

VCH SHROPSHIRE

Wem Rural

Aston

by Judith Everard and Wendy Horton

This is a draft text prepared by Dr Judith Everard and Wendy Horton for VCH Shropshire

Following on the completion of the Wem short (2019), we took the decision to work on the townships of Wem Rural especially those which fell within the manor of Wem. Now, in August 2021, we are publishing as drafts the text prepared by Dr Everard and Ms Horton.

This text will be further amended in a number of respects. It will be expanded to include more material on landholding. Subsequent versions will include maps and other illustrations. At a later stage there will also be a section on agriculture.

We welcome suggestions, corrections and additional references.

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ASTON

Aston township originated as an Anglo-Saxon estate apparently associated with Wem. It is almost entirely residential and agricultural. In the 20th century, the proximity of Wem railway station attracted a milk factory and a large military ordnance depot, both later converted to industrial estates. Located in the north west of the former township, these developments had little impact on the rural character of most of the area.

LANDSCAPE, SETTLEMENT, AND BUILDINGS

Boundaries and Township Origins

The place-name is Old English ‘east settlement’.¹ Aston adjoins Wem to the south east. The western boundary was roughly aligned on a weir across the Roden, known as Coteman’s weir by the 15th century.² The boundary ran south east from the river at Malins Oaks,³ past Weir Farm to near Wain House on the south east flank of Palms Hill. In the north west, the boundary extended from the weir to north of Soulton Road (B5065), abutting Lacon to the east. Here 7 a. of woodland was confirmed to the manor of Wem in 1256.⁴ Towards the east, the northern boundary crossed Soulton Road at Brook House farm and followed the stream there down to its confluence with Soulton Brook and thence down Soulton Brook to the Roden. From there, the river bend around Brockhurst formed the eastern boundary of the township (and parish). The southern boundary turned west from the river and followed a tributary (also the parish boundary) to near its source on Palms Hill. Across the river to the east is Lee Brockhurst and to the south Preston Brockhurst, now Moreton Corbet and Lee Brockhurst Civil Parish. Otherwise, Aston bordered with other townships of the parish of Wem: Tilley, Wem, Edstaston, Lacon and Soulton.

‘Aston Quarter’ was one of the quarters into which the medieval parish of Wem was divided for administrative purposes, incorporating the townships of Aston, Lacon, Sleaf, Soulton and Tilley. Aston township comprised 1,460 a. in 1840; in 1934 the boundaries of Wem Urban

¹ Gelling, *PN Salop*. I, 22–3.

² *Survey 1561*, 17; Garbet, 353.

³ *Survey 1561*, 158–9.

⁴ *Eyre Roll 1256*, no. 48.

District were altered to extend over adjacent rural areas, including small portions of Aston at the northern end of Church Lane and north west of The Weir farm house.⁵

Landscape

Aston is generally of a low relief; the central part occupies the alluvial plain of the Roden, which flows through the township. The Wem fault, the southeastern limit of the Cheshire plain, runs north east to south west through Aston and Tilley.⁶ The fault's north-facing scarp gives rise to two areas of higher ground in Aston: Palms Hill (105–110 m. ASL), whose north side forms an escarpment above Barker's Green, and Brockhurst (100 m. ASL), whose place-name is a compound of 'brocc' (badger) and 'hyrst' (wooded hill) – 'a classic *hyrst* site'.⁷

In the northern part of the township, Soulton Road follows a curving moraine of outwash sand and gravel deposited by seasonal and post-glacial meltwaters. This ground is better drained than most of the township and the soil was described in the 18th century as 'a mixture of mold, gravel and sand', arable but best used for dairy.⁸ South of the river are gley soils and alluvium.⁹ Garbet reported that the clay 'bears excellent wheat, but must be marled for barley'. Clay deposits in the south east of the township, at Barker's Green and the Moat House farm, supported a brick- and tile-making industry in the 19th–20th centuries.¹⁰ Brockhurst was wooded in the Middle Ages and not cleared for farming until the second half of the 17th century, when its soil was regarded as rich.

Communications

At the centre of the township and its principal hamlet is a ford on the Roden. Lanes leading from Wem, Lacon, Soulton, Lee Brockhurst and Tilley converged at this crossing point, and today these form the road network within Aston. The road from Aston to Lee Brockhurst via Hill Cop Bank was 'the king's highway', known as Hill Lane in 1561. This was apparently the route taken by the Royalist force retreating to Shrewsbury after the siege of Wem in

⁵ SA, CP325/7/1/1; Local Government Board Order 17137, 25 Mar. 1934; TNA, OS 38/1195/8.

⁶ British Geological Survey, sheet 138.

⁷ Gelling, *PN Salop*. V, 239.

⁸ Garbet, 353.

⁹ *Soils of the Wem District*, 56.

¹⁰ Below, 'Industry'.

1643.¹¹ Leaving Wem in 1763, Revd Samuel Garbet the younger also wrote of setting out on Aston Lane.¹² In 1825 it was described as the highway from Wem to Wellington, to be repaired at the county's expense.¹³ Alderley Lane, formerly Sowford Lane or Ollery Lane, led from Aston hamlet east to Soulton mill and beyond,¹⁴ but now terminates at Alderley Lane Farm. Soulton Road (B5065), passing through the north of the township, was turnpiked in 1769 as the Wem–Sandy Lane (Prees) turnpike. A gate (Round Hill turnpike) was installed at the junction with Church Lane.¹⁵ A little further east, just outside the entrance to Aston Grange, a mid 19th century milestone has been recorded. It was constructed of cast iron with a triangular cross-section and chamfered top. The writing was in relief and read 'Drayton 12 Miles' on the left face and 'Wem 1 Mile' on the right face.¹⁶

Bridges

There are two bridges over the Roden in Aston. There was a bridge at the ford by 1581, when it was the communal responsibility of the householders of the township to repair it.¹⁷ It is depicted on the 1631 map as a long, narrow wooden bridge, and was described in the mid 18th century as a long wooden bridge, maintained by 'the principal inhabitants'.¹⁸ This bridge was apparently replaced c.1770 by a packhorse bridge consisting of timber planks supported on stone piers, with carriages still using the ford. In 1826, Thomas Stanton, acting for Thomas Telford, county surveyor, proposed a new bridge of 33 ft span costing £600. This was regarded as too expensive, especially as the road was not a turnpike, and in 1826–7 the wooden bridge was repaired under the direction of the county surveyor.¹⁹ This did not satisfy the local demand for a carriage bridge. As the road and bridge were not the financial responsibility of the county, it was necessary to raise the funds by subscription. The present bridge was built in 1841. Designed by Edward Haycock, county surveyor, the contract was awarded to Edward and William Lewis of Weston in 1841, at a cost of £240. The

¹¹ Garbet, 220.

¹² NLW, MS 23699E, fos. 34–5.

¹³ *Survey 1561*, 143: 'regiam viam ... vocatam Hill Lane'; SA, QS 301/107, Salop Quarter Sessions, orders, Jan. 1825.

¹⁴ E.g. Garbet, 362.

¹⁵ Wem to Sandford Turnpikes, 8 and 9 Geo III, c. 55; OS Old Series; Tithe apportionment, lot 639. On Church Lane, see also Religious History, below.

¹⁶ Historic England, List Entry No. 1236701.

¹⁷ SA, 167/1, 6 Apr. 1581.

¹⁸ Arundel map; Garbet, 5–6, 361.

¹⁹ SA, DP5, Aston Horse Bridge; SA, QA/3/1/1, pp. 120, 122, 128.

specification stated that the stone should come from Wixhill quarry, Weston, or Hine Heath. The bridge is constructed of coursed sandstone ashlar with a shallow segmental arch 18 ft in span. It has a plain string course and parapets of monolithic blocks which curve out to square end piers.²⁰

Downstream to the east, where the Roden forms the township and parish boundary, Thistleford bridge carries the road from Wem to Lee Brockhurst. The road forms a hairpin bend at this location, necessary to bring the gradient down from Hillcop Bank – the bridge name is perhaps derived from ‘the Hill’s foot’.²¹ The bridge was depicted in 1631 as having two piers and three arches and in the mid 18th century was described as ‘a stone bridge for carts, consisting of two arches’. Destroyed by a flood *c.*1790, the bridge was rebuilt by subscription and the present single-arch structure was completed in 1796. Constructed of coursed dressed sandstone, 18 ft in span, the single segmental arch has stone voussoirs and a projecting keystone. In 1844, a specification was put forward by Edward Haycock, county surveyor, to replace the spandrels of the arch and raise the parapets by a couple of feet as they were only 18 in. high and dangerous. The resulting parapets are of coursed red sandstone from Hawkstone quarry, the masonry clearly distinguishable from that below.²² The south parapets and approaches curve round to follow the hair-pin bend, providing an attractive element to the bridge. An alternative route for pedestrians, cutting off the hair-pin loop, is the One Hundred Steps, a flight of red sandstone steps which lead directly down to the valley bottom and a footbridge, shown on the Ordnance Survey of 1881.²³

Railways

The Shrewsbury–Crewe railway line, opened in 1858, is close to the north west boundary of the township. The portion of Aston between the railway and Soulton Road became the site of a large US Army ordnance depot in 1942. It was connected to the main line by a siding and

²⁰ Historic England, List Entry No. 1236490; SA, QA/3/1/2, pp. 9, 88, 90, 92, 94, 96; A. Blackwall, *Historic Bridges of Shropshire* (Shrewsbury, 1985), 64. Plan of 1841 bridge: SA, DP5.

²¹ Woodward, 168.

²² Garbet, 6; SA, DP5, DP184 Thistleford Bridge; Historic England, List Entry No. 1212280; Blackwall, *Historic Bridges*, 34.

²³ OS 25”, Shropshire Sheet XXI.4, 1881; *Wellington Jnl*, 21 Nov. 1896, 3: footbridge called ‘the trestle bridge’.

had an integral network of rail- and road-ways that enabled access to individual storage huts by both rail and road vehicles.²⁴

Population

In 1327 there were four households in Aston township with goods valued over 10s.²⁵ In 1381, 24 people were assessed for the poll tax: 10 married couples and four single adults, representing up to 14 households,²⁶ but this should be regarded as a minimum figure. In 1525 there were four households with income of more than 40s. per annum, and in 1543 around 15 households worth more than 20s.²⁷ None of these figures reveal the size of the less well-off population, whose means did not meet the respective thresholds for tax liability. A survey of the manor in 1561 recorded 21 dwellings (17 ‘messuages’ and four cottages) in Aston.²⁸ In 1672, 21 houses were assessed for the hearth tax in Aston.²⁹ Around 32 per cent of households may have been exempt from hearth tax due to poverty; hence the total number of households in Aston in 1672 can be estimated at 31.³⁰ Applying a multiplier of 4.5 to the number of households gives an estimated population of 140.³¹ A census taken by the curate of Wem in 1800 recorded a population of 197 in Aston township.³² The population then increased rapidly to 262 in 1821, but by 1841 it had declined to 212.³³ In the second half of the 19th century the population slowly increased, to 245 in 1881. By the 1891 census, Aston had lost its identity as a township, becoming part of Wem Rural District. The rural population declined in the 20th century. In Aston hamlet, two unoccupied cottages adjoining the old smithy were condemned and demolished in 1938, although Wem Rural District Council provided eight new houses, across the road, at the end of the Second World War.³⁴ Eight more houses were built near the military depot in 1947 for permanent staff accommodation.

²⁴ See ‘The Built Character’, below; *VCH Wem*, 23–4.

²⁵ *Shropshire Lay Subsidy 1327*, 144. See *VCH Wem*, Table 5.

²⁶ *Poll Taxes ... 1381*, 392.

²⁷ *Shropshire Taxes*, Table II and nos. 449–57.

²⁸ *Survey 1561*, 134–45. The 1589 crown valuation of the manor reported just 14 dwellings (13 ‘messuages’ and one cottage) in Aston, presumably due to different circumstances and accounting criteria: TNA, LR 2/225.

²⁹ *Shropshire Hearth Tax Roll*, 47–52

³⁰ Based on the average for parishes in North Bradford hundred: *Shropshire Hearth Tax Exemptions*, Table 3.

³¹ See Introduction.

³² *Wem Parish Registers*, 778–9.

³³ National census data and analysis kindly provided by Penny Ward.

³⁴ TNA, HLG 23/16529; SA, DA27/701/1/8.

In recent decades, the general population decline of Wem Rural Parish has reversed. In Aston, 23 new dwellings were constructed at Round Meadow in 2015.³⁵

Settlement

The Roman road from Wroxeter to Chester passed close to the parish boundary, about 250 m. east of Thistleford bridge.³⁶ Roman remains may have been found at The Hill farm: ‘To the west of the house, ... were dug up a great many large stones, supposed to be the remains of a Roman way, or perhaps of some ancient building or fort.’³⁷ This location, on the high ground of Brockhurst, could have overlooked the Roman road. There is no reliable evidence for Roman settlement, however, other than isolated portable finds, here or elsewhere in Wem Rural Parish.

Aston’s place-name implies an Anglo-Saxon settlement, and it was recorded as a manor in 1086 with arable land and woodland pasture. By the late Middle Ages settlement centred on the ford/bridge, with several houses in crofts on both sides of the river.

Late medieval/early modern ‘messuages’ were also dispersed around the township: The Weir farm to the west and Brook House farm to the north east; Moat House farm, in an isolated location at the south east limits of the parish; Wain House farm (formerly ‘the One [i.e., isolated] House’³⁸) at the south west. The township’s open fields were north of the Roden. Brockhurst was a managed woodland within a loop of the river and hedged on the landward side.

There was encroachment on the lord’s waste along roadways: a cottage with 3 a. of pasture at Hill Cop Bank had become copyhold by 1546. Nearby, along the road as it climbed Hill Cop Bank, a small farm of 12 a. was still claimed as the lord’s demesne in 1648.³⁹ Such encroachment gave rise to the hamlet of Barker’s Green (below).

³⁵ See Introduction for population trends, and for the military depot and Round Meadow, see below, Settlement.

³⁶ I.D. Margary, *Roman Roads in Britain*, 3rd edn (London, 1973), 296–7, plate 12.

³⁷ Garbet, 359. About 1.5 km to the south was an Iron Age hill fort, on a steep bank of the Roden (Preston Springs, Lee Brockhurst, HER 02673): <http://shropshirehistory.com/military/hillforts.htm> (accessed 12 Jan. 2021).

³⁸ Gelling, *PN Salop*. V, 255; Garbet, 346. The farmstead is in Tilley, at the border with Aston and Preston Brockhurst.

³⁹ *Survey 1561*, 142–3; ACA, MS 508, f. 8v. Sold by the earl of Arundel’s trustees in 1652: ACA, MS MD 59, p. 74.

In the late 19th century, suburban development started to extend eastwards from Wem town centre, along Aston Street to the railway station and beyond. Initially, such development, along Aston Road and Soulton Road, was of detached and semi-detached suburban villas. For instance, in the sale of the Walford Aston estate in 1866, Lot 1 was 12 a., ‘suitable for the erection of Villa Residences, near Wem Station’.⁴⁰ Despite the extension of Wem Urban District in 1934, house-building, notably the municipal estate of Cordwell Park (1955–67),⁴¹ did not extend beyond the original Wem township/urban district boundary. Aston was spared further suburban encroachment by the decision of North Shropshire Rural District Council in 1971 to cease development of Wem east of the railway line due to lack of capacity of the railway level crossing.⁴² An exception was made for social housing provider, Severnside Housing, to build affordable housing, Round Meadow, off Soulton Road, with 23 houses completed in 2015.⁴³

Barker’s Green

‘Barkers grene’ is named in the 1561 survey, perhaps taking its name from a 16th-century resident.⁴⁴ In 1611 Thomas Barker and John Lovell were fined for encroachment on the lord’s waste at ‘barkers greene’.⁴⁵ On the 1631 Arundel map, ‘Barker Greene’ is formed by the junction of the Aston–Tilley road and Weir Lane, which leads north to a river crossing, formerly a ford and today a footbridge. Another lane enters at the south east, from a turning off the main Lee Brockhurst–Aston road just before Aston hamlet. A lane that led south west from the green to join ‘Preston Lane’ (the B5063 road) near Wain House has since disappeared.⁴⁶ The 1631 map depicts a house in a croft at the western end of the green, and there were several households located at Barker’s Green by the mid 17th century.⁴⁷ Property boundaries suggest that small enclosures were made and built on until only the roadways were left. The freehold of these tenements (nine houses with small gardens and crofts and an

⁴⁰ SA, MI4620/1, and see *VCH Wem*, 22.

⁴¹ *VCH Wem*, 3; Woodward, 114.

⁴² *VCH Wem*, 24.

⁴³ ‘Grand Opening at Round Meadow, Wem’, Severnside Housing, 3 Nov. 2015:

<https://www.severnsidehousing.co.uk/news/grand-opening-round-meadow-wem>

⁴⁴ *Survey 1561*, 136–9, 144–5; Garbet, 361.

⁴⁵ SA, 167/5a, f. 12. Thomas Barker married (probably as his second wife) Anne Coton at Wem in 1595 and died ‘a poor man’ in 1617: *Wem Parish Registers*, 9, 13, 93, 137.

⁴⁶ Arundel map.

⁴⁷ Burials at Wem parish church where deceased was identified as a resident of Barker’s Green: 22 Aug. 1655, 16 Mar. 1658, 26 Nov. 1662, 21 May 1687, 4 Apr. 1707, 6 Apr. 1726: *Wem Parish Registers*.

‘Incroachment from Road’) was sold by the lord of the manor in 1809, most to the existing occupants.⁴⁸ The census recorded 12 houses at Barker’s Green in 1841 and 20 in 1891, this increase effectively accounting for all the growth in housing in the whole township in that period. The number of houses has remained about the same, but smaller, more densely packed dwellings have been replaced by larger, detached houses.⁴⁹ For instance, a quarter-acre plot with three small cottages, no longer occupied, was sold in 1903;⁵⁰ by 1904 a new house, Hawthorn Villa, had been built on the site, with Springfields and Oak Tree Cottage on neighbouring green-field sites in the same year.⁵¹

Commercial brickworks were in operation by 1841 (see Economic History). Few of the inhabitants named in censuses had occupations specifically related to brickmaking, however, the majority being simply ‘labourer’ with a few craftsmen, for example, William Pitchford, wheelwright.⁵² At an earlier date there were at least two weavers: Thomas Bayley (born at Barker’s Green in 1735) and Arthur Shingler (from Prees, fl. 1777–1809).⁵³ Railway workers also lived in Barker’s Green from the 1850s,⁵⁴ with Tilley halt on the Shrewsbury–Crewe railway about 1.5 km to the west.

The Barker’s Green settlement was prone to poverty and disorder. Inhabitants were often before the Wem magistrates for poaching and domestic disputes.⁵⁵ In 1889 the Inspector of Nuisances reported 12–13 people living in one small house.⁵⁶ The Primitive Methodist mission launched in 1849 (see Religious History) was a response to the growth of this community. In 1896, Wem Parish Council resolved to provide allotments.⁵⁷ The supply of clean drinking water was also a problem. As water supply was generally the responsibility of the landowner, it may be that the neglect here was due to the difficulties of coordination and

⁴⁸ SA, 6000/12498, under ‘Aston’. For the tenement of Arthur Shingler, see also SA, 1186/183–4.

⁴⁹ See SA, 1186/190–217; SA, D3651/B/151/19; *Shrewsbury Chron.*, 6 Nov. 1840, 2; *Wellington Jnl*, 18 Mar. 1876, 5.

⁵⁰ *Wellington Jnl*, 23 May 1903, 1.

⁵¹ Personal observation of date stones on these houses.

⁵² 1841 census. For William Pitchford’s houses at Barker’s Green, see also SA, D3651/B/151/19; SA, 1186/190–217.

⁵³ *Wem Parish Registers*; SA, 6000/12498 under ‘Aston’.

⁵⁴ E.g., John Jones, railway platelayer, and Richard Jones, railway porter for LNWR: 1861 census; *Rugby Advertiser*, 25 May 1895, 3.

⁵⁵ E.g., *Eddowes’s Jnl*, 27 Mar. 1844, 4; *Shrewsbury Chron.*, 9 Jul. 1869, 8; *Wellington Jnl*, 3 July 1869, 5; 25 May 1878, 5; 11 Oct. 1879, 5; 15 Nov. 1879; 21 Oct. 1893, 7; *Whitchurch Herald*, 28 Dec. 1889, 5.

⁵⁶ *Wellington Jnl*, 7 Dec. 1889, 7.

⁵⁷ *Wellington Jnl*, 21 Nov. 1896, 3.

finance involved with the numerous small freehold properties. In 1896 the parish council resolved to try again to persuade the landowners to subscribe to sinking a new well with a pump 'near to the brickyard at Barker's Green which would be a central place for the cottages which were without a supply of pure water'.⁵⁸ Failing that, Wem Rural District Council was pressed to connect Barker's Green to the mains supply from Palms Hill, which was finally accomplished in 1909–10.⁵⁹

In 1908 the SCC Smallholdings and Allotments Committee chose Barker's Green for the provision of new smallholdings, one of the earliest such schemes in Shropshire. Two smallholdings may have been planned, but SCC purchased 37 a. 2 r. 13 p. of grassland from Sir Walter Corbet in 1909 and created just one, 'No. 7 Holding', with a cottage erected by W. Griffiths & Sons of Ellesmere. The Barker's Green smallholding was tenanted by the same family until 1986 when it was sold into private ownership.⁶⁰

The Built Character

Aston is a small hamlet to the east of Wem, centred on a crossing over the River Roden at a staggered road junction. Clustered in the hamlet are three large houses of historic importance, Aston Hall, Aston House and Bridge Farmhouse, all of which are half-timbered, the latter with a cruck truss. In total, the 1631 Arundel map shows eleven houses in the centre of Aston. No church is evident, but of some interest is a field belonging to William Menlove named 'Church yard', located in a bend on Church Lane. By 1842 the fields in this bend were named 'Near Church Gates' and 'Far Church Gates'.

Properties are otherwise well-spaced along the lanes of the township. Some larger farms are set back from the road, perhaps the most noteworthy being Moat House farm, which as the name suggests, is a former moated site. At the north end of the township, on the road between Wem and Soulton, is Aston Grange, formerly the centre of Aston Park estate.

⁵⁸ *Wellington Jnl*, 27 Jun. 1896, 3; 25 Jul. 1896, 3..

⁵⁹ *Wellington Jnl*, 19 Dec. 1896, 7; 18 Aug. 1906, 11; *Shrewsbury Chron.*, 1 Nov. 1907; 22 Oct. 1909, 7.

⁶⁰ *Shrewsbury Chron.*, 13 Nov. 1908, 9; *Wellington Jnl*, 13 Feb. 1909, 8; L. Staines, 'Smallholdings in Wem Rural', in Wem Rural Parish newsletter, undated, 6–7 (copy provided by Dr Len Staines, member of Wem Rural Parish Council), from minutes of SCC Smallholdings and Allotments Committee.

To the south of Aston is **Barker's Green**, shown on the 1631 map around the junction with Weir Lane. One house is shown on the edge of the green, probably an encroachment onto waste. The course of the lane between Barker's Green and Woodhouses (in Tilley) was altered between 1631 and 1842 to include a dog-leg, possibly related to brickworks in this area. A number of small dwellings were built along this new road, probably in the early 19th century. They are mainly two-storey detached or semi-detached cottages constructed of brick under slate roofs with brick stacks, some decorated with dentilled eaves. Around the bend to the east of these cottages are two small farmsteads, also of brick under slate roofs, with central date-stones inscribed 'Springfields 1904' and 'Oak Cottage 1904'. These small-holdings appear to be part of a scheme, perhaps built by a local landowner. The latter is well-preserved with a gabled brick porch and flanking three-light windows, those to the ground floor under segmental heads. It is fronted by a low brick boundary wall with blue-brick copings.

In 1944, an attempt was made to increase the density of settlement in the centre of Aston by building four pairs of council houses. These spacious semi-detached properties are brick-built with hipped roofs and brick stacks. The building materials of the southern two pairs are slightly different so they may be of a different phase.⁶¹

Aston Hall is located southeast of Aston bridge, set back from the road. The house consists of a hall and cross-wing with highly decorative framing and a jetty, reflecting the status of its owner. In 1672 it was the largest house in Aston, with seven hearths.⁶² It is probably of late 16th-century date. Of two storeys with attics, the house is timber-framed under tiled roofs with a chimney stack in the angle of the ranges with triple brick shafts; there is a further stack to the left end of the hall. To the ground floor, the framing has been replaced with brick and rendered over in parts, above which is a combination of close-studding, decorative work and rectangular panels. Some of the panels replace former windows, most of the existing windows being of late 19th- or 20th-century date. The doorway is under a gabled open porch, probably in its original position in the angle of the two ranges. To the right is the conspicuous gable end of the cross-wing, which is particularly highly decorated to the first floor, with small panels containing quatrefoils inside concave-sided lozenges, which originally flanked a six-light mullioned and transomed window, now replaced with rectangular panels. The gable

⁶¹ SA, 972/7/1/49; Wem Tithe map (Aston township), 1842; SA, DA27/701/1/8.

⁶² *Shropshire Hearth Tax Roll*, 48.

has uprights and diagonal struts, and its jetty is supported by twisted shafts and carved brackets. The right-hand return of the cross-wing also has twisted shafts, along with herring-bone decoration which continues around to the rear. In front of the house is a large rectangular courtyard of farm buildings.

The interior has deeply chamfered ceiling beams to the ground and first floors, including dragon beams in the ceiling of the cross-wing to support the jetty. Oak panelling of 17th-century date was found in the rear room of the cross-wing, along with inset wall cupboards. A partition on the first floor retained part of a timber frame including a segmental-headed doorway, along with an oak winder staircase from first floor to attic: that below was replaced in the 19th century. The roof space revealed two wide bays to the hall range and three short bays to the cross-wing, the latter with tie-beam trusses with collars and straight windbraces.⁶³

Bridge House was one of several messuages of the Watkis copyhold estate in Aston from the 15th to the 18th century.⁶⁴ Located in the centre of the hamlet on the north west side of the bridge, this dwelling retains a true cruck-truss of a former medieval hall-house, perhaps of 15th-century date, with peat block infill to parts of the truss and adjacent walls. The cruck is visible above a lower range at the north west end and has an upper and lower collar, but the apex was slightly truncated when the roof-line was altered in the early 17th century to form two storeys. At this time, the house was remodelled by inserting a chimney stack into the former open-hall, with a doorway in front forming the classic lobby-entry plan-form. The timber-frame has been partly replaced in brick and whitewashed, and stands on a sandstone plinth, the right-hand bay slightly set back. The roof is of slate whilst the stack is of rendered brick slightly set forward, under which is the gabled porch. Most of the windows are 20th century, but two upper windows are 19th century with leaded panes. To the right of the cruck-truss is a former lofted cow-house of late 17th-century date, the original tie beam with raking struts visible in the gable end. The walls were raised in the 20th century to provide an upper storey when this range was incorporated into the house.

Inside the house, the cruck-truss was found to have a chamfered collar, a slot for a massive trenched purlin and associated spurs, whilst the infill included peat blocks of varying sizes bonded by lime mortar. There was no evidence for an arched-brace beneath the collar, expected in the central truss of an open-hall, so this was probably an internal closed truss.

⁶³ Newman and Pevsner, 677; N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Shropshire* (London, 1958), 65; Historic England, List Entry No. 1264548.

⁶⁴ *Survey 1561*, 138–9; Arundel map: labelled ‘William Watkis’; Garbet, 356–7.

Behind the cruck-truss were the vertical posts of the gable end of the later cow-house. It has been suggested that this was a medieval long-house, but if so, the cow-house would be expected at the lower, south east end, so the manure could drain away.

In the 17th-century house, the left-hand room was the parlour, close-studded to the front and cross-wall, with square panels to the rear, and a chamfered spine beam to the ceiling with run-out stops. The room was heated by a fireplace of Grinshill stone with monolithic lintel and mantelpiece, all with classical-style mouldings, including ogee stops to the base of the jambs. The right-hand room had a brick inglenook fireplace with a chamfered wooden lintel and was once the kitchen. On the first floor are 17th-century panelled doors to each side of the large central stack, the left-hand bedroom with a moulded stone fireplace. Some timbers of the central truss were visible beneath the tie-beam, but the roof structure was altered. The staircase is to the rear right, not necessarily in its original position, whilst the bedroom in the former cow-house is accessed via its own staircase. There was a small sandstone cellar at the left end of the house beneath the parlour, lit by a small window and with a slab floor. It may have been part of a dairy.⁶⁵

Aston House farm was a copyhold messuage held by the Menlove family from at least the reign of Henry VII (1485). It belonged to Thomas Menlove at the time of the 1561 survey, and continued in the family for another five generations, finishing with William Menlove (d.1697). His nephew inherited the property and sold it to Richard Corbet of Moreton Corbet, who leased it to Andrew Downes of Preston Brockhurst. Andrew Corbet held the messuage and estate in the 1750s.

This fine, early 17th-century two-storey timber-framed house has an almost symmetrical H-plan, the gabled wings with shallow jetties to the front supported on carved corner brackets. It is in the transitional style of vernacular architecture, where the hall with its screens passage started to lose its importance, with more prominence given to the wings.

Dendrochronological dates of 1641–2 have been given for the central range and both wings of the house, so despite differences in the wings they are contemporary, and were constructed by the Menlove family. The differences are due to their function: the left wing, which is

⁶⁵ Newman and Pevsner, 677; Historic England, List Entry No. 1236489: includes text from N.W. Alcock, *Cruck Construction: An Introduction and Catalogue*. CBA Research Report 42 (1981), 145; Moran, *Shropshire*, 27, 527; Moran, *Whitchurch*, 247; M. Moran, 'Eight houses in and around Whitchurch and Wem', *TSAS* 86 (2011), 101–8.

slightly larger, contained the parlour where visitors were invited, whilst the right wing to the north was the kitchen and service wing. Much of the timber-framing was concealed by *faux* framing in the early 20th century, but since 2014 this has been removed to reveal the original box-panelling with brick and render infill. It is well preserved except for the front gables and parts of the rear wall and north end, which had been rebuilt in brick. The framing is four panels high and stands on a sandstone plinth under a slate roof. Two ridge stacks are not quite symmetrically placed, a large T-plan brick stack right of centre and a triple-shafted stack of Grinshill stone left of centre. Both served the central range and a wing. The almost central timber-framed porch was remodelled in the 19th century with a later hipped roof, but inside it retains the original 17th-century side benches on carved brackets, a nail-studded door and Grinshill paving. To the rear is an outshut staircase projection in the angle with the north wing. Most windows are late 19th-century five-light metal casements with leaded panes in the original openings, whilst a hipped attic dormer is of similar date. The three-light wooden window to the left of the porch was inserted in the early 21st century.

The front entrance leads into the hall which has a joist ceiling with stop-chamfered spine beam. To the right is an inglenook fireplace with large cambered wooden lintel and the original fire-back of patterned brickwork. Left of the chimney is the access into the kitchen along with a doorway to the staircase projection. In the kitchen, the large brick fireplace has a wooden lintel, which was slightly altered when a bake-oven was inserted in the 18th or 19th century. Between the kitchen and rear service room is an altered partition, which may originally have been a post-and-panel screen. The room above the kitchen was unheated, whilst the attic, with closed trusses, would have been servants' quarters. Left of the front entrance is a partition wall, its base of coursed Grinshill stone with timber-framing above. The parlour ceiling has been plastered but retains the spine beam. Across the north west corner is a modern fireplace, but the original may survive behind: a corner fireplace would have been very fashionable in the 17th century. A small ante-room behind the parlour is accessed from the hall, along with a closed-string staircase which is probably original. Beneath the ante-room is a small cellar. The stone stack serves a back-to-back fireplace on the first floor, heating the great chamber above the parlour and a room above the hall. Each fireplace is of Grinshill ashlar with flat Tudor-arched lintel, that in the great chamber with a wooden over-mantel decorated with Jacobean strapwork. This room is panelled throughout, though the wood panels may not be original. It is noteworthy that Grinshill stone has been used consistently in the parlour wing and such masonry would have been regarded as

prestigious at that time.⁶⁶ Aston House was the second largest house in Aston in 1672, with five hearths.⁶⁷

10 Aston: Gable end onto the road, this attractive two-storey two-window cottage is constructed of large blocks of Grinshill stone under a slate roof with a stone eaves cornice. The gables and part of the rear wall have been rebuilt in brick, along with the construction of the brick end stacks. The central entrance consists of a boarded door under a gabled porch canopy, whilst the mid-19th century round-headed windows are cast iron with radial glazing. On close inspection, the building appears to be of three construction phases, with large blocks of red sandstone at the west end and part of the front, the fabric cut by the lower right-hand window. Above and to the left is later white sandstone, which may be contemporary with the cast iron windows, though these cut into the eaves cornice. It is possible that this building had a non-domestic function originally, and the brick elements represent conversion to a house. A building is marked in this location on the 1631 survey of Wem; at the tithe apportionment it was recorded as a cottage and garden owned by the Walford estate.⁶⁸

Another small timber-framed cottage near the centre of Aston is **7 Alderley Lane**. Though restored and much altered, the mid 17th century cottage of one-and-a-half-storeys maintains a substantial box-panelled frame.⁶⁹

Pimhill: Located on Weir Lane, linking Barker's Green with the River Roden, this late 17th-century two-unit cottage of one-and-a-half-storeys contrasts with the larger properties in the centre of Aston. The timber-framing consists of rectangular panels three rows high with painted brick infill, but the roof covering has been replaced. The original chimney stack is to

⁶⁶ Garbet, 355–6; Newman and Pevsner, 677; Historic England, List Entry No. 1264582; R. Hayman, *Aston House, Wem: A Historic Building Assessment*, 2014 (part of an application for listed-building consent); Moran, *Shropshire*, 299, 306; Moran, *Whitchurch*, 247; Moran, 'Eight houses in and around Whitchurch and Wem', 109–12; https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/vag_dendro/full_record.cfm?id=4021; Vernacular Architecture Group (VAG), Vol. 49 (2018), p. 127: Tree-ring dates 2018.

⁶⁷ *Shropshire Hearth Tax Roll*, 48.

⁶⁸ Historic England, List Entry No. 1236491, including Images of England; Arundel map; Tithe apportionment, lot 1350.

⁶⁹ Shropshire HER PRN 12386: This cottage was provisionally listed in 1952, but was deleted from the list in 1987 due to alterations. Site visit by NSDC, 1980.

the far right, under which is a wide ledged door below a gabled porch canopy, thus forming a lobby-entrance. This might suggest that only the right-hand unit was heated. The left-hand gable end is said to have been rebuilt, the painted framing reflecting the original. Adjoining to the right is a taller two-storey unit of 19th-century date, of brick with imitation painted framing, a red tiled roof and rendered end stack. Weir Lane led to a ford in 1881, and there was also a footbridge on a footpath leading north west towards Wem.⁷⁰

Weir Farm: West of Pimhill and across the fields is Weir Farm. There are still farm buildings but the farmhouse was demolished in 1971. Photographs taken before its demolition show a classic sub-medieval lobby-entry house, probably of three units. It is box-panelled under a slate roof with a large brick stack left of centre, under which is the gabled porch. The casement windows are of 19th- or 20th-century date. To the rear right is a gabled wing, with a later single-storey lean-to along the rest of the elevation. The wing has clearly been raised as there is an earlier tie-beam truss in the gable, whilst the top tier of panelling to front and rear is of lighter timbers. The house was therefore raised from one to two storeys in the past.⁷¹ Garbet noted that the house name was derived from the nearby 'Coteman's Wear'.⁷²

Spring Cottage, on Hillcop Bank, is a small roadside cottage, timber-framed but of narrow scantling timber and therefore probably 18th century.

Former Smithy: A smithy is marked and labelled on the Ordnance Survey of 1881, appearing as a long range fronting the road with larger blocks at each end. It was in the same location as several small buildings, including a malt kiln, recorded in 1842; the same premises included a public house in the mid 19th century.⁷³ The smithy may survive in the form of an altered two-storey two-window house with brick end stacks, adjacent to which is a

⁷⁰ Historic England, List Entry No. 1236853, including Images of England; OS 25", Shropshire Sheet XXI.4, 1881; Google Street View, April 2009.

⁷¹ SA, PH/W/8/10/14 & 15;.

⁷² Garbet, 360.

⁷³ See Economic History.

lower two-bay range with dentilled brick eaves and a tie-beam truss to the south gable end.⁷⁴ The range that formerly adjoined the smithy to the south comprised two cottages (No. 12 Aston and Rock Cottage, with outbuildings). It was demolished in 1938 pursuant to a clearance order under the Housing Act 1936.⁷⁵

Former Brick & Tile Works: Samuel Bagshaw wrote in 1851 that Barker's Green was noted for its clay which made superior bricks. Two brickworks are shown on the 1881 Ordnance Survey in the vicinity of Barker's Green. The first is opposite the former green on the east side of the lane in a field named 'Big Gorsy Leasow' on the 1842 Tithe map. Two buildings at right angles and several small buildings are marked on the OS map of 1901, with labels for three chimneys, clay pits and a pump. At least one ruined brick kiln remained on the site in recent years.⁷⁶ The lane continues south west with a dog-leg around the second brick and tile works, with clay pits and an old brick kiln marked on the 1881 map. This manufactory appears to be earlier, as the Tithe map of 1842 is labelled 'Brick kiln field'. On the opposite side of the lane is a line of brick dwellings which may be contemporary with the works (see introduction), whilst just beyond the south east corner is a small building, shown in 1881 and labelled 'Mission Room' on the 1901 map, but no trace of it remains (see Religious History, below). An unusual feature marked in 1881 is a rifle range, 577 yds long north-south, focussed on a target in an old clay pit at the east end of Palmshill Rough.⁷⁷

Moat House Farm: According to Garbet, this house was known variously as the Moat House 'on account of the moat about it', the Woodhouse 'on account of the wood near it', and Besse Hall.⁷⁸ In the 1750s, the property included an alum well, the water of which had medicinal properties.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Wem Tithe map (Aston township), 1842; Bagshaw, 329; OS 25", Shropshire Sheet XXI.4, 1881 and 1901.

⁷⁵ TNA, HLG 23/16529.

⁷⁶ www.wemlocal.org.uk/wempast/industry/barkers.htm (undated).

⁷⁷ Bagshaw, 329; OS 25" Shropshire Sheet XXI.4, 1881, 1901; Wem Tithe map (Aston township), 1842; Shropshire HER PRN 33270.

⁷⁸ Garbet, 359. 'Besse Hall' is unexplained, and Garbet is the only known source for names other than the Moat House.

⁷⁹ Garbet, 359-60.

Moated manor houses were constructed to display the prestige of their owners and were not defensive in nature. They were commonly built in England in the medieval period, particularly around the early 14th century. The house, labelled 'Mote Howse', is shown within an enclosure on the 1631 map, suggesting the moat was still extant. The southwest quadrant of the moat is drawn on the Ordnance Survey of 1881, and was presumably fed by the stream which runs along its south side. A report in 1889 recorded a quadrangular moat, measuring 88 ft from east to west, the ditches traceable and containing water, except the south arm which was partly filled in. An inspection in 1981 revealed that only the south west corner was visible, the inner scarp *c.* 1 m. high and with shallow banks on the outer sides surmounted by hedges. The northern extent of the moat appears to be covered by farm buildings.

In 1812–13 Thomas Dickin of Wem, as copyholder, replaced the old farmstead with a new brick-and-slate farmhouse and outbuildings.⁸⁰ The current two-storey farmhouse was described as 'quite modern' in 1889 and is of Victorian appearance. It is of brick, partly roughcast, under a slate roof with brick end stacks and a large rear wing, the original windows replaced. The house and garden are enclosed within a brick boundary wall, the house facing north towards the farm buildings.⁸¹ The Ordnance Survey of 1881 shows a large L-shaped farm range, along with a smaller courtyard nearer the house, possibly a former stable block. The L-shaped building has some good detail despite alterations relating to change of use. It is of red brick under slate roofs with corbelled eaves, consisting of a substantial lofted range running east–west, its tall gable end facing the road with a triple stepped light, each light with a flat-arched brick head. The north side includes two loft doorways in different styles, two doors with segmental heads and a cart entrance. Adjoining is a much lower range running north–south, fronting the lane and with a single wide opening. Further north in the farmyard, with gable end to the road, is a small brick range under a slate roof with brick ridge stack. It has wide openings, some with sliding doors, and possibly includes a stable. It was built between 1901 and 1954. Open modern sheds lie to the north and west.⁸²

⁸⁰ SA, 306 box 2a: Articles for Building a Farm House.

⁸¹ Garbet, 359–60; SA, 972/7/1/49; OS, 25", Shropshire Sheet XXI.4, 1881; Shropshire HER PRN 01137: ESA 1473, M. Watson, Site Visit, 1981; *Salopian Shreds and Patches*, Vol. 9 (1889), 80; Bagshaw, 329; Google Street View, April 2009.

⁸² OS 25", Shropshire Sheet XXI.4, 1881, 1901; OS, Sheet SJ52 NW, 1954; Shropshire HER PRN 41689, 41693: Farm Building Survey, 1982–3; Google Street View, April 2009.

Aston Grange: The present house replaced an earlier one, marked on the 1631 map as closer to the road, and then held by William Watkis; by 1833, however, there was no house on the site.⁸³ This classical-style house was formerly the centre of Aston Park estate and was built c. 1833–38 by the Wem attorney, Stephen Hassall. Having carried on his practice from the Old Hall, New Street, Wem, Hassall retired to Aston Park and died there in 1843.⁸⁴ The square-plan two-storey house is rendered and painted under shallow, hipped slate roofs with rendered stacks. Rising from the centre of the roofs is a belvedere with pyramidal roof, providing an excellent view of the surrounding park. The entrance front faces south west with central portico supported on Ionic columns, under which are wide panelled double doors. Detail includes a sill band at first floor level, wide boarded eaves and tall sash windows. The southeast side appears to be the garden front and has a central pedimented bay. The interior is noted for a fireplace in the right-hand ground floor room which has inverted consoles as pilasters and a keystone to the lintel in the form of a female head. The house was surrounded by gardens, except on the north west side where there were farm buildings arranged around a courtyard.⁸⁵ The farm extended to 57 a. in 1840.⁸⁶

The Aston Park estate was requisitioned during the Second World War, becoming **Wem Camp** in 1942–3, a centre for the US military troop and munitions build-up as part of Operation Bolero. It became the first prototype storage base of this kind in Britain, housing between 1,250 and 3,000 men, their accommodation nearest to Soulton Road and consisting of Nissen or similar types of huts, with a hospital to the west. The rest of the site was used for storing munitions in Romney huts, laid out in rows running north to south, and served by railway sidings running south off the Wem–Crewe railway line. The Romney huts were of semi-circular cross-section with a pre-fabricated frame fixed onto a concrete base with holding-down bolts, a covering over the frame, sliding doors to the ends, window openings and roof-top ventilators. In 1944 the site became a prisoner of war camp, German Working

⁸³ Arundel map; OS Old Series.

⁸⁴ SA, 306 box 16b: 27 March 1860, ‘Conveyance and Assignment’, T.D. Browne to T.A.M. Dickin, of buildings, offices, coachhouse and fittings in house purchased from the late tenant Stephen Halsall; *VCH Wem*, 108; TNA, PROB 11/1987/14.

⁸⁵ Historic England, List Entry No. 1236814, including Images of England; Arundel map; Garbet, 360–1; OS 25”, Shropshire Sheet XIV.16, 1881.

⁸⁶ In the hands of the representatives of Stephen Hassall: Tithe apportionment, p.68.

Camp 9. It is not clear whether the prisoners occupied the existing accommodation huts only, but there were said to be nine groups of six huts within an irregular-shaped enclosure.⁸⁷

After the Second World War, Aston Park Camp, around 200 a., was retained by the War Department and became an important sub-depot to the Technical Stores Depot at Donnington (Shrops.). Permanent married soldiers' quarters were built in 1947. In 1962 the War Department agreed to release 20 a. in the north west of the site, where there were no Romney huts, for commercial development. The whole depot closed in 1966,⁸⁸ and the married soldiers' quarters – now Ash Grove, off Saulton Road – have since passed into private ownership.

The site now incorporates Wem Industrial Estate and the southwestern portion of Lacon caravan park. Many of the original pre-fabricated huts are still extant, though with modifications and extensions. In 2019, planning permission was given for the demolition of one of the Romney huts in the centre of the camp, Unit E11, in association with industrial development. A condition of planning approval was that an archaeological record should be made of the hut: Hut E11 was a good example of its type measuring 96 ft long and 35 ft wide, the semi-circular frame covered in the original sheets of corrugated asbestos. There were sliding doors to each end measuring 13 ft by 10 ft 8 in., wide enough for vehicles, and adjacent personnel doors. There were 12 lights in the roof and four ventilation flues spaced along the top.⁸⁹

LANDOWNERSHIP

In 1066, Aston comprised estates held by two freemen, Wulfgeat (*Uluiet*) and Almer (*Elmer*), and was assessed as one hide. Wulfgeat also held one of the three estates in the adjacent Lee Brockhurst. By 1086 Aston was one of the Shropshire manors of Roger de Montgomery. It was held of him by William Pantulf and of Pantulf by one Walter. The estate held by Walter

⁸⁷ Wem POW Camp No. 679: <http://shropshirehistory.com/military/prisoner.htm>; T.E. Coon, *History of 295th Ordinance H.M. Company (FA)*, printed privately by R. Oldenbourg (Munich, 1946), quoted in 'The 295th Ord H.M. Co.': <http://www.295th.com/history.html#2.3>; *VCH Wem*, 23–4.

⁸⁸ SA, DA14/700/7, 1947; SA, SCC1/K/7 TP70, 1957–1966.

⁸⁹ See Shropshire Council Planning Application 19/03890/DIS: Castlerring Archaeology, 2019, Report 688, Demolition of Unit E11. Also see TNA, CM 1/510 for a general description and erection instructions of the Romney Hut "O" span.

must soon have been taken back into the hands of William Pantulf or a descendant, however, as by the mid 13th century Aston was firmly attached to the medieval manor of Wem as a township owing suit at the manor court.⁹⁰

Demesne

The lord's demesne in Aston was extensive until the mid 17th century, principally in Brockhurst wood (below). The border of Aston, Preston Brockhurst and Tilley also appears to have been an area of late clearance, the lord's waste, where woodland persisted on poorly drained soil; 'Pantons Lake' lay near Preston Lane in 1561.⁹¹ The lord's demesne there in 1648 included 'the Lordes Pooles' (in Aston) and a farm named 'Great Pooles' (in Tilley), later Teakins ('takings', referring to reclaimed land).⁹²

A close named 'Lady Meadow' was probably the land acquired by Matilda Pantulf from Lacon in 1256. It was demesne in 1631 but had been sold by the mid 18th century and in 1805 was owned by Thomas Dickin of Wem.⁹³

There was also waste at Barker's Green and Hill Cop Bank. In 1805, there was 21 a. of waste and roads. Several small crofts encroaching on waste, notably at Barker's Green, were held at will and were sold in 1809 (see 'Barker's Green', above).

Freehold estates

A freehold estate was held by Roger Coteman (d. before 1309) and his descendants, consisting of burgages in Wem, land in the open fields of Wem, several closes along the Wem/Aston boundary and (from 1408) rights in the adjacent fishery and weir on the Roden, which was long known as Coteman's weir. By 1561 the freehold estate was in the hands of John Thurleigh, and was conveyed by his descendants in 1635 to Thomas Barnes of the Lowe. The weir and fishery reverted to the lord's demesne.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ See SA, 6000/2651, Bradford hundred tenure roll, c.1284 under Wem; TNA, C 139/76/34, *Cal Inq p.m.*, xxiv, 11–15 Henry VI, 348, no. 495 (1436).

⁹¹ *Survey 1561*, 158–9.

⁹² ACA, MS 508, fos. 7r, 8r; Garbet, 340. 'Lordes pooles' is 'the Pooes' on the Arundel map (1631). For Great Pools, see also *Survey 1561*, 138–9.

⁹³ Above, 'Boundaries', and *Survey 1561*, 56–7; Arundel map; Garbet, 353–4; 1805 Survey, 54–5.

⁹⁴ *Survey 1561*, 17–18, 52–3; SA, 306 box 8a: Indenture dated 14 Aug 11 Chas. I; Garbet, 254–9, 353, 360.

In 1327, the wealthiest tenant was Agnes 'de Paunton' (an Anglicisation of Pantulf) followed by a Richard Bote.⁹⁵ In 1436, customary tenants held seven messuages and 34 nooks of arable land (approximately 306 a.) worth 13s. 4d. and 60s. per annum, respectively.⁹⁶ The messuages probably included those of the Burdon,⁹⁷ Morton⁹⁸ and Watkis⁹⁹ families. By 1561 there was just one freehold tenement – part of the Aston Hall estate (below). The remainder of the tenants were copyholders.¹⁰⁰ When the trustees for sale of the earl of Arundel offered to sell the freehold of tenements in the manor in the 1650s, few Aston copyholders took up the offer. Samuel Smith, merchant of Wem, purchased the Morton estate from the executors of Thomas Morton (d. 1654)¹⁰¹ and enfranchised it. Another messuage with 12 a., in the occupation of Widow Groome, was sold to Richard Wynne of Lincoln's Inn.¹⁰² There were large copyhold tenements in Aston well into the 19th century.¹⁰³

In 1805 the largest landowner was Sir Richard Hill of Hawkstone, whose single tenement in the township was Brockhurst Farm (289 a.). Andrew Corbet held 183 a. in several parcels and George Walford held 162 a. Thomas Dickin held 153 a., of which 142 a. was the Moat House farm, but he also leased Aston Hall with 158 a. from the lord of the manor. Other substantial landholders were William Bailey at The Hill farm (84 a.) and Caleb Powell at The Weir farm (60 a.).¹⁰⁴ By the tithe apportionment in 1840, landholding had concentrated further in the hands of Viscount Hill (c. 405 a.) and John Henshaw Walford (c. 432 a.).

⁹⁵ *Shropshire Lay Subsidy 1327*, 144; *William Paunton': Poll Taxes ... 1381*, 394. Paunton was an Anglicised version of Pantulf; Palms Hill was named 'Pauntons Hill' until the 18th century: e.g. Garbet, 347, 353; 1805 Survey, 48. The Bote legacy may be in the closes named 'Boote heath' in the Morton estate and 'Boote moors' in the Watkis estate: *Survey 1561*, 138, 140; Arundel map.

⁹⁶ TNA, C 139/76/34; *Cal. Inq. p.m.*, xxiv, 348, no. 495.

⁹⁷ *William Bordon': Poll Taxes ... 1381*, 394; William Burdon, *bedellus*, accounted for the manor of Wem in 1409/10: ACA, MS W13; Thomas Burdon, fl. 1451–92: BL, Additional Charters 73170–3, 73175, 73177, 73179. Burdons Moor was later in the Watkis copyhold estate: *Survey 1561*, 138–9; TNA, C 3/195/76 (1570). A messuage named Burdons Hall apparently still existed in 1699: TNA, C 6/367/48.

⁹⁸ *John de Morton': Poll Taxes ... 1381*, 394.

⁹⁹ William Watkyns was a copyholder by 1462: BL, Additional Charter 73171; wills of William Watkis (d.1567/8), Edward Watkis (d. 1571), Thomas Watkis (d. 1612/13), William Watkis (d. 1625/6): 'Wem Wills', ed. Watts; Garbet, 357.

¹⁰⁰ *Survey 1561*, 134–45.

¹⁰¹ See wills of George *Moorton*, d. 1618, and Ellen *Mooreton*, d. 1619/20: 'Wem Wills', ed. Watts.

¹⁰² ACA, MS MD59, pp. 30, 74; Garbet, 357–8.

¹⁰³ E.g., The Hill, Moat House and Weir farms: TNA, C 78/1815.

¹⁰⁴ 1805 Survey.

Brockhurst

Brockhurst wood, around 250 a., was the lord's demesne. Enclosed by the Roden around most of its perimeter, the landward side was enclosed on an alignment indicated by adjacent field boundaries; the lane leading from Aston hamlet to Brockhurst ended at 'Clapping Gate' field.¹⁰⁵ In 1290, the management of the wood (*ballia foresture*) was farmed for 20s. and the vill of 'Legh' (Lee Brockhurst) paid an annual rent for pasture there.¹⁰⁶ In 1409/10, Adam Waring was the lord's 'bailiff of Brockhurst and keeper of the woods there'.¹⁰⁷ Tenants of the manor of Wem enjoyed free communal grazing, except pannage, for which they paid 1½d. or 2d. per animal depending on the abundance of beech mast.¹⁰⁸ By the mid 17th century, however, the woodland had become so overgrown that it was of little value for pasture.¹⁰⁹ A large area on the south side had been cleared and enclosed before 1631, when it was part of the Aston Hall estate. When Thomas Astley sold the copyhold part of Aston Hall estate in 1684, this portion appears to have been sold separately as The Hill farm.¹¹⁰

An account of the lord's demesne of Brockhurst in 1648 calculated the sale value of all the wood at £15,670 12s. Measured at 251 a., the estimated value of the land after clearing was 14s. per acre per annum, as 'the soile ... in itself is very rich and batfull' (*sic*).¹¹¹ In 1660 Brockhurst, comprising 280 a., was sold by the trustees of the earl of Arundel to Samuel Smith of Wem for £8,190.¹¹² After selling off the timber, Smith let the cleared area as parcels of agricultural land. A deed of 1674 concerning one half of Brockhurst refers to the tenements of Thomas Chettwood and William Addams, pieces of land in the occupation of Arthur Downes, adjoining parcels in the occupation of Roger Groom, and a new enclosure adjoining the land of Arthur Downes bounded by 'a crabtree' and 'a leaning sapling'.¹¹³ Smith was notorious for having defrauded his neighbours and he absconded in 1676. His son Joseph later recovered the whole of Brockhurst and sold it in 1705 to John Hill of

¹⁰⁵ Tithe apportionment.

¹⁰⁶ TNA, E 133/57 No .3, E 149/1; *Cal. Inq. pm*, ii, 470, nos. 773 and 774.

¹⁰⁷ ACA, MS W13. For Adam Waring, see *Survey 1561*, 16–17.

¹⁰⁸ TNA, C 135/206/15; *Cal. Inq. pm*, xii, 324; Wem custumal of 1566/7, in Garbet, 119, 122.

¹⁰⁹ ACA, MS 508, f. 38r.

¹¹⁰ Arundel map; Garbet, 359. See below, 'Aston Hall (Walford) estate'.

¹¹¹ ACA, MS 508, f. 38r–v.

¹¹² ACA, MS 59, p. 55; SA, 731/2/3324.

¹¹³ SA, 731/2/3324.

Hawkstone.¹¹⁴ Brockhurst Farm remained in the ownership of the Hills of Hawkstone at least until 1846.¹¹⁵ Wem Brockhurst dairy farm was advertised for sale in 1911. It has been owned and farmed by the Ashton family for several generations.¹¹⁶

Aston Hall (later Walford) estate

Sir Gilbert Talbot of Grafton (Worcs.) (1452–1517) married Elizabeth, daughter of Ralph, Lord Greystoke,¹¹⁷ and with her gained a freehold estate in Aston. Greystoke also appointed Talbot steward of the manors of Wem and Hinstock, an office formerly held by his older brother, John Talbot, second earl of Shrewsbury (d.1460). On his succession to the barony of Wem in 1488, Thomas, Lord Dacre confirmed Talbot's appointment for life.¹¹⁸ By 1482 Talbot was also acquiring copyhold tenements in Aston, notably the former Burdon estate.¹¹⁹ The Aston Hall estate was thus formed of both freehold and copyhold tenements. The freehold land was mainly north of the river and the copyhold to the south. Sir Gilbert Talbot, son of Sir Gilbert and Elizabeth, succeeded to the estate (but not the stewardship) in 1517.¹²⁰ After his death in 1542, his estate was divided.¹²¹ The Aston Hall estate passed intact to Sir Gilbert's youngest daughter, Mary, who was married to Sir Thomas Astley of Pattingham (Staffs.); they gave the Aston estate to their younger son, John.¹²²

In 1561 the freehold comprised a dwelling house and croft within an acre of ground,¹²³ 26½ a. of enclosed fields as well as arable land in the common fields of Aston, held 'by homage,

¹¹⁴ Garbet, 357–8. The owner of Hawkstone at the time was the Hon. and Revd. Richard Hill (1655–1727). Garbet may have had in mind Hill's energetic local agent, John Dicken (see Dicken's letters to Hill: SA, 112/1).

¹¹⁵ 1805 Survey, 60–1; SA, 731/3/25.

¹¹⁶ SA, 1096/58; pers. comm. Roger Ashton.

¹¹⁷ *ODNB*, 'Greystoke family (per. 1321–1487)'. Elizabeth died in 1490; her tomb with effigy is in St John's church, Bromsgrove (Worcs.).

¹¹⁸ SA, 327/1/D/1/2A: manor court roll of Hinstock, 1484, names 'Gylbart Talbot' as steward; BL, Additional Charters 73176: 1488.

¹¹⁹ BL, Additional Charters 73174–5, 73177–9.

¹²⁰ BL, Additional Charters 73179.

¹²¹ BL, Additional Charter 72902, 1544.

¹²² BL, Additional Charter 72902, 1544; *Survey, 1561*, 142–3; SA, 103/1/4/2/1/80; R.C. Purton, 'The Family of Astley of Aston in the Parish of Wem', *TSAHS*, 4th s., I (1911) 23–8; wills of John Astley (d.1598) and Thomas Astley (d.1631): 'Wem Wills', ed. Watts.

¹²³ This was probably the house depicted on the Arundel map, next to the bridge on the north side of the river and directly opposite Bridge farm house: Garbet, 356. This close has long been empty. By 1805 it was 'Pinfold Croft', a copyhold tenement of George Walford: 1805 Survey, 56–7; Tithe apportionment, lot 1266; Abstract of Title of John Henshaw Walford esq

fealty and suit of court' with a token rent service of *1d.* per annum. Some or all of this estate was leased to the Judson family.¹²⁴ In 1555 the fine for admission to the copyhold tenement was £16 13s. 4d. The copyhold tenement in 1561 consisted of 'two messuages now made into one' with gardens and orchards, and 105 a. in 24 enclosed fields; it was all let to Edward Watkis.¹²⁵ The present Aston Hall was built on the copyhold estate, *c.*1600 (see above, The Built Character).

Thomas Astley (1631–1685/6)¹²⁶ left no issue and the freehold estate was inherited by his two married sisters.¹²⁷ In 1711 it was sold to Francis Lloyd of Cockshutt.¹²⁸ Behind this transaction lay a bequest under the 1691 will of Francis Lloyd the elder to purchase land for the benefit of his grandsons, including William and Thomas Walford.¹²⁹ These were the two surviving sons of William Walford of Lee Brockhurst, born in 1699 and 1701, respectively. By 1722 William Walford the younger resided at The Hill farm, formerly part of the Aston Hall copyhold estate in the south east of Brockhurst, but he died without issue in 1724 and was succeeded by his younger brother, Thomas (d. 1769).¹³⁰ Thomas Walford, in 1722 in business as a tanner in Newport, then moved to Aston and took up the life of a country gentleman.¹³¹

A second Aston estate acquired by the Walfords was the former Morton copyhold tenement. In 1536 John Morton was admitted to the copyhold, which in 1561 comprised a messuage (probably at the corner of Church Lane, near the bridge) with an orchard, and a bakehouse and barn across the road, 43 a. in Aston and 12 a. in the common fields of Wem.¹³² In 1654, the estate, now 80 a. in various closes mainly north of the Roden, was purchased by Samuel Smith, merchant of Wem, who enfranchised it. Smith went bankrupt and absconded in 1676. William Walford, one of his creditors, successfully sued Joseph Smith, Samuel's son and

to piece of land called Penfold Croft in Aston, purchased by Caleb Powell: SA, 1868 box 151.

¹²⁴ BL, Additional Charters 73180, 73182–5; *Survey 1561*, 135. The acreage in the common fields was unfortunately omitted from the manuscript.

¹²⁵ BL, Additional Charters 73181; *Survey 1561*, 143; will of Edward Watkis (d. 1571): 'Wem Wills', ed. Watts; Garbet, 354–5, 359.

¹²⁶ Purton, 'Astley of Aston'. See also the genealogy in Charles Astley's bill to recover part of the copyhold (allegedly sold *c.*1650) in 1699: TNA, C 6/367/48.

¹²⁷ SA, 103/1/4/95; SA, 103/1/4/102–3.

¹²⁸ Garbet, 356; SA, 103/1/5/267–8.

¹²⁹ SA, 103/1/5/267–268; SA, D3651/B/46/1/11.

¹³⁰ SA, 103/1/4/107–8; *Wem Parish Registers*. For The Hill, see Garbet, 359.

¹³¹ SA, 103/1/4/107–8; SA, 167/47, 50–1; SA, 665/570; Lee Brockhurst Parish Registers.

¹³² *Survey 1561*, 140–1; Arundel map.

heir, and was awarded the estate in 1722. It then descended as part of the Walfords' Aston estate.¹³³

As to the copyhold part of the Aston Hall estate, Thomas Astley sold it in 1684, having suffered financially from the Wem copyholders' litigation against Daniel Wycherley, lord of the manor (1673–82). It was purchased in 1688 by Sir George Jeffreys, 1st baron Jeffreys of Wem, and thereafter descended with the lordship of the manor.¹³⁴ By 1731 the copyhold estate was let to John Dickin and then his son, Thomas, who resided at Aston Hall. The tenant had the right 'to sit as often as they pleased in the Best Seat in Wem Church belonging to the said farm'.¹³⁵ Thomas Dickin's son, also Thomas Dickin, continued to reside at Aston Hall until 1784, when he moved to the large town house he had built in Wem, but retained the lease.¹³⁶ The copyhold Aston Hall estate was still owned by the lord of the manor, Sir William Pultney, in 1805. Thereafter, it was sold by the earl of Cleveland (lord of the manor, 1805/6–1842), either to George Walford of Wem and Lee Brockhurst, or his son and heir, John Walford, the preeminent Wem lawyer.¹³⁷

The Aston Hall copyhold was thus reunited with the freehold within the Walford estate in the early 19th century. In 1828 John Walford placed Aston Hall with 157 a. in trust to provide £5,000 to his daughter, Sarah Rebecca, upon her marriage to Henry John Baker, the successor to Walford's legal practice.¹³⁸ Such was the dominance of the Walfords as landowners in Aston that in 1836 there were celebrations in Wem and Aston on the birth of John Henshaw Nickson Walford, toasted as 'the Heir of Ruyton and Aston'.¹³⁹ Upon the death of his father, John Henshaw Walford, in 1866, J.H.N. Walford sold off the estate in Aston in lots, one of which was Aston Hall Farm, comprising 235 a.¹⁴⁰

The Moat House

¹³³ Arundel map; ACA, MS MD59, p. 30; Garbet, 357–8.

¹³⁴ Garbet, 355; SA, D3651/B/37/2/1a/1-21; 1805 Survey, 52–5.

¹³⁵ SA, 306 box 2a: Lease 26 Aug 1731 Thomas Dickin of Loppington gent to Bartholomew Ebrey of Aston esq.; Garbet, 347.

¹³⁶ *Wem Parish Registers*; SA, 306 box 2a, lease 26 Aug. 1731; SA, 322/3/48/9; TNA, PROB 11/1054/152. For The Hall, Wem, see *VCH Wem*, 32–3.

¹³⁷ 1805 Survey; SA, 816/5.

¹³⁸ SA, 816/5, naming the various fields comprising the Aston Hall farm.

¹³⁹ SA, 322/2/377/55; *Shrewsbury Chron.*, 30 Dec. 1836, 3. Below, Social History.

¹⁴⁰ Sale Particulars for Aston Hall Estate, Wem, 1866: SA, MI4620/1, SA, 1868 box 151.

This estate was generally bounded to the north by the Aston–Lee Brockhurst road, to the south by Palms Hill and to the east by a tributary of the Roden that formed the manor and parish boundary with Preston Brockhurst. Moat House farmstead occupies an isolated situation on the bank of this brook.

In 1512/13 the Moat House, a copyhold tenement, was sold by William Moreton of Ludlow to Thomas Lawrence of Aston. In 1561 it was held by a Thomas Lawrence, who died in 1586, apparently with no issue.¹⁴¹ In 1631 it was held by Thomas Hinks. Arthur Hinks added Parker's meadow, near Wem.¹⁴² The same Arthur Hinks, by a settlement confirmed in his will proved in 1719, conveyed the Moat House estate to William Lawrence, gent, and his heirs.¹⁴³ William was succeeded by his son John (d. 1769).¹⁴⁴ John Lawrence 'considerably augmented' the estate; in 1745 he acquired several pieces of copyhold land in Aston including Owens Britch, Barker's Green Croft and Palms Hill ('Pontons Hill'), and in 1767 a cottage near Palms Hill.¹⁴⁵ Later in life, John Lawrence sold off the estate.¹⁴⁶ In 1785 he sold Parker's meadow to George Walford. In 1790, John Lawrence of Wem and his only son, Thomas Lawrence of Birmingham, merchant, conveyed the Moat House estate to Thomas Dickin of Wem.¹⁴⁷ It then remained in the Dickin of Loppington estate until at least 1858 and was probably sold with the rest of the Dickin estate in Wem in 1865.¹⁴⁸ The purchaser may have been William Ikin, then the tenant, or Edward Ikin (d. 1879), farmer at the Moat House by 1870, whose grandson William Norman Ikin occupied it in the mid 20th century.¹⁴⁹

Weir Farm

¹⁴¹ *Survey 1561*, 144–5; will of Thomas Lawrence (d.1586): 'Wem Wills', ed. Watts.

¹⁴² Deeds 25 Dec. 1694, 26 May 1703: SA, 306 box 2a; SA, 1186/40–1.

¹⁴³ Garbet, 359, seemingly based on deeds he had seen, perhaps then in the possession of John Lawrence, the contemporary owner of the Moat House, whom Garbet appears to have consulted for this account. See *Survey, 1561*, 144–5; SA, 1186/40-41, will of Arthur Hincks of Wem, gent.

¹⁴⁴ Bristol Archives, 32955/9: Last will and testament of John Lawrence of Wem, Salop, gentleman, 11 Feb. 1769.

¹⁴⁵ Garbet, 360; SA, 306 box 2a, copy of court 11 Apr. 1745; deed 27 Oct. 1767.

¹⁴⁶ See Bristol Archives, 32955/9–14.

¹⁴⁷ SA, 306 box 2a: deed 21 Sep. 1785; 'Schedule of Deeds & Writing of Thomas A. M. Dickin, Esq. relating to farms at Aston & Wolverley & Wem in Mortgage to Robert Topham, esq...'

¹⁴⁸ SA, 306 box 2a: 'Abstract of Title of T.A.M. Dickin to Copyhold Estate, The Moat House Farm, ... 1790–1858'.

¹⁴⁹ *Shrewsbury Chron.*, 2 Jun. 1865, 1; 7 Jan. 1870, 2; *Wellington Jnl*, 28 Jun. 1879, 5; 18 Jun. 1898, 7; 28 Jan.1899, 5; N. Ikin: SA, DA27/710/2/157 (1934 x 1948); Woodward, 167.

The Weir was a messuage with land near Coteman's weir, perhaps part of the copyhold tenement of Thomas Menlove before 1561.¹⁵⁰ The estate had both freehold and copyhold tenements, on both sides of the Roden and with some closes in Wem and Tilley townships. Thomas Whitfield 'of the Weare' died in 1701.¹⁵¹ The next Thomas Whitfield's widow and son defaulted on the mortgage; after proceedings in Chancery, the Weir farm was conveyed in 1742 to the executors of James Blakeway, merchant, of Shrewsbury. By 1756 it had been sold to Caleb Powell of Besford.¹⁵² In 1805 the 60 a. estate was owned by a Caleb Powell and occupied by John Abbott.¹⁵³ By 1840, the owner was Thomas James, with Richard Sands as tenant, while Caleb Powell and John Abbott both still owned several cottages and closes in Aston.¹⁵⁴ By 1895 Wycherley Bros. were farmers at the Weir farm; they were still in occupation in 1922 but by 1941 the farmer was Arthur Williams.¹⁵⁵

Brook House Farm

Brook House farm is named from its location beside a tributary of Soulton Brook which forms the township and manor boundary. A small house is depicted here on the 1631 map, on a close belonging to the freehold Aston Hall estate, and the estate was probably created in the early 17th century for the youngest son of John Astley of Aston (d.1597), Lawrence (d.1658).¹⁵⁶ By the mid 18th century, the farm combined adjacent land from three estates: several Aston Hall freehold and Watkis copyhold closes, and a large close of the former Menlove (then Corbet) copyhold estate fronting Soulton Road; a new farmhouse was built on this latter close. Thomas Astley and his descendants were tenants throughout the 18th century.¹⁵⁷ By 1840, Brook House farm was owned by the Walford estate and comprised 127

¹⁵⁰ *Survey, 1561*, 145. See above, *The Built Character*.

¹⁵¹ *Wem Parish Registers*, burial, 12 Dec. 1701; SA, 306 box 2a, indenture 26 Mar 1703; TNA, C 78/1815 for 1725.

¹⁵² TNA, C 78/1815; Garbet, 360 ('Wingfields' in error for 'Whitfields'); SA, 587/56 [MI570?]: correspondence of George Whitfield, surgeon: 16 Apr. 1774.

¹⁵³ SA, 167/47, 50–1; 'Abbott, Mr. John, *Wear*' in 'Subscribers' Names', Garbet (1818 edition).

¹⁵⁴ Aston tithe apportionment, pp. 51, 63, 68–70.

¹⁵⁵ *Kelly's Dir.* 1895, 1913, 1922, 1941.

¹⁵⁶ Purton, 'Astley of Aston', 27–8; Shropshire HER, List Entry Number: 1236847.

¹⁵⁷ *Wem Parish Registers*, e.g., 416, 426, 508, 562, 701; Garbet, 360–1; lease, Benjamin Goldisborough to Thomas Astley, 1711: SA, 731/2/3871; 'licence to demise' to Thomas Astley for three lives, Apr. 1725: Abstract of title of Sir Andrew Corbet, to copyhold lands in Aston (c.1809), SA, 1868 box 151.

a. 2 r. 23 p., the tenant was Mary Williams.¹⁵⁸ It was sold in 1866 as a farm of 89 a. in the occupation of John Onslow.¹⁵⁹ From 1913 to 1969 it was operated as a dairy farm by the Edwards family.¹⁶⁰

ECONOMIC HISTORY

Agriculture

In 1066 Aston was valued at 20s. but in 1086, its value had halved. There was land for three plough teams and woodland for 40 pigs.

Aston had three open fields, situated north of the Roden, from west to east: Wem field, Winsorton field and Barley field.¹⁶¹ These were still in operation in 1589 but had been enclosed by 1631.¹⁶²

Industry and services

The commerce and industry carried on in Aston has generally served the needs of the local agricultural community. In the mid 19th century there was a shop, a blacksmith and agricultural implement maker, and a beer house with maltings.¹⁶³

The shop was run by Thomas Abbotts from the 1840s to the 1860s.¹⁶⁴ Abbotts was deceased by 1871, when 'Edgerton' the brickmaker (see below) added 'grocer' to his business activities.¹⁶⁵ There was a shop at Barker's Green in 1895.¹⁶⁶

There was a blacksmith's shop in Aston by 1756.¹⁶⁷ In 1842 a blacksmith's shop owned by John Henshaw Walford was located between Aston Lane and the river, west of Bridge Farm

¹⁵⁸ Tithe apportionment, pp. 73–4.

¹⁵⁹ Sale Particulars for Aston Hall Estate. Wem, 1866: SA, MI4620/1, SA 1868, box 151.

¹⁶⁰ <http://www.wemlocal.org.uk/wempast/farming/tomedwards.htm>

¹⁶¹ *Survey, 1561*, 137; Garbet, 361.

¹⁶² *Survey 1561*, 134–45; TNA, LR 2/225; Arundel map (1631).

¹⁶³ Bagshaw, 329.

¹⁶⁴ Census 1851, 1861, 1871; Bagshaw, 329.

¹⁶⁵ *Cassey's Dir.*, 1871, 378.

¹⁶⁶ Bagshaw, 329; *Kelly's Dir.*, 1895, 254.

¹⁶⁷ John Cartwright, fl. 1758, d. 1798: *Wem Parish Registers*, 555, 700; Thomas Thornhill, married 1759, d. 1801; *ibid.*, 667, 716, 816; Thomas Williams, fl. 1803–41: *ibid.*, 787; William Evans, born c.1820: 1841 Census.

house.¹⁶⁸ Occupied by Thomas Williams and Benjamin Edwards, it was sold in 1866 as part of the Walford estate.¹⁶⁹ The Williams family of blacksmiths relocated to Aston Street in Wem, leaving Benjamin Edwards at the Aston smithy. By 1878 Edwards occupied premises adjoining the public house, where the blacksmith's shop appears to have continued in operation at least until 1911.¹⁷⁰

A public house or beer house was established in Aston hamlet by 1831, when the tenant of a house with malt kiln and yard was Henry Powell, innkeeper.¹⁷¹ In 1857 John Topsham, publican, took a lease of the dwelling house called 'The Plough' with the malkiln and five pieces of land, from year to year, from George and James Powell.¹⁷² By 1862, it was a public house named the Corbet Arms.¹⁷³ George Powell sold the property in 1872, when it was advertised as a freehold public house, adjoining 'the high road' from Wem to Lee Brockhurst, with stables, malthouse and three crofts.¹⁷⁴ The purchaser was James Wilkes from Shrewsbury.¹⁷⁵ Wilkes probably took over as landlord of The Corbet Arms, as his death in 1876 was registered at Wem.¹⁷⁶ His widow, Anne, continued as landlady, but she was unable to keep an orderly house and in 1878 the licence was suspended for two years.¹⁷⁷ It does not appear to have been renewed. A public house named The Plough Inn was still recalled in the

¹⁶⁸ Tithe apportionment, lot 1261; Sale Particulars for Aston Hall Estate. Wem, 1866: SA, MI4620/1, SA, 1868 box 151.: SA, MI4620/1, SA, 1868 box 151.

¹⁶⁹ 1805 Survey, p. 51; Sale Particulars for Aston Hall Estate. Wem, 1866: SA, MI4620/1, SA, 1868 box 151.: SA, MI4620/1; SA, 1868 box 151.

¹⁷⁰ 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911 census; *Oswestry Advertiser*, 26 Dec 1877, 6; *Eddowes's Jnl*, 4 June 1879, 1; OS 25", Shropshire Sheet XXI.4.

¹⁷¹ Draft deeds for Powell estate: SA, 1868 box 151; Tithe apportionment, lots 1351–3; William Hewes 'malster and beerhouse keeper': Bagshaw, 329; William Hughes 'publican': 1851 Census; John Topham, publican at 'Beer House' in Aston: 1861 Census.

¹⁷² Solicitor's papers on the Powell estate in Aston: SA, 1868, box 151.

¹⁷³ *Shrewsbury Chron.*, 24 Oct. 1862, 6; *Cassey's Dir.*, 1871, 378: Richard Cartwright, 'Corbert Arms inn' (*sic*).

¹⁷⁴ Conditions of sale of public house, cottages and land in Aston and Coton, 1872: SA, 1868, box 151; *Shrewsbury Chron.*, 26 Apr. 1872, 1.

¹⁷⁵ Letter from Corser & Nevett to Edward Bygott, 26 June 1872: SA, 1868, box 151; St Mary's, Shrewsbury, 1841–71 censuses.

¹⁷⁶ Deaths Registered in October, November, and December 1876, 313: via *The Genealogist* website.

¹⁷⁷ *Oswestry Advertiser*, 26 Dec. 1877, 6; *Shrewsbury Chron.* 22 March 1878, 9; *Eddowes's J*, 4 Sept. 1878, 6; 18 Sept. 1878, 8; 4 June 1879, 1. By 1881, Anne and her second husband, Frederick Wingfield, were living in Shrewsbury with James Wilkes, perhaps her nephew by marriage: St Mary's Shrewsbury, 1881 Census.

mid 20th century, as the second house south of Aston bridge on the left. At the time of writing, the house in that location was named ‘The Old Plough’.¹⁷⁸

Clay deposits at Barker’s Green were used for brickmaking by the mid 18th century.¹⁷⁹

Commercial brickmaking in Aston had begun by the early 19th century; in 1831 Thomas Williams was in business as a brickmaker, joined by his son by 1841.¹⁸⁰ William Tomkis Higgins of Bilmarsh, brickmaker, purchased a house at Barker’s Green in 1843.¹⁸¹ By 1851, there were two additional brickmakers: Samuel Maddox and Charles Edgerton. Edgerton, from Cockshutt, married Maddox’s daughter and took over his brickmaking business.¹⁸²

Between 1891 and 1901, William Matthews from Bridgnorth and his three adult sons arrived in Barker’s Green to work as brickmakers. In 1911 sons and grandsons of both Edgerton and Matthews were still brickmakers at Barker’s Green. There were two separate brickyards, but it is not clear if they were in competition or operated as a single business. Brickmaking was thriving at the turn of the 20th century, when a clean water supply was needed for cottages near the brickyard, and a building plot (now Hawthorn Villa) was advertised for sale ‘situate in the midst of a brick-making industry’.¹⁸³ Around 1870, ‘Aston Pottery’ was also manufacturing earthenware goods and plant pots, but without commercial success.¹⁸⁴

There was another commercial brickyard at the Moat House. The farmhouse and outbuildings (see The Built Character) are conspicuously brick-built. In 1861 John Crowder, brickmaker, resided at the farm.¹⁸⁵ By 1886, William Ikin was producing bricks and drainage pipes at ‘Moat House Brickyard, near Wem’.¹⁸⁶

¹⁷⁸ Woodward, 167; OS 25”, Shropshire Sheet XXI.4 (1881). See ‘The Built Character’, above.

¹⁷⁹ Garbet, 361.

¹⁸⁰ SA, 1186/102: Dec. 1831; 1841 Census.

¹⁸¹ Bbl labelled ‘Barker’s Green’: SA, 1868 box 157.

¹⁸² Bagshaw, 327; Wem Non-Conformist Registers, 18 Jun. 1852 (typescript in SA); *Eddowes’s Jnl*, 19 Nov. 1862, 7. See ‘Religious History’, below.

¹⁸³ *Wellington Jnl*, 27 Jun. 1896, 3; 23 May 1903, 1.

¹⁸⁴ *Wellington Jnl*, 25 Jan. 1868, 4; *Shrewsbury Chron.*, 25 Feb. 1870, 1; *Cassey’s Dir.*, 1871, 378.

¹⁸⁵ 1861 Census.

¹⁸⁶ *Wellington Jnl*, 31 Jul. 1886; 28 Jan. 1899, 5; *Kelly’s Dir.*, 1895, 254; invoice for supply of 4 in. clay pipes to J. Williams, Prees Green, 31 Dec. 1903 (in possession of Tom Edwards).

In contrast to the former industry, today the land use at Barker's Green is residential and agricultural, with the sole exception being a builder's merchant on the south side, near Weir Lane, formerly the premises of a second-hand furniture dealer.¹⁸⁷

SOCIAL HISTORY

Communal Life

In the mid 19th century the descendants of John Walford, attorney, although residing at Roden House on Mill Street, Wem, fulfilled the role of resident gentry in Aston. This reached its high point with John Henshaw Nickson Walford, for whom a pair of oak trees were planted – one at his birth in 1836, the second at his coming of age – which still stand, on either side of Aston Road as it enters Aston hamlet. The coming of age was celebrated with public festivities in Wem town.¹⁸⁸ The festivities for J.H.N. Walford's marriage in 1862 were held in Aston 'village' itself, with catering by the landlord of the Corbet Arms.¹⁸⁹ Walford chose to pursue the life of a country gentleman, not in Aston but on land he inherited at Ruyton-XI-Towns (Shropshire). To fund the construction of Ruyton Towers,¹⁹⁰ in 1866 he sold his entire estate in Aston and Lee Brockhurst,¹⁹¹ ending the Walford ascendancy in Aston.

Wem and District Agricultural Association's annual show was held on Aston Road, on the field opposite the milk factory, in 1939 and 1954.¹⁹²

Wem Cricket Club moved to its present ground on Soulton Road in 1982.¹⁹³

Education

¹⁸⁷ Pers. comm. Tom Edwards.

¹⁸⁸ *Shrewsbury Chron.*, 11 Dec. 1857, 6; 5 Aug. 1910, 9.

¹⁸⁹ *Shrewsbury Chron.*, 24 Oct. 1862, 6.

¹⁹⁰ G. Williams, *The Country Houses of Shropshire* (Woodbridge, 2021), 560.

¹⁹¹ Sale Particulars for Aston Hall Estate. Wem, 1866: SA, MI4620/1, SA, 1868 box 151; *Eddowes's Jnl*, 1 Aug. 1866, 1.

¹⁹² *Chester Chron.*, 12 Aug. 1939, 5; Wem and District Agricultural Association 42nd annual show 1954: catalogue in possession of, and pers. comm., Tom Edwards.

¹⁹³ *VCH Wem*, 87.

Children from Aston attended schools in Wem. In 1881, poor road drainage causing flooding of the approach to Aston bridge was highlighted as a problem for children going to school.¹⁹⁴

Social Welfare

Aston followed the same poor law regime as Wem.

Charities for the poor

Ralph Watkis of Aston left to the poor householders of the township 4 nobles per annum charged on 'Shaws Lands', probably between 1715 and 1733. In c.1830, £1 6s. 8d. was paid annually by Stephen Hassall as owner of 'Shaw's Land' in Aston, and distributed by the churchwardens, in small sums, to the poor of Aston Quarter.¹⁹⁵

RELIGIOUS HISTORY

Aston was and is within the parish of Wem. The parish church of SS Peter and Paul is located in Wem town.¹⁹⁶ When Aston bridge was out of repair in 1581, the complaint was that it prevented the residents of Aston from going to church.¹⁹⁷

Church Lane connects Soulton Road with Aston hamlet; it is not the obvious route to any church. On the west side of the lane, a copyhold close of 3 a. named 'Churche yard croft' in 1561 and labelled on the 1631 Arundel map as 'Church yate'¹⁹⁸ may represent the site of an otherwise forgotten pre-Reformation chapel.

Nonconformity

¹⁹⁴ SA, DP5, Aston Bridge, 1881: correspondence from Surveyor of Wem Highways Board.

¹⁹⁵ Charity boards displayed in Wem parish church (personal observation); *Charities Commission Report*, 335.

¹⁹⁶ For the history of Wem parish, see *VCH Wem*.

¹⁹⁷ SA, 167/1, 6 Apr. 1581.

¹⁹⁸ *Survey 1561*, 144–5; cf. Gelling, *PN Salop*. V, 239, 'Church Gates', from Wem tithe apportionment (1841).

Aston ‘dissenters’ joined congregations in Wem. The Noble Street Presbyterian chapel in particular had members from Aston, from the Lawrence family of the Moat House and their tenants to a Roger Thomas of Barker’s Green whose son was baptised at the chapel in 1781.¹⁹⁹ In 1810 Thomas James was authorised to hold religious meetings for ‘dissenters’ at The Weir farm house.²⁰⁰

There was a Primitive Methodist preaching house at Barker’s Green by 1843,²⁰¹ and another was said to have commenced in 1849, with an average attendance of 18 in 1851.²⁰² This was probably the work of Charles Edgerton, a brickmaker and local preacher at Barker’s Green for over 50 years, as well as trustee of the Wem Primitive Methodist chapel. In 1862 the Prees Green Primitive Methodist Circuit approved the Wem congregation raising funds to build a new chapel, with Edgerton a member of the committee.²⁰³ The ‘mission room’ was built in a field near the Barker’s Green brickworks. There was apparently a flourishing congregation in the late 19th century,²⁰⁴ the date of its closure is unknown and there is now no trace of the building.

¹⁹⁹ *The Register of Wem Presbyterian Chapel, 1755–1814* (Shropshire Family History Society).

²⁰⁰ SA, QS1/9, f. 88r, 2 Oct. 1810.

²⁰¹ ‘Primitive Methodist Preacher’s Plan of the Press Green Circuit’, 1843:
<https://www.myprimitivemethodists.org.uk/content>

²⁰² *Church and Chapel*, 108.

²⁰³ P. Edwards and T. Edwards, *A History of the Methodist and United Reformed (Congregational) Societies in Wem* (Wem, 1995), 114, 116, 124; ‘Memorial’ certificate of Wem Primitive Methodist congregation awarded to Charles Edgerton, 30 Aug. 1901, image at:

http://www.myprimitivemethodists.org.uk/images/uploaded/originals/letter_to_charles_snr.jpg; SA, NMA69/B/1, meeting Sept. 1862.

²⁰⁴ Photograph in the possession of Thomas Edwards, labelled by Mrs Eileen Edge as Barker’s Green Primitive Methodist chapel, ‘built by Mr Edgerton ... on his field’, of a group of eleven women and nine young children in front of a plain brick building (late 19th century).