For this reason, when a property changed hands, it was not necessary for the court to refer to

it in terms of its name or whereabouts or other physical features. The names of the people who had held it in the past was sufficient, because the homage would know who they were and what they owned. To us, centuries later, this information is lost. There are sometimes ways around this problem, and an old map accompanied by a schedule of land occupancy can be a great help. However, the only such map of All Stretton is the so-called tithe map of 1840 with its book of reference to owners and occupiers, called the apportionment, but its value is limited by the fact that there are no court books for the periods immediately before and after that date. The consequence is that whilst the map has given us many insights as to the identities of many of the properties that we find in the court books, many others remain unidentified.



Aerial view of the junction of Shrewsbury Road and Farm Lane showing Essex Lodge and Roseleigh, c 1920

Another obstacle to research lies in the distinction between copyhold and freehold tenure. A copyhold technically remained the property of the lord of the manor, and it was so

called because ownership or tenancy was established in open court, and a new tenant received a copy of the court roll entry of his transaction as proof of his entitlement. In the case of freehold, the tenant would enter into private agreement with the lord whereby he purchased the right to the property in perpetuity. This process, known as enfranchisement, meant that the property disappeared from the record, because it was no longer under the jurisdiction of the manorial court. Luckily, few properties were enfranchised before the middle of the 19th century, but there are nevertheless many properties whose history will remain in the dark because they were old freeholds.

The way our manor functioned when compared with most other rural manors in Shropshire reflects our relationship with the lords of manors from early times until the beginning of the 19th century. Elsewhere, the lord tended to have his residence within his manor and treated it like a personal estate, with the farms held of him personally by lease for a period of years and a commercial rent. He would control most aspects of daily life in his personal fiefdom, and he would oversee every new development, whether agricultural, commercial or industrial. This was not the case in Stretton-in-the-Dale. Here, the lord lived far away from his domain, and our manor was one of many that he owned, scattered all over the country.

From the King during the early middle ages, the lordship passed to the Earls of Arundel, who forfeited their property in the 1570s, when the Crown sold it to a London merchant, who settled it on his daughter and her heirs on her marriage to the future Viscount Weymouth. The residence of the Weymouths was at Longleat in Wiltshire, and they happened to be distant relations of the Thynnes of Botvyle. For about a hundred years this family, who were soon advanced to the Earldom of Bath, were happy to hold Stretton in return for the income of some land (Dudgley, Inwood, Gogbatch and woodland on Ragleth) and the small amounts of money that were collected as fees when property changed hands or the owner died. Where the inhabitants of the kind of manor mentioned above were

leaseholders, the people of Stretton were either freeholders or copyholders, who were relatively free to do as they liked with their properties, provided they did their court duty and paid their manorial fees. In the 17th century the Lords of Bath tried to introduce commercial rents in the manor, but a group of copyholders took their lord to court, claiming rights from time immemorial, and won. This is why the fees or rents remained the same regardless of inflation (maybe just a penny for a house with a garden), and why the influence of the lords of the manor over the lifestyle of his manorial tenants remained negligible. By the beginning of the 20th century the only reason why anyone would buy the manor was so they could enjoy the hunting rights.



Driving ponies down from the Mynd, c 1920

Enclosures and encroachments

Agriculture was always problematic in the narrow, steep-sided valley. The medieval method of farming, involving strips of

land in open fields, cultivated for subsistence, was largely done away with by the end of the 16th century. On an early winter morning, with the low sun and a dusting of snow, we can still make out the remains of the old ridges here and there, as for instance in the field above Dudgley Mill, but these fields have been enclosed for centuries. Each copyholder used to farm one or more ridges of arable land scattered about the various open fields until they found that it was more economical to trade ridges and consolidate groups of them into single units, fenced in with hedges.

The rest of the outlying land was held by the manorial tenants in common as pasture. For All Stretton, this involved part of the Long Mynd and Lower Wood. There were old enclosures here as well, known as encroachments, such as Jinlye, Plush Hill and Bullock's Moor, but large tracts remained as common. During the 18th century it became fashionable to improve farming incomes by enclosing common grazing land into units of arable land. As compensation for the loss of rights of common, the landowners were given allotments within the enclosed land in proportion to the size of their existing land holdings. Many people sold their allotments, which led to the creation of several new farm units. On the map the distinction between encroachments and allotments is clear-cut. Along the road to Picklescott, for instance, the old encroachments appear as irregularly shaped islands on the common, but further along, from Mynderley onwards, the boundaries of the High Park enclosure form straight lines of ditches and hedgerows. The Lower Wood enclosure is another case in point.

The Village of All Stretton

The village of All Stretton has changed very little over the centuries, at least in terms of its position and general shape. There are still buildings here that go back to the early 16th century. It is a typical Shropshire village, and it fits the description from 1820 by James Loch, the Marquess of

Stafford's agent, of villages in the parish of Lilleshall and elsewhere in the eastern part of the county:

The occupiers of the land in each township resided together in the same village. Their houses and farm-offices consisted of those strong-built, half-timbered buildings, which are still to be seen all over England, and which are more picturesque in their external appearance, than commodious in their internal arrangement. Behind each house was placed the garden and the hemp-butt, and then a few closes of their best land. The remainder of their farm was scattered in every direction over the township.



A view of Old Hall Farm and White Heart cottage, c 1910

Until the beginning of the 19th century virtually every house in the village was a farmhouse of sorts. Even if the head of the household had another occupation, such as blacksmith or

shoemaker, he would still have some land in the neighbourhood for the family's subsistence and perhaps some income on the side. Some of these village farmers had considerable landholdings, but they were scattered. We may think of a farm as a group of fields with buildings attached, but with one or two exceptions, but this was never the case in All Stretton. This rural image of the village is emphasised by the fact that there were meadows in the very centre of the settlement right up to the 1920s. Part of the land above the Yew Tree where the Village Hall stands, was Lake Meadow, and the land between the Yew Tree and Buckstone Farmhouse was known as the Lord's Lands, later the Town Meadow, until it was sold as building plots in 1922.



View of The Row, the Congregational Chapel and the Manor House, c 1910

Several of the houses that were landmarks in the village centuries ago, are still prominent features today. The people who built them and lived in them are merely names to us today. The Wilding family's Lower House was certainly there by the middle of the 18th century; then there is the Wilkes family's house with its fancy, early 17th century timberwork, known to us as the Manor House. Buckstone Farmhouse is

referred to in the manorial record as Michael Sankey's farm, a name which takes it back to the 17th century. Most of the other old houses: the Hall, the Yew Tree, Essex Lodge, Rose-Leigh and Old Hall Farm, are dealt with elsewhere in this book.

The Wilding family and after

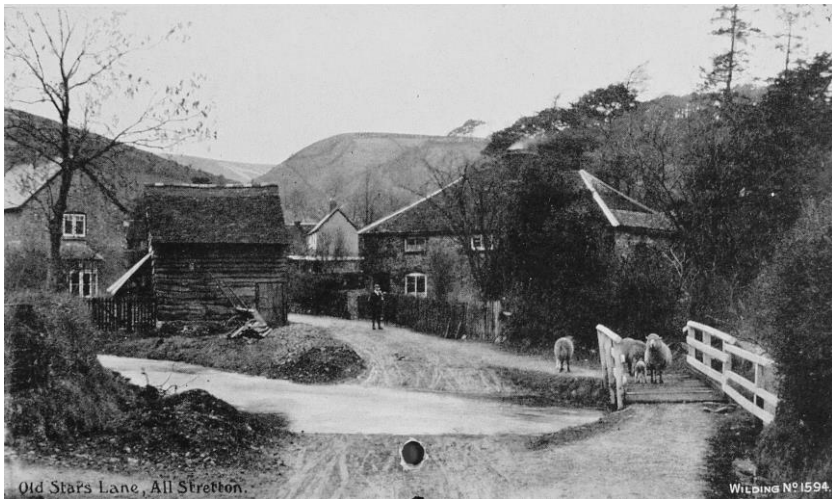
Of the families whose buildings survive, the Wildings were the ones who achieved greatest prominence. They were present in the township in the early 1500s, and their landholding grew steadily through fortunate marriage alliances as well as purchase. The head of family in every generation was named Richard, and the last three Richards Wildings were clergymen as well as gentlemen farmers and landowners.

By the early 19th century they were the most extensive landowners in All Stretton. Their property included Womerton, most of the Batch Valley and most of the village itself. They also owned Botvyle and New House Farm, not otherwise mentioned in this book, the former because it lies outside the manor of Stretton-en-le-Dale, i.e. in Lydley and Cardington manor, and the latter because it lies mainly in the township of Church Stretton.

In the 1830s the two brothers Samuel and Henry Wilding died without direct heirs and their property passed into the hands of trustees. Over the next 20 years there was a series of legal challenges to the estate from other members of the Wilding family, and it only in the 1850s that the trustees were able to sell the property at auction. As the Wildings owned so many of the village properties it has proved particularly difficult to distinguish between them in the manorial records. This has made the research into the Yew Tree, All Stretton Hall and Roseleigh a challenge.

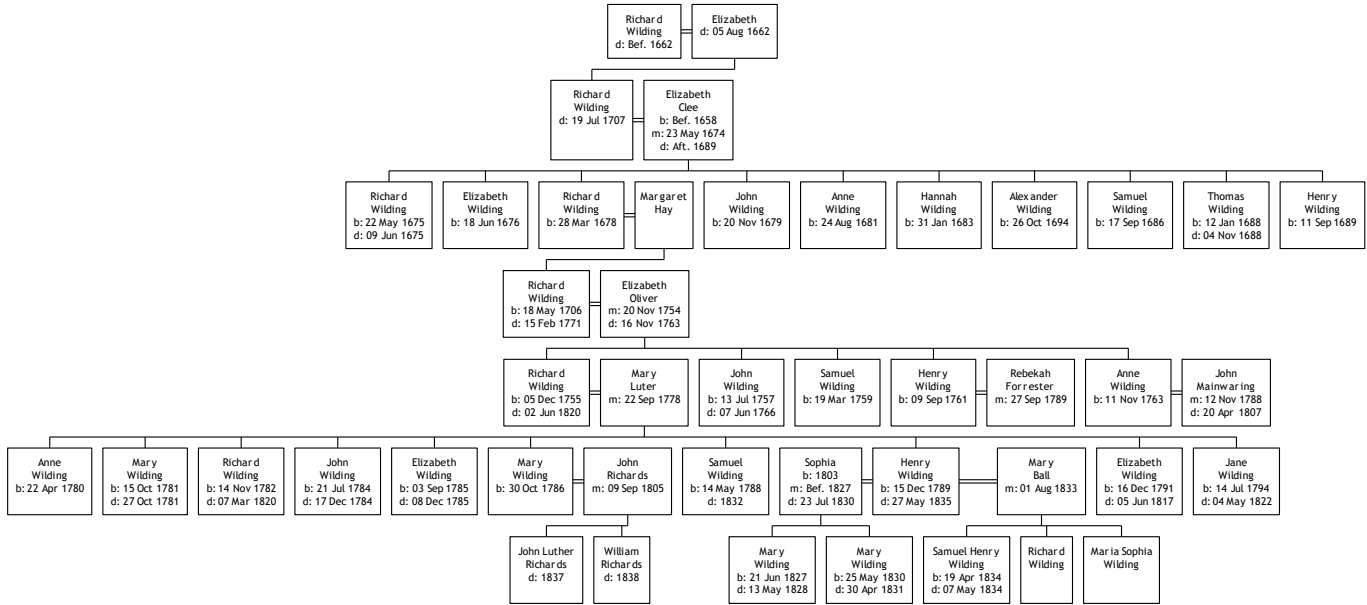
The greater part of the estate, including Botvyle, was purchased in 1855 by Beriah Botfield. He was a wealthy industrialist who took a keen interest in genealogy and traced

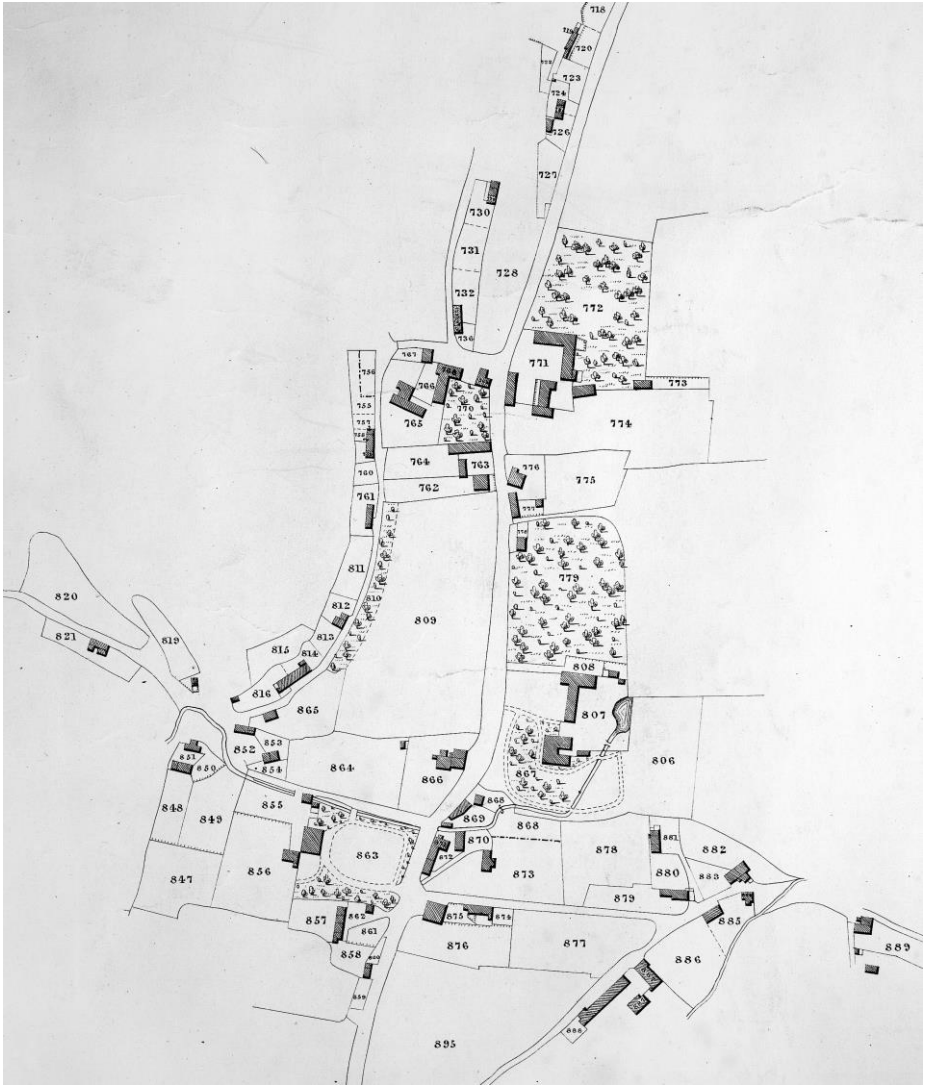
his ancestry to the Botfields of Botvyle, and therefore to the Earls of Bath. Being childless, in his will he gave this estate to his wife for her lifetime and thereafter to the Earl's second son. From his death in 1863 his widow held the estate until her own death in 1911, when it passed to members of the Earl of Bath's family, who sold it soon after, probably in order to meet death duties. Thereafter land ownership within the village was divided amongst a range of individuals.



Farm Lane with the old ford over the stream , c 1910

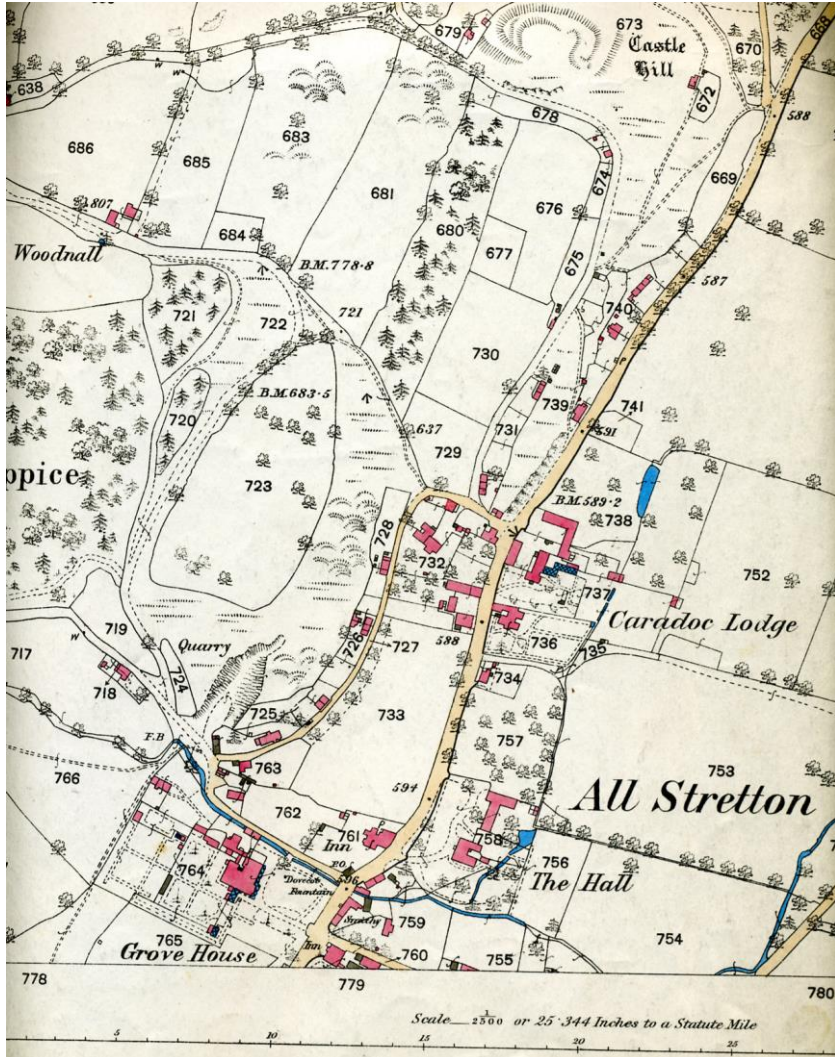
The Wilding family of All Stretton





Tithe map of All Stretton village, 1840

The tithe map shows the following properties in 1840 : 769 White Horse, 807 All Stretton Hall, 814/6 Buxton House, 821 Brooklyn, 854 '1603', 863 The Grove, 866 The Yew Tree, 869 All Stretton Stores, 873 Roseleigh, 875 Essex Lodge, 887 Old Hall Farm, 889 Minton Cottage.



1882 Ordnance Survey plan of the northern part of All Stretton

The following properties are shown, White Horse, 758 All Stretton Hall, 725 Buxton House, 718 Brooklyn, 762 '1603', 764 The Grove, 761 The Yew Tree, All Stretton Stores, 759 Roseleigh, 779 Essex Lodge.