

How this short stretch of trackway acquired its name is not clear, but what is certain is that it was once part of the old Shrewsbury-Oswestry road before Telford's Holyhead Road improvements. It survived only because it was lined with a varied collection of houses, whose number has been increased recently, filling up almost all available space. The old road was also the parish boundary, so that before 1853 this community was once split between Preston Montford (St Alkmund) and Bicton (St Chad).

Today, the area is so screened by trees, fences and the road embankment that many passing by may be unaware of its character or even its origin.

Here, at the base of Grange Bank, the old road crossed a stream and its space broadened out across the damper ground. As population rose during the sixteenth century, such roadside waste would offer space for cottages, whose builders had both opportunity and necessity to pursue some non-agricultural activities. Such waste was of course 'owned' by the local lord of the manor, who would demand a 'fine' or rent for the ground. Since such 'lordship' in Preston Montford happened to be held by the Borough of Shrewsbury, we learn from its records that Richard Nesse occupied a cottage here in 1580. He may even have been 'Richard the weaver' accidentally drowned in the Rover Severn in 1582. Certainly John Griffiths, weaver, was charged for a cottage here in 1610.

At the time the cloth trade had been very important in both Shrewsbury and Oswestry and therefore this was an ideal location for such craftsmen.

In 1658, Robert Hughes and John Barber were granted 21 year leases here and John, at least, was also taxed for 'one hearth' in 1672.

In the following century, Preston Montford was acquired by the Adderton family, whose wealth had come from this cloth trade. However, in subsequent marriage settlements the property passed first to the Chambre family of Petton and then to the Hills of Hawkstone, who only used the Hall as a 'Dower House'. In this way, Hannah Chambre (nee Adderton) returned here as widow and continued to improve the estate. Thus in 1770, for £60 she bought from Shrewsbury Corporation *"five cottages and huts with gardens ... adjoining the turnpike road at the prill of water and small bridge occupied by Samuel Morris, Thomas Porter, widow Hall, Thomas Jones, Edmund Phillips and Richard Phillips ... with full liberty to repair or rebuild ... all or any ..."*.

After her death, the Hills later sold the estate to John Wingfield of Onslow in 1829. It now included cottages and gardens occupied by Edwin Paddock, William Thomas, June Price, William Hughes, Samuel Slater, Hannah Griffiths and William Lloyd, most of which must have been this same group. By this time these estates had tidied up the layout of the plots.

Meanwhile, on the Bicton side, a Methodist chapel had been built in the centre of a field owned by farmer and blacksmith William Cotton, who also built Brook House (the details of which have already been discussed in this series).

When in 1835-7 the improved Holyhead Road bypassed this community, the Wingfield estate expanded the cottage gardens into the centre of the old road, reducing it to the present narrow lane.

From now on, census returns, directories and Tithe maps reveal more about the people and their activities here.

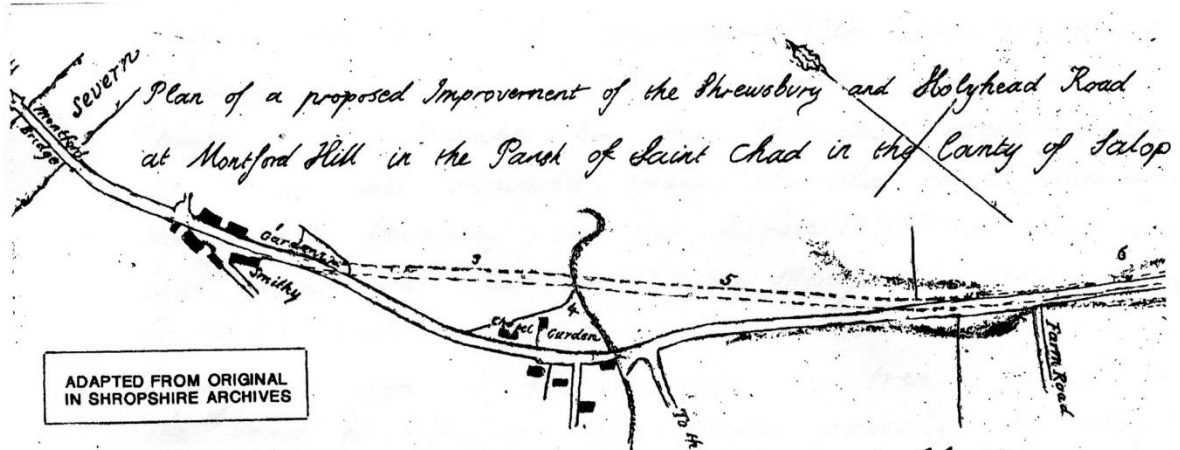
A typical feature of such cottage communities at this time was the way in which agricultural labourers moved frequently from job to job, while only self-employed tradesmen tended to stay longer in one place. This is only partially true of Drury Lane, since some labourers also spent several decades here, probably because of special roles within their landlord's estate. This must have been true for Edward Lewis, gardener at Preston Montford Hall and his neighbour Samuel Slater, both originally recorded in 1829. Edward and wife Elizabeth raised a large family in a new estate cottage, which was subsequently also occupied by their daughter, Anne, until her death in 1914. Samuel and younger wife Mary do not appear to have had any children, but provided space for several different lodgers over the years, while Mary continued in the cottage for many years as a widow.

Most of their other neighbours were, however, tradesmen, such as John Rundles, the blacksmith, whose shop was by the Wingfield Arms. He even employed two helpers in the 1860s, but later, after the death of his wife, appears to have retired for several years before being buried in our churchyard in 1905 at the age of about 94.

Another neighbour, Charles Pugh, ran a successful carpenter's business also employing two other men in the 1860s, but died soon after. Son Andrew carried on the trade while also raising his own family, which included son Charles, listed as a building contractor in 1900.

Robert Lewis, a tailor, appears to have started his business on the Bicton side of the road opposite the Wingfield Arms, but had crossed to Drury Lane by the 1860s where he contrived to trade for the next 30 years.

The world has changed so much since the nineteenth century and this is reflected in the present buildings and inhabitants of Drury Lane. Nevertheless its character still owes a great deal to the historical development of its 'framework'.



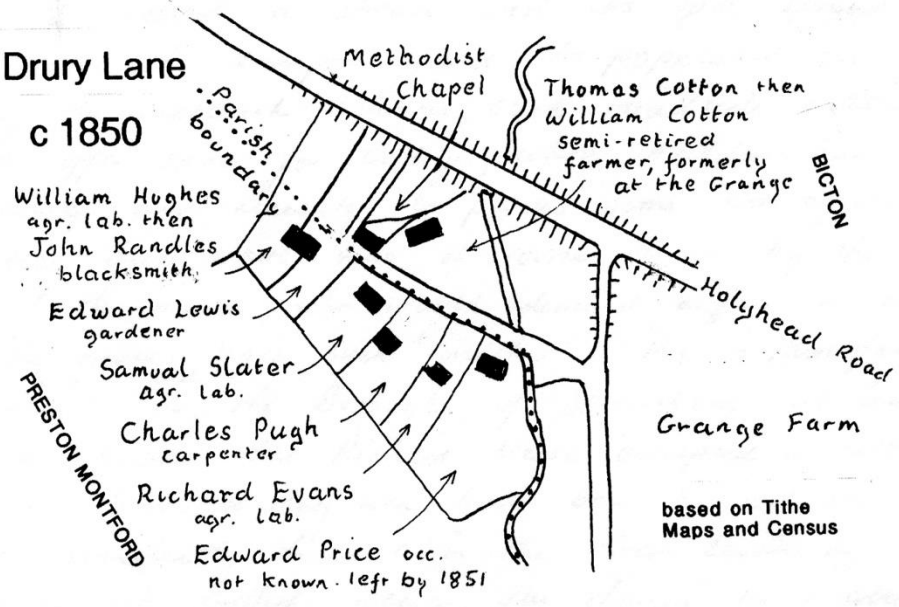
ADAPTED FROM ORIGINAL
IN SHROPSHIRE ARCHIVES

The line of the present Road is coloured yellow
The line of the new intended Road is coloured red

John Provis
Nov. 25 1835

Drury Lane

c 1850



based on Tithe
Maps and Census

