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Archaeological Desktop Study

Re-Routing of Access to St. Edith's Church, Shocklach

For Community Interest

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Re-Routing of Access to St. Edith's Church, Shocklach

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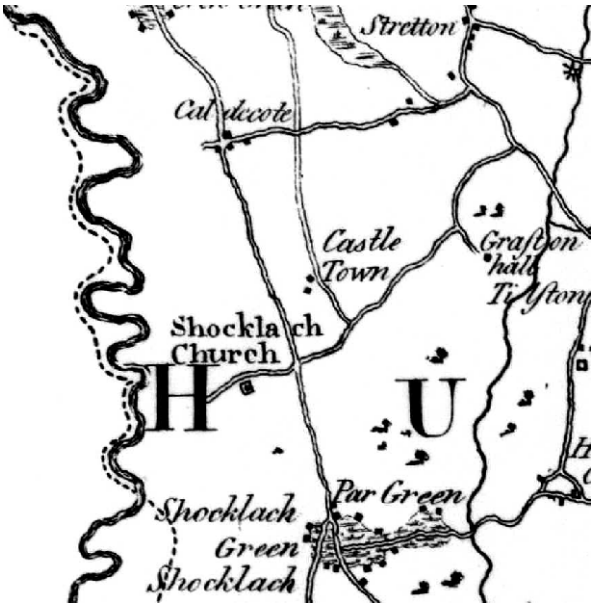
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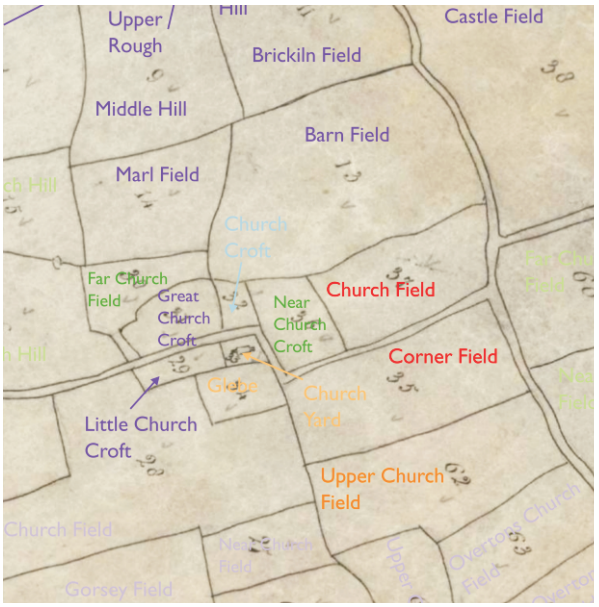
The potential re-routing of access to St Edith's church, Shocklach

One method of tracing former boundaries and track ways in the landscape is to look at the angles of existing field boundaries and their anomalies. These may reveal echoes of previous field shape, size or orientation. The modern approach to St Edith's church down Church Road has a dog leg shape with two right-angled bends. This is not logical, as there is no apparent need for this road shape. The road does not go round an obstacle and does not appear to align with anything in the landscape.

According to Peter Burdett's 1777 map[1] of Shocklach, there was a track way running east directly north of St Edith's church to a crossroads and then following on in a north- easterly direction towards Grafton Hall. (See below). Church Road, with its distinctive corners, is not marked.



Part of Burdett's 1777 map of Church Shocklach



Part of the 1839 Tithe Map for Church Shocklach

The track on Burdett's map does not appear on Greenwood's 1819 map of Church Shocklach, Bryant's 1831 map or the tithe map of 1839 (see above), which show the present road with the dog leg. Given that Burdett was an award winning cartographer and draughtsman, it seems unlikely he would have made a fundamental error in the positioning of St Edith's church in relation to the local tracks or roads on his 1777 map. Therefore what is now Church Road appears to have been built at some point between 1777 and 1819, leading to the former track falling out of use or possibly being appropriated for farming purposes.

Graeme White in *The Medieval English Landscape 1000-1540* describes St Edith's Church in Shocklach as standing "*at the confluence of a network of public footpaths linking the dispersed settlements of the*

1 Burdett, Peter Perez (1734/5-1793) was a cartographer and draughtsman. His map of Derbyshire at a scale of one inch to a mile, begun in 1763 and published in 1767, won him the £100 premium offered by the Society of Arts. In 1768 Burdett moved to Liverpool and launched several cartographic and artistic projects. His experiments with printmaking included aquatint, for which his claims to be the inventor are strong. A fine draughtsman and noted expert in perspective, he was the first president of the Liverpool Society of Arts and exhibited in London at the Society of Artists. (Source: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography)

parish".[2] Likewise St Edith's Church information booklet states that, "there are signs of many tracks and connections to and from the church"[3]. One or more of these footpaths may have altered course or disappeared over time. One possible reason for the disappearance of footpaths is the advent of new farming practices during the Industrial and Agricultural Revolution when much consolidation and enclosure of land took place. It made economic sense for fields to be altered or enlarged for crop rotation and more intensive farming. More sophisticated methods of drainage also allowed the farming of previously unused land.

Polly Bird confirms that south-west Cheshire followed the national trend of consolidation of land holdings[4]. This consolidation started at least as early as the mid 17th century and, in south-west Cheshire, was part of an ongoing process of piecemeal enclosure, rather than the parliamentary enclosure which occurred in the Midlands[5].

Analysis of the surviving Shocklach Land Tax Assessments drawn up between 1795 and 1827 shows that although the number of land occupiers remained stable during this period, the number of landowners doubled. This demonstrates that land was indeed being bought, sold and probably altered at this time. Examples include an 1815 estate account which refers to an enclosure at Shocklach where £2 15s 8d was paid to R Harrison for "*quick and labour inclosing wasteland at Shocklach*"[6] and the sale of the Dutton family's 400 acre Manor of Grafton, which included some land in Church Shocklach. The estate was advertised for sale in 1808[7] but a buyer was presumably not found since adverts reappear in 1815, seeking first of all a sale by private contract[8] then subsequently giving notification of a public auction where the estate was to be sold in lots[9]. Specific evidence of land being altered around St Edith's Church is referred to in the surviving Glebe Terriers. Church Croft field, adjacent to the church, was 1 acre and 30 yards in 1663 but increased in size to 1.25 acres in 1738[10].

Analysis of field names mentioned in newspaper articles between 1777 and 1819 provides further evidence of field changes in Shocklach parish. Four field names appear which are not present on the 1839 tithe maps for Church Shocklach, Shocklach Oviatt or Caldecott, namely Higher Church Croft, Lower Church Croft, Little Kitchen and Great Kitchen. One would expect to find Higher Church Croft and Lower Church Croft in the vicinity of Great Church Croft, Church Croft, Near Church Croft and Little Church Croft, which are located on the 1839 tithe map to the north, west and east of St Edith's Church (see below). Could Higher and Lower Church Croft originally have been situated where Near Church Croft and Church Field are located on the 1839 tithe map?

Higher Church Croft and Lower Church Croft were advertised for sale in 1809[11]. Higher Church Croft was described as excellent quality land in Church Shocklach measuring 2 acres and 1 rod and Lower Church Croft was said to be very rich land measuring 2 acres and 2 rods. Perhaps these fields were enlarged and/or altered and re-named when the present Church Road

2 White, G J, *The Medieval English Landscape 1000-1540*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2012, p174.
3 The booklet *Saint Edith's Church, Shocklach, Cheshire* was written by Margery Waddams and can be viewed on the website www.tilstonandshocklachchurch.co.uk.
4 Bird, P. *Landownership and settlement change in south-west Cheshire from 1750 to 2000* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), University of Liverpool, UK, 2007, Chapter 4, p86.
5 Bird, P., Chapter 7, p267, 268, 272.
6 Bird, P., Chapter 7, p302.
7 Chester Chronicle, 2nd September 1808, p2.
8 Chester Courant, 25th July 1815, p1.
9 Chester Courant, 29th August 1815, p1.
10 Bird, P., Chapter 7, p279.
11 Chester Chronicle, 9th September 1809, p3.

was built in 1813? The old track way on Burdett's map would have become part of the two new fields and would no longer have been required as a track.

A further reason for fields and track ways being altered immediately around St Edith's Church could be drainage issues and frequent local flooding. In 1803, 11 tons of stone were bought for laying a new church drain[12]. The wet ground around the church continued to be a problem, leading to an iron dish being purchased in 1831 for ladling water out of graves prior to burial[13].

Aerial images show the ridge and furrow in Near Church Croft field runs north to south, rather than east to west, suggesting it is more likely to be modern. Earlier east to west ploughing would have taken advantage of the natural drainage towards the river. Church Field shows evidence of intensive farming with modern equipment. This may have destroyed any signs of a previous track way.

In the 18th century, every parish was responsible by law for maintaining and repairing roads in their area. In reality these roads were often little more than dirt tracks, which were sometimes impassable in poor weather. The roads around Shocklach do not appear to have been well looked after. Scratched with a diamond ring on the east window of St Edith's Church is the following, "*I Robt. Aldersey was here the 31st day of Oct. 1756 along with John Massie and Mr. Derbyshire. N.B. The roads were so bad we were in danger of our lives.*"[14]

Details of path and road repairs are recorded in the Shocklach Church Wardens' accounts[15]. In 1743, flagging from the church gates to the stable was put down, no doubt to prevent parishioners from getting muddy whilst walking from the stable to the church. In 1813 there was a Parochial Visitation inspecting St Edith's Church at which Reverend Unwin Clarke ordered the church and chancel to be *cieled*[16] and "other necessary matters" to be addressed[17]. 1813 was when Church Lane "*was first Gravelled by the Parish and a gravel road through the Parish nearby was completed*"[18]. Perhaps the gravelling was one of the necessary matters suggested by the inspection. May be it was felt that improved access was needed to the church at a time when the population of Shocklach was increasing[19].

What is not made clear is either the positioning of Church Lane or where exactly the gravel road through the parish was situated. Presumably gravel was laid on what is now known as Church Road with its right-angled bends. An improved road surface may then have meant that this became the primary route to St Edith's and other tracks became obsolete. Gravelling would certainly have made it easier for parishioners to get to and from the church from the main road (the present Worthenbury Road), giving improved access for horses and carriages especially[20]. If the current Church Road was indeed constructed and/or improved at this time, its

12 Richards, Raymond: *Old Cheshire Churches. A survey of their history, fabric and furniture with records of the older monuments*, E J Morten, Didsbury, 1973, Appendix X, p428.
13 Richards, Old Cheshire Churches, Appendix X, p429.
14 Richards, Old Cheshire Churches, p295.
15 Shocklach Church Warden's Accounts 1725-1835, Cheshire Archives and Local Studies.
16 *cieled* means to cover with a lining of wood or plaster. Source: Oxford English Dictionary.
17 St Edith's Parish Bundle, Microfilm 116, Cheshire Archives and Local Studies.
18 St Edith's Parish Bundle, Microfilm 116, Cheshire Archives and Local Studies.
19 The period 1781-1841 saw a steady rise in the population of Church Shocklach and Shocklach Oviatt. Source: Bird, P., Chapter 5, p176-178.
20 The main road running through Shocklach is unclassified and, according to the property deeds of local residents, does not have a name. The southern section of the road is known as Purser Lane. Part of the northern section of the road may also have been known as Purser Lane in the past. Cheshire West and Chester Council refer to the northern part of the road as Worthenbury Road. Information obtained from Shocklach resident Alison Macchi, July 2016

positioning makes more sense as it leads directly from the main road to the stable, which would have been built by this time. It has also been suggested that Shocklach cross may have stood here before being moved to its present location in the churchyard.

The field on the corner on the left-hand side as you turn into Church Lane from the main road through Shocklach, named Corner Field on the 1839 tithe map, was owned by the Puleston family, the dominant landowner in Shocklach Oviatt. It would have been in their interests for Church Road to be sited in its present position since their approach to the church would be from the south and east. Perhaps the Puleston family, as patrons of St Edith's, donated money to the church to help with the huge cost of gravelling Church Road in 1813 and possibly had a say in the precise route of the lane/road. The Pulestons certainly donated to the church and parish after this date. Richard Puleston donated a new pulpit cloth and crimson Communion table cloth in 1820[21]. Then, in 1825, Sir Richard Puleston paid for a road bridge, thought to be on the road from Shocklach to Horton Green, to be prepared for carriages[22].

Other landowners who may have been involved with the construction of Church Road or the alteration of fields around St Edith's are the Tyrwhitt Drake family. By the start of the 20th century, ten landowners owned 55% of the land in south-west Cheshire. The largest landowner was the Tyrwhitt Drake family, with 19% of the land[23]. A 1787 estate map showing Grafton and parts of Tilston, Stretton and Shocklach shows the Tyrwhitt Drake family owning fields in the north and east of Church Shocklach parish[24]. The 1839 tithe map reveals that Tyrwhitt Drake owned some of the fields surrounding St Edith's, including: Great Church Croft, Little Church Croft, Barn Field and Marl Field. There may have been an agreement between Tyrwhitt Drake and the church regarding the reorganisation of these fields. Any agreement drawn up may have been unofficial or may not have survived. In subsequent years, the Tyrwhitt Drake family granted extensions of land to St Edith's church, both in 1905 and again by Edward Thomas Tyrwhitt Drake in 1922[25]. Perhaps this was partly due to the fact that the Tyrwhitt Drake family may have received extra land from the church in Near Church Croft and Church Field when these fields were previously altered in size.

Burdett's 1777 map clearly shows a track way leading eastwards just north of St Edith's Church and the absence of Church Road with its right-angled bends. Changes in land ownership and field names, surviving documents and records and old newspaper articles provide additional, if circumstantial, evidence that supports the possibility of this old track way. The modern Church Road may not have been constructed at all until 1813. Alternatively there may have been two parallel tracks, with Church Road becoming the dominant route after it was gravelled, causing the suggested track way north of St Edith's and leading east to go out of use. Unfortunately, however, any vestiges of this former track may have been damaged due to intensive ploughing.

21 St Edith's Parish Bundle, microfilm 116, Cheshire Archives and Local Studies.
22 Bird, P., Chapter 6, p226.
23 Bird, P., Chapter 4 , p88-90.
24 Map of Estates in Grafton, Tilston, Stretton and Shocklach, 1787, reference DDX588/1 and DDX588/2, Cheshire Archives and Local Studies.
25 www.tilstonandshocklachchurch.co.uk/index.php/history.