

Objection to Harleyford Aggregates: Archæology

As yet there has been no official archæological survey published on the Lower Hall (Grade II listed) area of Samlesbury, yet we believe that there is more history to be learnt here than at the eastern end of the parish, where the Grade I listed Higher Hall is situated. Historically, Lower Hall is a very important part of Samlesbury, and there are a number of reasons why Harleyford Aggregates must not be allowed to develop this site.

Early migrants and raiding parties used the inland waterways more than the roads, so the level riparian lands would be some of the earliest to be settled, and evidence may well have been left behind them. Indeed, a few items have already turned up whilst ploughing, eg. cobbles, pieces of pottery, and mosaic tiles.

Samlesbury would have been an admirable site for the Angles to settle, because they were a very superstitious people who initially avoided the deserted Roman stations, and Samlesbury lies between two – Ribchester and Walton-le-Dale.

Unfortunately our first records date only from Norman times when of the local lord, Cospatic de Samlesbury lived here in the mid-to-late 12th century. His home would be in the vicinity of the present Lower Hall, and it may have been he who was responsible for replacing an earlier timber-framed Saxon chapel with the stone Grade I listed church of St. Leonard's-the-Less c1186. He may also have instated the ferry service.



Lower Hall farmland occupies the whole flood plain lying within the Ribble's *Horseshoe Bend*, and its boundaries are roughly one mile long and a quarter of a mile wide.

Sketch of the Horse Shoe Bend and Lower Hall land in 1854.

The photograph below proves that this is prime agricultural land, capable of producing arable crops.

There were fords at both sides of the Bend, close to the ends of the wooded banking. They were part of a well used east-west route from Ribchester and Elston (on the left side of the photograph), to Brockholes and Preston which lie to the right (off the photograph). The latter ford can still be seen when the water is low. Dean and Potter Lanes would extend over the proposed quarry site and link with the lane connecting the fords.



A modern photograph of Lower Hall land and the site of the old sand and gravel quarry.

For approximately ten years in the 1920s/1930s the *Ribble Sand and Gravel Co. Ltd.* had their dredging plant at the bottom of the Bend. Folk memories recall that the company was bankrupted by its inferior product, but during quarrying operations, many large dressed stones were brought to the surface, and eventually foundations were revealed that indicated the remains of a structure some 38ft. square. It was suggested that it was perhaps the remains of a small peel tower, because the Anglo-Saxon suffix '*bury*,' denotes a defensive place that would give some protection, but could not hold out against a sustained attack.

In 1322 the Earl of Lancaster rebelled against Edward II and for a time Lancashire was in a state of anarchy. During the civil unrest, the Lower Hall was raided twice. The first assault was carried out by a deputy sheriff acting under pretence of a Royal Warrant, and he removed armaments, farm implements, domestic items and grain to the value of £9 6s 0d..

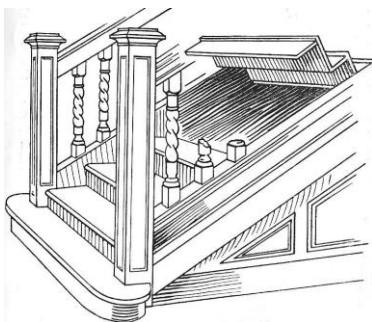
The second attack occurred in the mid-summer when *Robert the Bruce* (presumably encouraged by the civil unrest), led a raid into England, pillaging his way as far south as Samlesbury. Here he removed the contents of Lower Hall's armoury (including 100 lances), appropriated 18 oxen, domestic utensils and bedding, before firing the place and going on to steal vestments, chalice, missal and psalter from the chapel. At least one man is known to have been killed, and the total value of stolen items in the Scots' raid came to £30 11s. 10d.. The 'sudden coming' of the Scots had taken everyone by surprise.

1612 saw a (Roman Catholic) priest, Christopher Southworth falsely accusing three women of practicing witchcraft. One of them was Jane, the recent widow of John Southworth, heir to the lordship of the manor. The family lived at Lower Hall and had joined the reformed Church. Some of the alleged deeds were done in that vicinity, but fortunately the Judge of Assize saw through the perjury and *the famous witches of Samlesbury* were acquitted.

An epidemic (probably typhus), swept the country between 1622 and 1624. It must have reached Samlesbury by the Spring of 1623, because from then until February 1624, at least 42 burials took place – a dramatic increase. Perhaps it was then that the centre of the population moved away from the Lower Hall area, because we understand that it is a deserted village.

St. John Southworth is also believed to have been born at Lower Hall. He was the last Secular priest to be executed under the sentence of high treason at Tyburn in 1654, and the only one to be executed under Cromwell.

c1623 the Hall was bought by Thomas Walmesley, and he built a new house. The Walmesleys were sympathetic to the Church of Rome, and a domestic chapel dedicated to St. Chad was included at the back of the house, where all the local Roman Catholics were able to worship. It was abandoned in the early 19th century when river erosion rendered it unsafe, but there were still traces of the altar and look-out holes in 1871, plus a clever hiding place under the stairs.



The secret hiding place beneath the 5th and 6th stair treads.

In 1936 bare walls of the reputed look-out tower were still standing 'a little to the west of the ruined Hall,' and there are legendary stories of baptisms once held at Marsden Well, and secret Masses in the remote recesses of near-by woods.



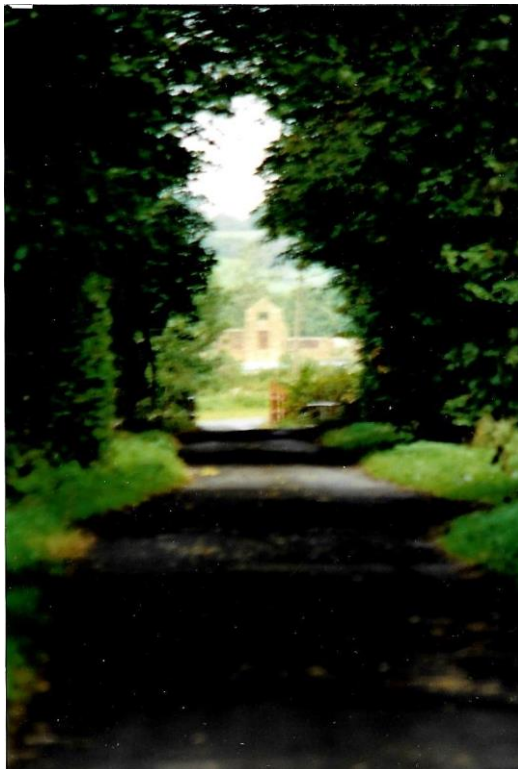
The Grade II listed ruin of an earlier Lower Hall dating from 1623

Two engraved stones, one etched with a heart and the abbreviation *SHJ*. (Sacred Heart of Jesus), are incorporated into the garden wall, and St. Chad's Mission hosted several Episcopal Visitations in the 18th century. That in 1709 lasted for three days, when very many children were confirmed by their Bishop.

Lower Hall is approached by an avenue of ancient lime trees. It is almost ¼ mile long and is believed to have a Tree Protection Order on it.



The avenue of ancient lime trees, which branches off from the original line of Potter Lane, at a point a little over ¼ mile from Lower Hall.



The lime avenue framing the front of the Hall

The topmost window of the Hall was visible from the end of the Avenue and if it contained a lighted 'duck' lamp, it was a sign that Mass was going to be celebrated.

During the civil wars the Battle of Preston (August 1648), was of more consequence than any of the others, and King Charles lamented that the Royalist defeat was 'the worst news that ever came to England.'

The early part of the fight on Ribbleton Moor however, must have spilled across the river into Samlesbury, because over the years large quantities of musket balls have been gathered from Lower Hall and the riverside farms. It is claimed that Colonel Dean chased some English Royalists across the river, and a skirmish took place next to the Lower Hall boundary, on what is known as Dean Lane. Several men were killed.



Musket balls found next to Lower Hall boundary.

In 1936 Robert Eaton (local historian and founder trustee of Samlesbury Higher Hall), wrote in his *History of Samlesbury*:

Over all the Lower Hall flats extending quite to Cuerdale boundary are spread unmistakable evidences of numerous long-forgotten settlements and dwellings, now razed to the ground.

Eaton also mentions an old river terrace where:

...on its edge nearest the river are sunken foundations of long-vanished buildings, and some of the stones of the nearby field walls probably were once part of the buildings of Lower Hall.

The remains of a red sandstone wall still encloses a forty acre area of gardens and orchards from earlier times.



Some of the wall which may be part of an earlier building.

It is understood that a covenant was placed on this area on 11th November 1966.



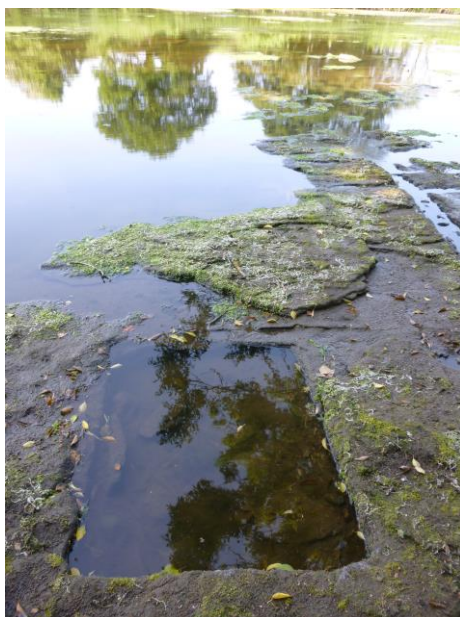
← *Uneven ground near the centre of the picture suggests that the earth there has been disturbed in the past.*

According to oral tradition, all stone needed for early buildings in the neighbourhood was taken from the river, and certainly there is a channel in the river bed running about ¼ mile upstream from Lower Hall. Was this the quarry? There is no other sign of one on either side of the river.

The present channel→ (which was called 'the Bezza Troughs' in the 19th century).



There are also thirteen large post holes across the river bed, which still contained rotting oak posts in the latter part of the 19th century. They may have supported a bridge over the river, or given access to the channel.



Another theory is that they may have been something to do with a 16th century weir, because records show that by 1580 there were so many obstructions along the Ribble, Special Commissioners were sent to survey the weirs and obstacles. According to ancient custom there had to be a pass/gap in the weirs large enough 'for a sow with her five little pigs to enter,' (which gave the salmon an unimpeded run to their spawning grounds).

←One of the post holes. It measures approximately 3ft x 3ft 6 in.

The Commissioners' report on a weir near to Lower Hall was damning:-

one call, wear or gorse made about 18 years ago upon the water of Ryble called Bessowe [Bezza] call in such a place as heretofore there hath not been any erected and that the same call is so high and so close that salmon and salmon fry cannot have their free passage or course...and that the said call doth stop the water that none can pass over at an usual fourth above the said call which Fourth is a mile or thereabouts distant.

The Commissioners may not have taken action at that time, but an order was certainly given for its demolition in 1679.

A short distance away, earthworks indicate the possible site of a 'much mutilated,' motte and bailey castle.



The possible site of a 'motte and bailey' castle.



It is clear that the area deserves a thorough investigation.