



**Shevington & District Community  
Association**



# **HERITAGE TRAIL No. 2**

**To Celebrate Lancashire Day 2013**

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*Welcome to Shevington & District Heritage Trail No. 2, which follows that of June, 2012.*

*I trust that this too, will stimulate interest in the heritage of our local communities and encourage residents to explore in more detail the fascinating story of where we live today.*

***John O'Neill***

*Cover photographs: Gathurst Bridge Houses, 1905.*

## Origins

First recorded in 1225 the name Shevington probably derives from the Welsh 'Cefyn' and the old English 'Tun' relating to our hill-slope community in the Douglas Valley. Shevington became a manor within that of Standish with Langtree and its church dedicated to St. Wilfrid from the late 12th century.

From the 1870s Shevington became an ecclesiastical parish in its own right followed by the building of St. Anne's Church in 1887, one hundred and twenty six years ago; and under the Local Government Act of 1894 became a Parish Council within the settlement's ancient boundaries of the Calico Brook, Millbrook and River Douglas.

Within Shevington's own boundaries lies the greater part of the less well-known hamlet of Gathurst.

This trail attempts to describe some of its features, past and present, along that section of Gathurst Lane passing through the hamlet.



# SHEVINGTON & DISTRICT HERITAGE TRAIL No. 2

**DISTANCE OF 1.75 MILES.**

Start from the Parish Council Car Park (across from The Plough & Harrow public house) on Gathurst Lane, Shevington and proceed in a southerly direction downhill to the railway bridge, keeping to the eastern side and return uphill on the western side to finish at the pub.

**CAR PARK** - Owned and administered by Shevington Parish Council.

**RECREATION GROUND** - Access is by foot between the Parish Council's car park and that of the adjacent Methodist Church buildings. It is the property of St. Anne's Parish Church and administered by the Recreation Ground Trustees.

The field was purchased in the 1920s from the Standish Hall estate by James Lyon, Headmaster of Crooke School, who offered it for sale to Shevington Village for recreation purposes. It was used for football, cricket and tennis until the Second World War.

Since those days it has been used generally for organised football, training sessions, fêtes and, until recent years, visits by a fairground company.

Attention recently has been given to improving the whole site in order to accommodate wider community use.

**METHODIST CHURCH** - Local Methodists seeking a place of worship obtained the temporary use in 1959/60 of a hut on Miles Lane, but were forced to move as it was blocking the construction of the M6 motorway.

In 1963 they found another hut, that being the smaller building you see today adjacent to the main building, on land sold to them by the Vicar of St. Anne's. To make that hut more substantial, they built around it in brick.

There followed years of fund raising with the assistance of their Minister, the Reverend Derek Kendrick, who conveniently owned a building firm, to be able to erect the present Church in 1981. The earlier building is still used by a wide range of organisations.

**HIGHFIELD AVENUE** - Named after the Victorian farm that once stood close to the access. Owned by the Standish Hall estate it was sold by auction in 1921. The land has since been developed for recreational, residential and retail purposes.

**YOUTH CLUB** - The purpose-built centre on Highfield Avenue was established in 1967 on land leased from the Recreation Ground Trustees following the club's transfer from its original site in an ex-army hut on St. Anne's Church car park, off Church Lane (see Heritage Trail No. 1 for further information).

The club affiliated to the National Association of Boys' Clubs and its first President was Sir Fred Emery. Born in Standish Lower Ground in a small cottage attached to Evan House Farm, he attended Crooke School and eventually became a telegraphist at Gathurst Railway Station in 1899. Sir Fred later became a councillor for Salford then Mayor and a Member of Parliament for the town and was knighted for his public service.

A foundation stone dated 17th December 1967 marks the club's opening by him.

Today the Youth Centre is owned and operated by volunteers who organise a wide programme of activities catering for boys and girls across a wide-range living in our local community.

**SHOPPING AREA** - Developed in the 1950s/60s to meet the needs of a growing local population, there have been changes in the types of retail outlet over the years. For example, there is no longer a butchers or florists and no banking facilities since the closure of a local branch, except through the Post Office which relocated here from its Church Lane premises some years ago. An outstanding feature in the early days was the beautiful front garden, complete with bee hive, attached to Johnson's the Chemist now Manor Pharmacy.

**LIBRARY** - The building was opened in 1970 replacing the limited but much appreciated book-lending scheme that had been housed in St. Anne's Parish Rooms in Church Lane. Today the service is staffed and administered by Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust, together with volunteers, providing all the services required of a branch library.

It also acts as a focal point for a number of voluntary groups and is the venue for Shevington Parish Council's meetings. The District Councillors and local Police also use the premises to meet local residents at set times and by appointment.

**PUBLIC ART** - Situated outside the library buildings is an interpretation board highlighting one of Shevington's past domestic industries 'basket-making' together with three metal baskets acting as planters. This project is part of the work of Shevington and District In Bloom's team of volunteers.

**HOUSE NUMBERS 34-38** - Built in the 1950s, to accommodate local police families, they were sold by Greater Manchester Police under a rationalisation of property programmes a number of years ago to serve as private dwellings.

**RICHARDSON'S (CHEMIST)** - This building was privately owned for many years as the local doctors' surgery. It served as such until the opening of its current practise in Houghton Lane, adjacent to the existing clinic in 1988

**THE GREEN** - An interpretation board established here in 2010 briefly outlines "Our Story", the history of Shevington and its local communities. Two adjacent pit-tubs on rails and used as planters were also placed here to mark the past importance of the coal mining industry in the area. An old plough has also been sited here in 2013 to highlight the past significance of farming within the local community.

**RANDALL AVENUE** - Named after Robert Inward Randall who acted as clerk to the parish council from 1924-1946 and who represented the Parish Council on Wigan Rural District Council for over twenty years.

Inward Drive on the nearby estate also recalls his name and the area of Shevington Vale around the junction of Miles Lane with Mill Lane is commonly referred to as "Randall's Corner".

**VICARAGE LANE** - Named after St. Anne's Vicarage a large Victorian property, now demolished, situated almost directly opposite (see later)

Vicarage Lane was used for many years as the access for heavy vehicles serving the Roburite works. At its end the Lane becomes a public footpath 012/07/10 continuing through the fields to Croke Village,

A large private housing estate "Oakwood Meadows" is reaching completion on that part of the old chemical works' site. Its streets have been named after previous landowners down the centuries and in memory of workers who were killed in an industrial accident on the southern site in 1916.

**THE GARTH** - Note the long bungalow situated just before the wide bend, built in 1929 and probably on land previously belonging to Higher Gathurst Farm. Its unusual name in medieval times, referred to a yard or paddock. In this case the land probably enclosed an orchard.

**WIDE BEND** - In the vicinity of property No. 100, on this wide bend in the Lane you cross Gathurst Hamlet's northern boundary. To your left was the site of Higher Gathurst Farm bordering onto Greaves' Wood. It is possible that Gathurst Hall, recorded in the Standish deeds for 1487/8 stood in this vicinity. Forming part of the Standish Hall Estate it was sold in the 1921 auction and according to

records, a branch of the Standish family resided here, and across other parts of Gathurst, from as early as the 13th century.

**NOTE ON GATHURST** - From here the Hamlet stretches south to beyond the canal, river and railway bridge and continues on the steep slope of Gathurst Road, passing Gathurst Wood to what, until recently, was the Bird i' th' Hand public house, now converted to a private dwelling, just below St. John Rigby 6th Form College (N.B. the river Douglas is Shevington Township's southern boundary and Orrell Township's northern one).

Various old English meanings of the word Gathurst include 'Gate', 'Bank' and 'Goat' (an impression of the latter appears on a seal attached to a Standish family document relating to land in Gathurst dated 1502).

No's: 100A to 104 and including Greaves' Wood. Until recent years this area now occupied by these attractive properties was the site of Gathurst Service Station, a large garage complex including showroom, motor maintenance and fuel sales with a number of properties to the rear bordering onto Greaves' Wood which in Medieval times stretched down to the river Douglas and was possibly known then as the White Wood.

**BEECHWOOD VILLAS** - This new residential housing development by Taylor Wimpey is built on land previously occupied by Orica the successor to earlier industrial chemical and explosive manufacturers' including Roburite. All industrial activity has now ceased.

Originally opened in 1888 south of the river Douglas as the Roburite Explosives Co. Ltd. It produced explosives for the mining industry and munitions for warfare (see later). This northern site was occupied by workshops and magazines for filling cartridges, storage and testing purposes.

It was linked by a narrow gauge railway crossing, the river Douglas and Canal by way of a viaduct to the original works just north of Gathurst Station, where the chemicals were manufactured.

After various amalgamations by 1926 the company became the Imperial Chemical Industry Ltd. and in 1930 transferred all activity to this northern site.

The works became a large employer during both World Wars moving its products by rail until 1989 and then by road. Today the Gathurst Lane section of the Beechwood Villas development, known as Elwood Gardens, is named after Robert Elwood who worked for Roburite for fifty years. Because the site when active had prohibited public access, including the establishment of extensive blast zones, much of the site remains as it had been in earlier times rich in flora and fauna.

Plans are being drawn up to allow local residents to benefit from that natural inheritance

**LEEDS LIVERPOOL CANAL** - This section of the Canal was completed from Dean Lock to Wigan in 1781 enabling carriage of coal to wider markets. The bridge was the forty sixth to be built along the canal's total length.

**NAVIGATION INN** - Probably built no earlier than the 1850s to serve canal traffic. Its first recorded landlord, taken from the 1861 census, was John Atherton described at a victualler. The unnecessary renaming of the inn in recent years to 'Baby Elephant' destroyed its historic link with the canal, as it was named after the labourers, 'Navvies', who excavated the waterways.

**RIVER DOUGLAS** - Translated from the British it means, "The Black Stream". Mention of a bridge across it appears in the Standish deeds of 1487/8.

Owing to the increasing importance of coal from the late 17th century, together with the inadequate state of local roads for its carriage from pits to markets, plans were drawn-up and, eventually, approved by Parliament to make the river navigable from the Ribble Estuary to Wigan, It was completed in 1742 via thirteen locks including at Appley Bridge, Gathurst and Crooke.

The natural slope of the Douglas Valley to Gathurst assisted the movement of coal in tubs on tracks from local pits especially in the Orrell area, to a wharf on the rivers southern bank to the western side of Gathurst Lane where it was loaded onto sailing barges called flats capable of carrying up to twenty tons.

**ROBURITE EXPLOSIVE WORKS** - Established in 1888 between the river Douglas and Gathurst Railway Station on land that had been the site of a dye-making factory.

The viaduct, mentioned earlier, was demolished as late as 1982 although rusty abutments are still visible a short distance along the canal towing path

Today, the area closest to the highway is occupied by an exercise area for horses and their riders and just beyond that, a short public footpath No. 011/01/10 joins others close to Ackhurst Hall and beyond.

**RAILWAY LINE, BRIDGE & STATION** - The Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway Company completed this line between Manchester, Bolton, Wigan and Southport in the 1850s and the Gathurst station opened in 1855.

Apart from meeting the demand across a wider area by the business classes for more efficient modes of transport, the line assisted the transport of coal and other materials, including agricultural products grown across the Lancashire

plain to expanding markets throughout the country. The railway's development also attracted settlement in the Gathurst/Shevington area of the middle classes drawn to a pleasant rural location.

Today G.M.P.T.E./Network Rail operate a park and ride system for local commuters via Station Approach. There is also an attractive hostelry, The Station Inn, welcoming travellers and local residents.

A small archway built into the eastern side of the bridge, still visible today, was created to allow Hustler & Co to continue transporting its coal from Orrell Pits down the steep incline on a track to the canal as it had done since the 1820s.

Now return north from the railway bridge on the western side of the highway. N.B. Cross to eastern side footpath where none exists on west side.

Notice, close to the railway banking, a whitewashed cottage possibly, 18th century, and then its neighbour the extensive Deandane Kennels, Cattery and Riding School (Deane in Old English refers to a deep wooded valley of a stream and relates to Dean Wood and Dean Brook to the south west of the railway bridge).

**CANAL TOWING-PATH** - (A short diversion) - This route will take you close to the convergence of the river, canal, railway, and the Gathurst Viaduct which takes the M6 motorway part-way across the Douglas Valley.

The Viaduct was completed in December 1961 and the entire motorway in May 1963. Built by A. Monk & Co Ltd for £828,834 the viaduct is a six span structure at a height of 75 feet above the canal.

A short distance further on you will see Dean House & Locks. The latter was built in 1774 to allow boats to journey upstream to Wigan by joining the river at that point from the then unfinished canal.

A number of wharfs were created on the south side of the river connected via wagon ways to Orrell Pit from the 1770s. All tolls were collected at Dean House Lock.

**OPEN SPACES** - The river bank, canal side and adjacent fields became from the late Victorian period, popular places for picnics from Easter through to the end of summer for Sunday and holiday visits alike in the general area of Gathurst.

They arrived by all modes of transport to enjoy amusements, sideshows, stalls, music including that provided by Croke Brass Band, and dancing. The surrounding fields and woods also grew in increasing popularity as areas for recreation.

**GATHURST COMMUNITY** -The hub was immediately north of the canal and included the Globe Inn, probably early 19th century, to meet river and canal trade. Its last "beer seller" was James Baron as recorded in the 1861 census. To the front of the Inn stood a terrace of seven dwellings dating from the early 18th century and referred to as "Gathurst Bridge Houses" served by a communal well to the rear.

The northern most of these properties eventually became a sub-post office. In 1900 a Mrs Sutherland ran the business with its daily collection of the post, including Sundays, together with a daily delivery and a telegraph service. Just beyond that building was an entrance to Gathurst Hall Farm which permitted access from the 1920s to the southern end of Gathurst golf course established in 1913 on land rented from Naylor's Farm.

**GATHURST HALL FARM ROAD** - Gives access to the farm and Hillside bungalow. The hall, visible through the trees, is set in a prominent position overlooking the canal and river and is possibly of late 17th century origin.

**MARTLAND'S WOOD** - This private woodland was sold by Standish Hall estate in the 1921 auction. Since then a number of dwellings have been built on that part of the wood fronting Gathurst Lane dating from the 1920s/30s to the 1950s/60s.

**PRINCE'S PARK** - This residential area was built on land previously owned by Standish Hall Estate in or close to the wooded area. Access was created in the early 1920s with further housing introduced in the 1950s/60s. Lord Joe Gormley, a former National Union of Mine Workers President retired here. A long wooden fence backing the rear gardens of Woodland Drive, off Princes Park, now takes you up to No. 107 Gathurst Lane.

**THE OVAL** - So named because of the construction site's shape for private housing. It was built on land that prior to the First World War had been St. Anne's Church cricket field. The name is also associated with the famous Surrey County Cricket Ground.

The site itself was affected by the M6 motorway development and was sold to Wigshaw Properties for seven thousand pounds in June 1961.

**PUBLIC FOOTPATH NO. 012/07/10** - Leads to Naylor Farm Avenue and Martland Avenue and across the M6 motorway to the golf course. To the left of the footpath was the old cricket ground and to its right the Vicarage occupied in 1900 by The Reverend George Blagden Hopkins, the second vicar of St. Anne's Church.

**ST. ANNE'S COURT** - The large Victorian property in extensive grounds that had been purchased as a residence for the vicars of Shevington was demolished in recent years and the land developed for private housing.

The new Vicarage is immediately to the north of the access to St. Anne's Court on Gathurst Lane.

**DOUGLAS DRIVE** - Named after the river, this private development was built in the 1950s/60s

**THE OLD VICARAGE** - A very attractive Victorian property, it became the home after his death in 1899 of the first vicar The Reverend Alexander Richardson's family. Prior to that they had lived in Shevington Hall off Shevington Lane.

**HOSPICE SHOP** - This was a purpose-built village shop erected in 1906. One of its previous occupants was Kennedy's (grocer) before eventual conversion to a Wigan & Leigh Hospice Charity shop selling a range of donated items operated by a team of volunteers.

**MANOR HOUSE** - This curious building situated adjacent to the Hospice shop was demolished in 1961. Its origins remain unclear but given that Shevington has been a Manor from medieval times, though divided amongst several owners over the centuries, it could have been the manor house as recorded in 1653 as belonging to Thomas Stanley Lord Mounteagle whose predecessors were granted the Manor. If that was the case then an even earlier Manor House could possibly have occupied the site.

From old photographs the building had a Tudor appearance and was in a terrible condition when demolished together with two adjacent Victorian properties.

**GEORGE AND DRAGON INN** - This public house, probably of Victorian origin, was the last property on this side of Gathurst Lane in the 1890s before reaching the next property which was the Plough and Harrow. It had its own bowling green and was situated opposite a number of cottages on what is now the corner of New Miles Lane.

**NEW MILES LANE** - This road was created in 1961 when the original Miles Lane was blocked off at a point where the M6 was to cross its route. The old road now continues after the point where New Miles Lane crosses the motorway in the vicinity of Gathurst Golf Club's access and that of Houghton Lane, opposite, leading to the clinic and surgery. As an outcome of the diversionary road's development the green area of today was created on the spare land where the old buildings, previously mentioned, had stood.

**THE COOPERATIVE STORE** - Situated on the corner of New Miles Lane and Gathurst Lane and established shortly after the road development, it remains the only mini market in the village.

**MANOR ROAD** - Built in the 1930s it leads towards Old Shevington Hall built in the 17th century and demolished in 1961. The hall was sited a short distance away to the rear of the present Conservative Club which itself was once the Victoria Bowling Green public house.

**PLOUGH AND HARROW PUBLIC HOUSE** - Probably established in the late 18th century and rebuilt in 1905, its name reflects the principal occupation down the ages in the Shevington area.

### **NOTE ON HOUSE TYPES ALONG THE ROUTE:**

Ranging over 150 years, the Victorian properties are the most spacious, especially on the eastern side of the lane and generally set within large and attractive grounds against a woodland background. One of the most impressive, sadly now demolished, was "The Mount" set within the Roburite site and occupied at one time by Mr. Harris Bigg-Withers, the works' first manager, who came from Germany.

"Pleasant View" built in 1895, across from Randall Avenue, would suggest from its name that, like several other properties in that and the Edwardian period, buyers chose sites with, at that time, uninterrupted views across the fields and woods to Wigan and beyond.

A number of Edwardian properties were designed as terraced blocks as is that in which the Hospice Shop of 1906 is situated. And during 1920s and 1930s you may note that the properties were set closer together, of simpler design and with smaller gardens.

Those properties built since the Second World War, including part of the council estate, led to the filling of available gaps left by pre-war development and with more houses fitted into ever smaller sites until later development at St. Anne's Court and the Old Gathurst Service Station site, led to more attractive designs and better use of available space.

### **Shevingtons Population (Inc. Gathurst)**

1801 - 646; 1851 - 1147; 1901 - 1753; 1931 - 1936; 1951 - 3057; 1971 - 8100

