

## **Alderley Edge, Bramhall, and Woodford Three Rural Areas in North Cheshire contrasted 1841 to 1871**

During 1841 the Manchester and Birmingham Railway company was part-way through building its line from Manchester to Crewe. Manchester to Stockport was completed and opened in 1840 but Stockport to Crewe via Wilmslow and Sandbach was a work in progress.

The original plan of the line had plotted a course from Wilmslow to Stoke on Trent with a junction a mile or so south of Wilmslow in the township of Chorley with a branch-line going to Crewe. In the event, due to a national recession leading to a shortage of investment from the public, the longer line to Stoke and beyond was abandoned and the line to Crewe was the main and only line built. However, Chorley township still got its station and it is the station now known as Alderley Edge. The Stockport to Crewe line was opened in 1842

A branch line from Cheadle Hulme to Macclesfield was completed in 1845 and this gave Bramhall a railway station. As for Woodford it never got either a railway or a station.

### **1841 Comparison**

#### **a) Alderley Edge/Chorley**

At the 1841 census, in the Chorley township of Wilmslow there were 91 dwellings with 561 people in them. Of those 73 or so were lodging navvies engaged on building the railway, which gives a population of 488 natives.

The township was the most southerly of the four Wilmslow townships and named for the old manor of Chorley. [Chorley Old Hall dates back to the 1300s]

The majority of its resident workers were engaged in agriculture, handloom cotton weaving being the second most popular occupation.

There was no village in the township but a scattering of farmhouses and clusters of cottages, some forming named hamlets eg Chorley.

#### **b) Bramhall**

For the purposes of this report "Bramhall" means the area covered by today's Bramhall as defined by postal address. In 1841 it was part of the township of Bramhall, originally a subdivision of the parish of St Mary, Stockport.

In 1841 Bramhall had a population about 80% the size of Chorley at 416 in 66 dwellings.

The majority of its workers were engaged in agriculture and the second most popular occupation was the cottage industry of handloom silk weaving.

As with Chorley, there was no village but clusters of cottages some of which were named hamlets and also scattered farms and cottages.

#### **c) Woodford**

Woodford was the northernmost township of the geographically huge parish of Prestbury and in 1841 was home to 554 people in 98 dwellings..

As with AE and B, it was mostly agricultural with a cottage industry of hand loom weaving (of silk, the same as Bramhall). However where it differed from the other two places, was that in 1837 a calico printing works had been opened on the river Dean (near the Deanwater) which employed between 150 and 200 people 81 of whom lived in Woodford on the 1841 census.

Cottages had been built in Woodford to house some of the workforce.

All three places had a public house, the Lamb Inn in Bramhall on Woodford Road (now private houses) and the Trafford Arms in Chorley, on the site of today's de Trafford Arms in Alderley Edge and the Thief's Neck (now the Davenport Arms) in Woodford.

Bramhall had a manor house, Bramhall Hall, although in 1841 it was rented out, the Davenports having retired to Cheltenham for a few years, said to be because of financial difficulties. The major landowner was the Trafford family who were residents of Trafford Park, Lancashire. The Davenports of Capesthorne were the major landowners in Woodford.

### **Recap on railways**

The national railway network started in the mid 1820s with the opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway. The Liverpool Manchester Railway, opened in 1830, was the first to connect two major centres and the first to rely solely on steam locomotives to pull the trains.

Between 1834 and 1838 two more major railways were being built, one from London to Birmingham and the second from Birmingham up to a junction half way along the Liverpool Manchester railway. From the late 1820s onwards there was an explosion of railway proposals especially in the 1840s after the three major railways opened in the 1830s had proved themselves very profitable, but few lines had been opened by 1840. In 1842 the railways were therefore still rather novel.

### **Opening of the Manchester and Birmingham railway**

And then the line as far as Sandbach (on the way to Crewe) was ready for opening in May 1842. In anticipation of this, in the April, the Manchester Times and Gazette put out two articles describing what a passenger would be able to see from the train on either side. The first article covered Stockport to Alderley, the second from Alderley to Crewe. The writer says:

The principal advantage the line offers to the commercial community is the much shorter route it presents (and saving of time consequent) for travelling to Birmingham and London; the source of gratification it offers to the middle and working classes will be found in the easy access it will afford to pic-nic parties and persons bent on pleasure in visiting some of the most romantic scenery in the neighbourhood. We refer in particular to Alderley Edge and its neighbourhood. .... It is probable that the directors will hold out the temptation of moderate fares, while the distance, calculating it by time will be within half an hour.

He goes on to recommend the traveller to alight at Chorley station (the station nearest to Alderley Edge) and, if not part of a picnic party to arrange refreshments from "mine host" at the Trafford Arms and to acquire a guide from there.

And did the writer's predictions prove accurate? In relation to cutting journey times from Manchester to London, the saving in distance was about 15 miles. When the line was first proposed in 1834, train speeds over a long journey could be expected to average about 20 mph (including stops. So a journey to London could take just over 9 hours rather than almost 10 hours. By the time the railway was opened in 1842 average journey speeds of over 30 mph could be obtained. Still a saving, just not quite as significant.

As regards the seekers of pleasure being able to travel to Alderley Edge at reduced fares he was very right indeed. [The early standard railway fares were about 3d per mile 1<sup>st</sup> class, 2d per mile 2<sup>nd</sup> class and 1d per mile 3<sup>rd</sup> class. Special outings from Manchester to Alderley Edge came to be charged at 1s 6d return or even less rather than the 2/2, 3/3 or 4/4 under the standard rate.]

Examples of the popularity of excursions can be found by looking at reports in the Manchester Times and Gazette newspapers of 1844, where the following news items are included:

### **Sunday Schools Outing – May 1844**

A special train comprising between 70 and 80 third class carriages and luggage waggons was used to convey about 4,000 Sunday school scholars and their teachers from Manchester to Alderley. There were Sunday schools of various denominations taking part and the train was seen off by about 1,000 spectators. There was a special reduced rate charged by the railway company, but the newspaper article does not specify what it was.

### **A passenger fatality – September 1844**

This occurred during a trip from Manchester to Alderley for 3,000 people. They were conveyed in goods waggons and trucks which had no doors in the sides. At Manchester, stepladders were provided to enable the passengers to climb in. At Alderley there were no such facilities and no platforms. The passengers had therefore to clamber up at the end of the trucks and get down after standing on the chain that joined the trucks. A woman passenger was thrown under the wheels and killed when the train jerked forward just as she was climbing down.

The newspaper reporter deplored the accident but also the fact that although the railway could bring large numbers of people to Alderley Edge, there were no facilities to help with their enjoyment when they got there. [The Queen's Hotel, built by the railway company was opened the following year]

### **Mr Orrell's mill outing – June 1844**

Alfred Orrell was a cotton mill owner of Stockport and well-to-do with it. In 1842, his mill was reported to employ 846 females and 418 males. In June 1844 he hosted a day out at Alderley for all his workers. It was reported in the press that the party marched up from the mill to Heaton Norris station accompanied by two bands.

The train comprised 3 first class and 22 second class carriages, A party of ladies, including Mr Orrell's sister travelled in the first class carriages. The railway company was understood by the newspaper to have charged Mr Orrell 6d per head for the return trip, which was what it charged Sunday school parties.

For refreshments, Mr Orrell provided every worker on the excursion with a bun weighing 1lb and 30 lb of tea was taken. He also provided six fiddles (does it mean six fiddlers?) and the mill hands entertained themselves principally by dancing when they were at Alderley.

They set off on the outward journey from Stockport at 2 in the afternoon and caught their return train at 9 o'clock in the evening.

Mr Orrell took his hands to Alderley again in 1845 and in 1846, but by then his behaviour was old hat and merited a mere one line snippet in the newspaper.

### **The development of the three communities 1841 - 1855**

Chorley got the railway in 1842 and Bramhall in 1845; Chorley was on the direct line to London and Bramhall was on a branch line. Woodford wasn't on a line. How were they each affected in the period from 1841 to 1855?

#### **1. Chorley**

This township was radically affected by the railway. Absentee landlord Humphrey de Trafford made an agreement with the railway. He would make building plots available near to Chorley station and they would be large plots of 3 – 5 acres in size, suitable for somewhat upmarket clients. The railway would offer free 20 year season tickets to and from Manchester (and stations in between) to those who built a house within a mile of Chorley station and worth more

than £50 pa. [A family living in such a house would likely have an income in excess of £500 p.a and keep more than one servant]. The railway company also undertook to build a suitable hotel near the station.

Twenty nine building plots were made available initially and the first house completed in 1845. The Queen's Hotel by the station was opened in the same year.

In a Gazetteer of Cheshire from 1850, the following was written as part of the entry about Chorley township:

*ALDERLEY EDGE extends into this township, and has become a place of considerable importance, and brought into well-merited notice, from its contiguity to the line of the Manchester and Birmingham section of the North Western Railway. Since the completion of the railway to this place many elegant residences have been built, principally occupied by the merchants of Manchester, invited hither by the fine air, and the extensive and interesting views of the surrounding country. The first house was built here in 1845, since which about thirty very handsome residences have been erected, which are let at the rental of from £100 to £200 per annum..... A very commodious and elegant inn was erected at the station in 1844; it is of red brick, with stone finishings and cost upwards of £6,000."*

The 1851 census records include 22 dwellings in Chorley with two or more domestic servants – with an average for the whole 22 of just over three. There is among them a resident physician who, in addition to his four domestic servants has two “bath servants” which suggests he offered some sort of hydrotherapy treatments.

The population of Chorley as a whole increased from 488 to 803 between 1841 and 1851.

In 1852 an Anglican chapel of ease to serve the inhabitants of Chorley (and in particular “Alderley Edge”) was opened and that building with later extensions is now St Philips church at Alderley Edge.

## **2. Bramhall**

And what happened in Bramhall in the 5 years before and 10 years after getting a station? Bramhall was not a renowned beauty spot, its main road was not a turnpiked road to be kept in good repair and the local major landlord did not make an arrangement with the railway company for free season tickets.

From a study of the local annual poor rates books (at the Stockport Heritage Library) and the censuses it can be found that in 1849 John Lees (cotton merchant of Brinksway, Stockport) moved to Bramhall about where Midland Road is now and built himself “The Grange”, a house which would probably have got him a free season ticket in Alderley.

In 1855 John Carr, a cotton merchant, and his family moved to newly built High Bank House (what is now Hillbrook Grange), but in its first version was estimated as £33 pa.

These were the only two commuters to be found after 10 years.

The population of Bramhall in 1851 was just a few people down on the population 10 years earlier even though there were a few more houses

## **3. Woodford**

In the first 7 years after 1841, Woodford remained busy. A church was built and a school to serve the community. However, in 1848 the calico print works ceased trading and the 1851 census shows the population had reduced by nearly a quarter from 554 to 430, there being no other industry come in.

### **Chorley the next 16 years - 1855 to 1871**

The population of Chorley more than doubled between 1851 and 1861 (from 803 to 1760) and a gazetteer of 1865 describes Alderley Edge as “..now one of the fashionable suburbs of Manchester. Many mansions have been erected.”

The Edge itself continued to be a tourist attraction and guide books were regularly published. One dated 1863 contained adverts for businesses both in Manchester and in Alderley Edge.

By 1865 Alderley Edge had a variety of shops, a post office and savings bank, several resident builders, two resident physicians two Methodist chapels (New Connection and Wesleyan) and an Anglican church. The Queens Hotel could supply coach horses to hire and was “replete with every accommodation for large and small parties”. Indeed, in 1869 when Charles Dickens was touring the country giving readings of his works, for his Manchester engagement he stayed out at Alderley Edge at the Queen's Hotel.

### **Woodford – the next 60 years**

For the rest of the century, the story of Woodford was one of slow decline. Its lowest census population was in 1901 when it stood at just 300.

### **Bramhall the next 14 years – 1855 to 1871**

All that can be reported on development is that in 1865 Bramhall acquired its first shop – Mr Boulderstone's grocers (where Elm Interiors is now) and also in that year John Findlow the stationmaster built his first two “build to let” properties on Ack Lane. The houses were both known as Oak Bank and each estimated as worth £25 pa. They incorporated an attic room and were the sort of house suitable for a family who kept one servant. They were let to business people who probably worked in Manchester, although possibly, Stockport.

By 1871 John Findlow's sister has built Oak Cottage on Ack Lane and let it to a commercial traveller, retired tobacconist William Wood had built himself a house where he and his wife, daughter and woollen merchant son in law lived; Jesse Brunt a clerk from Cheadle Hulme, but turned builder had built his first two cottages (these were for local workers). The 3 houses known as the Villas had been built but only 2 were tenanted by the census date and Henry Glover the new wheelwright had acquired a new house because the retired wheelwright still lived in his old house on Lumb Lane, which was 11 new dwellings from 1864.

The development of Bramhall as a community suitable for commuters was really only just beginning at this point, (John Lees and John Carr may be regarded as aberrations) over 20 years after the railway station was opened. The population of 416 in 1841 increased only to 430 in 1871 which was the 11 new houses counteracting the drift downwards of the agricultural and silk weaving population. The 1870s and 1880s saw about 20 new houses built in each decade and then Bramhall's development really took off in 1894/5. 50 years after the railway came it was time to welcome the commuters in force.

### **Sources**

1. Newspaper reports via the British Newspaper Archive
2. Censuses
3. Poor law rates books at Stockport heritage Library
4. Alderley Edge, A Guide published by Abel Heywood 1863