

## The Early History

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The tale of Shrawley in early times is the tale of a Ford and a Wood.

A ford which was more negotiable, more easily crossed, than any for some distance up and down the river Severn. Before the days of locks, and before the days of bridges, the road from Ombersley, and probably Droitwich also led down to this ford; and across it on the other side, there was gradually made a clearing in the dense forest and a little village sprang into being. Possibly the indispensable salt was taken along this way, in the earliest times, into the far west; and possibly Caractacus and his tribesmen fought with the Romans on the Shrawley river bank and kept guard from the top of the fortification on the high mound which still commands the ford, there being evidence of some early battle in the shape of bones of men and horses found buried in the river bank. But this is all in the realms of perhaps.

Perhaps, some day, that steep embankment which guards the crossing will give up some of the story of those dark, unrecorded ages.

Then after the Britons had fought across our ford with each other, and then the Romans had tramped and splashed peacefully across it for centuries and then finally departed, the Saxons came along, burning and destroying and driving the "Welshmen" further and further west. They must have pushed across the ford and taken possession of this little bit of west bank of Severne and given it the present name Shaw, or Shrawley (Shrawley wooded pastures).

And then the tale goes on and tells how the Saxons again, in their turn, kept guard by the ford, dreading the appearance of "the long ships" of the sea rovers, the hated Danes, to prevent their landing at this little forest clearing.

But all in vain: for Shrawley must have been deplorably harried with the rest of the Doddingtree hundred by the savage Earl Hakon. There is one other trace of those early Saxon days in Shrawley, which is the place named Dodoak, now just a name of a house, which no doubt commemorates some remarkable oak tree which marked a spot on the boundary of the hundred of Doddingtree, possibly both in the overlordship of a Saxon called Dod or Dodo. The Saxons came to stay and have left the mark of their ownership and holding and seizing on all the village names round about.

With the Norman conquest, Shrawley came under the overlordship of Ralph de Toni, the Conqueror's standard-bearer, who fought in the ranks at Hastings, and in reward for his valour and services was accorded the hundred of Doddingtree; and all the fair lands, and stout Saxons appertaining thereto, for his liegemen. There is no actual mention of Shrawley in the Domesday Book. Again, history is dumb. And who was the lord who lived, if any did at the castle on the mound by the river (now known as Oliver's Mound), we shall never know. The name "Poher" occurs as tenant of the overlord. This name sounds Norman, too. Perhaps the Pohers



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were the residential squires of that time.

Round about the year 1100, the earliest parts of our existing Parish Church were built, probably succeeding an earlier one, the “olde decayed chapel”, which Habingdon saw when he surveyed Shrawley in the early 17th century, which perhaps was the Church of the Saxon forefathers of the village. Our Church is perched upon a ridge, backing the wood, and Habingdon likens it to a lanthorn, emerging, as it must have done, from woodlands on every side.

Through Ralph de Toni, or Tony, as he is sometimes called, Shrawley fell by marriage to the Beauchamps, the great family of the manor of her neighbour Holt, who placed their coat of arms up in the east window of the little church and probably also contributed to the fabric and improvement. It would not seem, however, that the Beauchamps ever lived here; and whether Shrawley in its accustomed isolation, shut off by its river and forests and hills, escaped the troubles of Stephen's time, and how it fared in “the Black Death” of all this silence. An ancient unlettered tombstone - out of place - said by the learned to be of date about 1200, is the only fragment cast up to us from that time.

Subsequently, through marriage, Shrawley passed to the great Earl of Warwick, the Kingmaker, who died attainted on the field of Barnet for once fighting on the losing side, and so the hundred of Doddingtree, as the heritage of a traitor, passed to the Crown. From this period emerges one John Rawlings, an early rector of Shrawley, whose portrait appeared, as seen by Habingdon, on the east window - a priest praying with the accompanying words: “Orate pro anima: domini Johannis Rawlings qui istam ecclesiae fenestram fieri fecit 1462 - 1471.” What of him during those nine years? Was he like Chaucer's “poor parson”, or was he a self-indulgent, overriding, deluded, ante-reformation cleric? Did he live a mile away from the church, on the site of the present rectory, or had he a little cottage in the churchyard? When he prayed and served at the altar in his little Norman chancel, with the sunlight coming through the tinted shields of the Beauchamps, it was mainly the same church that we see every Sunday now. The font was there, but no gallery and no pews, and our carved oak pulpit was added later. The present tower was built in the next century.

The curtain falls, the shadowy figure disappears, and doubtless the window and the kneeling priestly form with its pathetic appeal “Pray for the soul of John Rawlings”, fell a prey to the fanatical fury of Cromwells soldiers, and the Beauchamp memorials with it. At the time of the next recorded visit to our church they had all disappeared. The village cross standing hard by the church must have decapitated by the same hands. It is now turned into a sundial.

The church registers start in 1537. We may suppose it to be one of the many new arrangements brought into effect at the reformation. The books starts thus: “A book of register made in the 29th year of the reign of King Henry VIII of most blessed memory, of all the christenings, weddings, and buryings within the parish of Shrawley that time

being parson Richard Tandy.” Further on we see “Richard “Tandy” being married to a “Margery Arden”. Perhaps this same rector, taking advantage of the new order of things in the church which allowed a priest to have a wife.

The names of Stone, Martin, Tolley, Severne, Thrupp, Spragg, Bartlam and the rather extraordinary one of Herbage, are of frequent occurrence in these early registers. Two of these, at any rate, have remained to the present day. Also the name of Yarranton is constantly met with. Shrawley may claim a share in the great 17th century ironmaster and engineer, Andrew Yarranton. His forebears seem to have lived in the 16th century at Glazenbridge, just on the border between Shrawley and Astley. The flood of 1924, which swept away the dam and the bridge of Glazenbrook, revealed one of Andrew Yarranton's\* blast furnaces. He would find in that spot the needed water power and also forest timber in large quantities to feed his furnaces. A great deal of beautiful woodland must have fallen to his axe. He seems to have lived before his time and to have initiated great engineering schemes which were not understood or appreciated till long after; and he died a disappointed, poor, and apparently unsuccessful man. The name of Lancelot Yarranton, described as a haberdasher of hats of Worcester, appears later in an old deed, selling a much mortgaged Shrawley property; perhaps Andrew's son or nephew. This seems to be the last connection with the family. \*(see further details of Yarranton in Shrawley thro the Ages)

After being in the possession of the Crown some half century, King Henry VIII presented the manor of Shrawley to one, Shelldon, and later the names of Rotherham and Adams occur, who probably inherited by marriage.

At the time of the Civil war, the manor of Shrawley was divided; William Chylde being possessed of the woods and John Adams of the other part of the village. In fact, there must have been then two hamlets. The original one down



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by the ford on the river, described as seen on an old map, as "Great Shrawley", the other one straggling at the foot of the hill which is surmounted by the Church and village cross.

William Chylde was an ardent royalist and (according to tradition) held his castle, down by the ford, against Cromwell's army who bombarded it from a field on the other side of the river (known as Battle Meadow) with disastrous effect and also engaged at close quarters in the woods, from tales told of bullets found hidden in branches of old trees. For all this William Chylde had to pay a large indemnity in cash to the Parliament Party.

The Chylde family, although described as of Northwick, appear to have lived in Shrawley. Whether at the castle, previous to its destruction, or elsewhere - that is a mystery unsolved still. William Chylde, Esq., appears, entered very briefly in the parish register, as buried in 1656. We search the register in vain for any intimation of how the village of Shrawley thought and acted in these stirring times. There are two or three entries of soldiers, described as such, being buried, which rather conveys the impression that they were not parishioners, and were, perhaps, fighting against the men of Shrawley. Also, at the beginning of the war, Shrawley had a rector who, if one may judge from the writing, was a fine, educated gentleman of the name of Luddington, who kept the registers in copperplate script, which comes to an end and registers are in a different writing and kept by a layman - the banns are asked from the market place of Worcester, and instead of children being baptized, they are just entered as being born.

In 1681, Thomas Chylde, having acquired the whole of the manor of Shrawley, sold it to Alan Cliffe, who sold it again in 1700. The Cliffe family seems to have been established in Shrawley for some time, and to have been connected with the Tolley family. We hear of both families as being at Dodoak.

In 1700, Shrawley came into the possession of the Vernon family of Hanbury, who have been lords of the manor ever since. This family has also given us several rectors.

To about this date belongs a quaint request from a Rector of Shrawley of the name of Edward Burlton; who left the sum of £40 to be vested in a perpetual mortgage on a certain meadow then known as "Isabel Clarke's meadow", now known to the villagers as the "School meadow" - the rent of of £2 a year to be used, as the deed phrases it, for the "washing and education" of five needy boys and girls of Shrawley. It would, indeed, just about pay the weekly Dame school fee of those times of twopence per scholar. One Richard Stone received the £40.

The Severnes were an old family, very long established in Shrawley. They lived high up, overlooking the river, at a place with the quaint old name of "Cockbaylis". It was rebuilt and renamed some hundred years ago by one of the Vernon family. It is now known as Severn Bank House - a passing beautiful situation.

About this time, 1700, the Bourne family settled in Shrawley. They lived in a house that was then known as "Shrawley Court", and which is now called the

"Court Farm". We do not know whether this house succeeded the one on Oliver's Mount as the Court. The last member of this family, residing in Shrawley died in 1856. She was, as the tablet in the Church records, "very good to the poor in Shrawley" and left them several bequests. But primarily the villagers of Shrawley have need to be grateful to the Vernon family: and of late years to Mr. and Mrs. Allan.

We are now getting on to times of which we have heard tell from our parents, and times which we can remember ourselves - we older ones. Shrawley has been so cut off from the busy world until lately; old customs and manners have remained long. Till a few years ago, Shrawley was only served by a carrier once a week, and those of us who kept no beast of burden in the shape of a horse or donkey were bound to trust to our own legs to carry us out into the busy world - to Worcester or Kidderminster. The letters were brought to Holt by the Ludlow mail and had to be sent for from there. We had more shops then, two butchers amongst them.

At church we had for music a barrel organ, afterwards replaced by a very small orchestra consisting of a flute and fiddle, somewhat thin and shrill it must have been. About sixty years ago the East wall of the church was rebuilt and the dividing arch between chancel and knave was put in. It is now a round one, no doubt chosen to be consistent with the Norman chancel. It used to be acutely pointed. The dames' schools have been replaced by an up-to-date church school, for which there is no need of the Rev. Edward Burlton's kind bequest to help poor little Shrawley scholars, and where our children and grandchildren play on the green under the beautiful trees on the outskirts of Shrawley wood, and under the shadow of the memorial which keeps fresh the memory of so many, alas! of our brave boys.

We older ones can remember merry dances on the green to the tune of blind Abel Spragg's fiddle-playing and singing, and whose tunes have been immortalised by Mr Julius Harrison. We used to dance on the green at Ford's corner. At the side was the old pound and stocks. Some of us can remember some unfortunate reveller being clamped in them.

We wish our girls and boys could know how jolly were those old English dances: the "Old Severn" and the "New Severn" and the Gallopede. The two former were danced in two long lines, something like Sir Roger de Coverley: but they were cast aside for the polka and waltz, and now, in these days, they in their turn have given place to \*\*\*\*\* jigs and the foxtrot and Charleston.

On the fifth of November there was a Wake held down by Oliver's Mount, at the Wyre Inn by Severn. In those days there were several farmhouses down there and a brick works, also the keeper's cottage. It was quite an important part of the village. The Wyre was the principal tavern with a fine bowling alley.

The Ombersley men, at the close of a social evening, used not to wait for the ferry, but would walk across the river with the greatest ease.

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There was a special Shrawley cake sold at the Wake, which was something like Banbury cake. We had many more handicrafts and industries in those days. After the forge was done away with at Glazenbridge, some sort of pottery was made there, and they used to grind alabaster which was brought by boat along the Severn. In several places, power was supplied by windmills, notably for wood-turning, of which a good deal has been done at one time and another. Shrawley clay has been used largely for making bricks. There have been brick kilns in several places in the village. Shrawley bricks are a beautiful rosy red colour, and of very fine texture. We see them used in our old village half-timbered houses to replace the original wattle and daub between the old black oak.

We did, of course, all our own work in the village, our shoemaking, smithying, basket making, clothes and candle making, wheat growing, threshing, milling and baking. Also, there was much glove stitching done for the Worcester factory.

Now in these late years our village life has changed. The 'buses and wireless have brought the busy world to our doors. The Women's Institute started seven years ago by Mrs. Allan, who is still our much-honoured President, is helping us to make the very most of our lives. Our industries, except the real one of agriculture, have all gone. Our lives are all bounded by the all-engrossing cares of producing, tending and marketing. Yet Shrawley, hidden away between her wood and the tumbled hills, is still withdrawn from the world outside to a great extent, and is content to follow its own concerns. Governments may come

and go, and decisions of world-wide importance be taken, but nothing disturbs the peace of our community so much as a Parish Council Election.

