"CHURCH IN THE FIELD"

Mobberley Quaker Graveyard And Its History



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The Religious Society of Friends was so called as early as 1647, and the name 'Quakers' is thought to have arisen from the physical manifestations of religious emotion characteristic of many of its early members. While small in number the Society occupies to this day a position of singular interest, a form of Christianity widely divergent from the prevalent types, being a religious fellowship which has no formulated creed demanding adherence, no liturgy, priesthood or outward sacrament, no specially consecrated building, and which gives women an equal place with men. Friends believe that the Church is the whole family of those who seek to follow the light of Christ, and in worship they gather in a Meeting House in silent waiting upon the Spirit of God, and if anyone present feels moved by that Spirit to speak or pray aloud, he or she may do so.

The history of Quakerism in England may be divided into three periods: from the first preaching of George Fox in 1647 to the Toleration Act of 1689; from that date to the evangelical movement in 1835 and from 1835 to the present time. George Fox (1624-1691) was the founder of the Society, beginning his ministry in 1647, and there is no evidence that he set out to form a separate religious body. At that time the established Church was extremely intolerant, and even the Puritans who had sought freedom away from the Church created their own sects, built up rules and dogma, and persecuted those who deviated from them, hence from both the established Church and from the Puritan wing, Quakers were opposed and persecuted. Despite this, George Fox went about the country preaching and converting; he was often imprisioned, beaten and stoned, his meetings broken up by soldiers. Contrary to the Puritan preaching of the mid-seventeenth century the Quakers insisted upon the possibility for every individual of complete victory over sin, and this brought Fox and the Friends into conflict with all the religious bodies of England.

The members of the Society refused to pay tithes, kept their hats on in the presence of those considered their superiors, condemned church buildings as mere 'steeple houses', and interrupted church services. Strife was inevitable and was marked by a zeal and bitterness characteristic of the period; consequently Quakers were seen by the authorities as a threat to civil order. When the law had no other case against them they were imprisioned for refusing to take the Oath of Allegiance to the King, although they did not intend disloyalty to the monarch: to take an oath was against their conscience because as they saw it, to do so was to disobey Christ's teaching, "Swear not at all, let your yea be yea and your nay be nay". They believed, and still believe it to be their primary duty not only to follow the divine 'Light' but to respond to it in others, therefore to help those in need and not to use violence or take human life. Quaker tolerance becomes evident in their refusal to participate in war, though they have always helped the victims of war, both friend and enemy, hence although pacifist they are not at all passive. Their devotion to humanitarian work in all aspects of life is widely known.

* * * * *

From its origins Quakerism was strong in the north of England, including Lancashire and Cheshire. Mobberley in Cheshire was one locality where the Friends established early. The parish of Mobberley is a collection of hamlets and farms with some fine early buildings

surviving, including the church of St.Wilfred (14th-15th centuries), but of the earlier 13th century Augustinian priory there is no trace. On the NE outskirts of Mobberley village near Lindow Moss lies an historic feature of great importance, a Quaker graveyard used for burials for some 200 years. The graveyard lies along the lane named after it, Graveyard Lane, which runs between Newton Hall Lane and Moss Lane, Knolls Green, Mobberley, and is surrounded by a stone wall. Graveyard Farm which is passed on the left was built in 1790. It was threatened with decay but restored and for some years occupied by the present (2002) owner of the Quaker Graveyard, John Alfred Davies. Newton Hall, on Newton Hall Lane, was known in 1634 when it was bought by Francis Newton of Stannilands. Originally half-timbered, the oak framework may still be seen incorporated in parts of the present structure probably dating to the end of the 17th century. Several members of the Newton family lie buried in the Quaker graveyard including John (d.1679), Elizabeth (d.1680) and Mary (d.1681).

The first person known to be buried there was Robert Peirson of Pownall Fee, Wilmslow, who died 16th August 1656, the earliest of 397 deceased listed as being interred on the site within an area presently c. 560 square yards, although it is thought that the total number of burials is nearer 500. The graveyard was known as the 'Burrying yard...at Mobberley' and sometimes referred to as 'The old church in the field' despite the fact that there was never a building on that site.

In October 1653 two Quaker 'Publishers of Truth' (as they called themselves), John Lawson and Richard Hubberthorne arrived in Cheshire from Wrexham and found evidence of Quakerism already present in the county. A month later Hubberthorne was thrown into Chester goal, where he met and convinced the Puritan preacher Thomas Yarwood, a Chester shoemaker born in Knutsford. On his release, Yarwood took Quakerism from Chester to Mobberley to "A people who Sometimes met at the house of Richard Yarwood". Active in the promotion of Dissent, Yarwood led a group of Seekers there, a Separatist sect who anticipated the Quakers and frequently merged with them under the charismatic influence of George Fox and his Publishers of Truth. The group at Mobberley, we hear, ".....met Together, neither To preach nor Pray vocally butt to Read the Scriptures and Discourse of Religion, Expecting a farther Manifestation". The Churchwarden's accounts of 1654 state: "paid unto Mr. Daine at the Middlewich for the takeing of four examinations concerning the Quakers 5 - 0d." Middlewich goal was one of several in which Quakers were imprisoned. Another item reads "1656 Distributed by Mr. Brereton, parson and the churchwardens, XXs (20s=£1) which was forfeited by the Quakers for their Saboth breaking, and ordered for the poor of the Parish of Wilmslow".

After the passing of the Quaker Act in 1662, the more comprehensive Conventicle Act was passed in 1664, applying to all Dissenters. It made it illegal for more than four people to meet for worship other than in accordance with the practice of the Anglian church. In the early days of the Society of Friends, many of the Quaker community living in Wilmslow, Morley, Mobberley, Styal, Bowdon, Stockport and district, through fear of persecution met in private houses, a number of which still exist. One such is Yarwood House, Wood Lane, Mobberley, then the Yarwood family home, the family thought to have been the prime movers in establishing the graveyard.

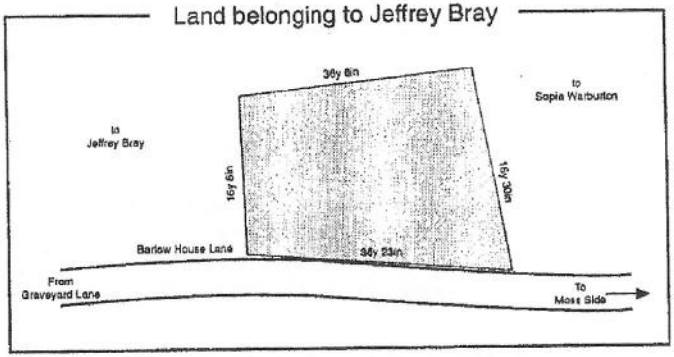
The Act of 1664 led to bitter persecution of the local Friends; when they met for worship in defiance of the two restrictive Acts many had their goods seized and others were committed to the House of Detention at Middlewich. On the first page of the first volume of *The Sufferings of the Cheshire Quakers* is an account of the arrival of troopers on the 3rd July 1665 at a meeting for worship in the house of Edwarde Alcocke of Mobberley. The eighteen worshippers were arrested, imprisoned for two months, released, then re-arrested several times during the same year. Friends who visited them in goal were arrested too, - food passed to prisoners through a window was their only sustenance. In 1684 records state that severe action was taken against members of the Stewart and Bradbury families (Quakers) for being absent from divine service at the Parish Church. This oppression continued until the passing of the Toleration Act of 1689; in 1693 the Friends were granted the lease of a building near to Oversley Ford which was occupied as a Meeting House and remained open for worship until 1831 on land let at a peppercorn rent. It lies on the Altrincham to Wilmslow road at Morley, and later the building became worker's cottages, at one time home to 8 families but more recently modernised, now forming Penn House (see below) and Quaker Cottage, thus preserving the Friends' name within the Township of Morley.



In 1832 a new Meeting House was built, on the same main road, much closer to the centre of Wilmslow, on land sold to the Quakers by the Earl of Warrington for £1. Close to it they constructed a single-storey carriage shed and stables. 50 years later a second storey was added to accommodate a Schoolroom. In the late 1980's the Friends needed to make extensive repairs and modifications to the Meeting House. A scheme was devised to sell the Meeting House and part of the land (including the disused Burial ground) for internal conversion to a number of office suites. The Friends themselves could then convert the Schoolroom, the former carriage shed and stables into a new Meeting House. This was used for worship for the first time on 21st May 1995, still retaining its Grade II* listed status.

By 1669 Quaker Meetings covered an area crescent-shaped, stretching across the north of Cheshire from Frodsham in the west to Stockport in the east and down through Wilmslow, Macclesfield and Nantwich, with other Meetings in Chester, Malpas and several smaller Cheshire market towns. Prior to 1832 when a new Meeting House was built, Wilmslow (Morley) had been rural Quakerism's main survivor in Cheshire.

The Burial Ground Records

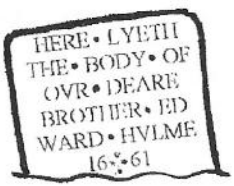


The original documents on parchment relating to Mobberley Burial Ground are preserved in Cheshire County Record Office, Chester. They are: 1) The Declaration of Uses of Mobberley Burial Ground, 24th August 1669. 2) Feoffment of Mobberley Burial Ground 1669. 3) Feoffment of Additional Piece of Ground to Mobberley Burial Ground 1670. 4) Plan of a Burial Ground at Mobberley near Knutsford belonging to Cheshire Monthly Meeting of Friends, 1848 [as shown].

In 1669 a parcel of ground measuring 400 square yards was purchased "for the sum of £3 from Edward Alcocke [Quaker] and others, of Fulshaw, the then owners by Thomas Janney the elder and others, to whom it was conveyed. Some addition was made in 1673 by a purchase by the said Thomas Janney the elder and others, and the whole then consisting of about 560 square yards of freehold land, situated in Mobberley in the county of Chester, was held in trust, for the Society of people called Quakers, as a place for the burial of their dead".
With the acquisition of the 1673 portion of land the graveyard as it is today was completed. Few gravestones remain visible, the earliest in 1994 was DA 1659. Other examples were TS 1697 and RS 1696.









The former belongs to Thomas Strettle, d.22nd April 1697. A larger grave also survives of Thomas Strettle the elder, d.19th April 1756 aged 76. He was the grandson of Hugh Strettle who purchased Saltersley Hall in 1662, married Mary Hulme, and later their two daughters, Anna and Sarah, were the heiresses who sold Saltersley to Thomas Orrell in 1765.
The latter possibly relates to Robert Smith of Styal, d. 2nd April 1696 but he is also included on a large flat stone together with another Robert Smith buried 16th Sep.1765 aged 78.

Mr Alan Dale (b. 1891), a local historian, one time Chairman of Knutsford Historic Society, recorded from official registers the names of 397 Quakers buried at Mobberley, but clearly

the total number interred must have been well in excess of that number since the last burial was in 1848. A handwritten list was sent to Alan Dale by Mary Helen Pemberton, Ohio, USA, giving the deceaseds' age (where known) at death, but the first two burials are missing from the Central Library, Manchester's MSS. Many gravestones appear to have been removed by unauthorised persons. Years ago the Cheshire Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends financed the restoration of the wall around the graveyard and the repair of the entrance gate, and in 1975 the Mobberley Preservation Society decided to organise a complete restoration of the ground. Severable volunteers led mainly by Mr Geoffrey Wilkinson of Mobberley cleared the area of a thick overgrowth of grass and weeds which were strangling the site, planted spring flowers and kept the grass mown for a number of years.

Later History of the Site

The Trust Deeds show that "The Graveyard was sold to John Alfred Davies and Tom Davies" by a conveyance dated 28th April 1977:

'The Vendor *Friends Trusts Ltd.*

Purchasers *John Alfred Davies* of Croft Cottage, Newton Hall Lane, Knolls Green, Mobberley and *Tom Davies* of the Sycamores, Knolls Green, Mobberley.

The Vendor acknowledges receipt from the Purchasers of £... , the purchase price of a plot of land known as Mobberley Burial Ground, Mobberley ('The Property'). Area 560 square yards or thereabouts.

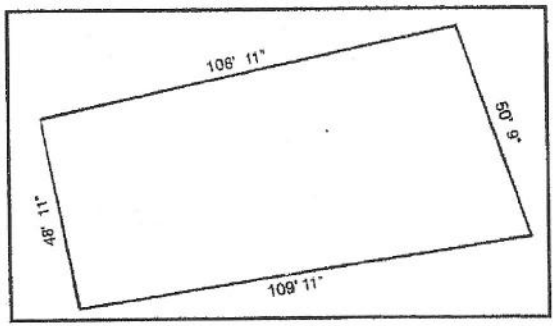
The Purchasers covenant with the Vendor that they and their successors in title will:

a) Use the Property as agricultural land or as a domestic garden only, and in particular that they will not erect any buildings upon the Property in contravention of the Disused Burial Ground Act 1884.

b) That they will at all times be prepared to receive and consider any representatives made by the Council for the Preservation of Rural England or any other public body or the Mobberley Parish Council with regard to the preservation and care of the Burial Ground.

c) That they will retain all existing gravestones within the compass of the Burial Ground and will leave in situ those which are now visible, or will place them in a visible position against the boundary walls'.

With the conveyance is a plan dated October 1976 indicating the dimensions of the graveyard in feet and inches:



At the time of reprinting (2002) only a few flat gravestones and small headstones are still visible. The grass is being kept mown and the upkeep of the plot maintained by John Alfred Davies, who is now the sole owner of the parcel of land. Hopefully the small section, which has become overgrown with saplings and undergrowth, will eventually be cleared. Over the

years, he has spent much money in repairing the wall and removing a few trees which had succumbed to Dutch Elm disease.
A number of other documents in the County Record Office are relevant:
An *Abstract of Title of the Graveyard* prepared for Cobbit Wheeler Cobbett with reference to the encroachment 1872.
A *Charity Commission* document 1972 listing 19 charities administered in connexion with Cheshire Monthly Meeting mentioned amongst other places

The Mobberley Burial Ground.... 1669.
The Macclesfield Meeting House and Burial Ground.... 1705.
The Stockport Meeting House and Trust Property... 1789 and 1960.
The Wilmslow (Morley) Meeting House and Burial Ground... 1831.

* * * * *

The standard of domestic life of the gentry owners of the neighbouring large houses may be gleaned from the probate inventories: one such, Jeffrey Alcocke, a Quaker yeoman of Pownall, d.1729, was worth £493 with £45 in credits, £180 in "money upon mortgage". He had one of the largest head of cattle in the district (36, 16 of them cows) though he kept no sheep, and he had 140 cheeses worth £40. His gravestone is just visible within the wooded area and is illustrated on the cover.

William Norbury (*pseud.* 'Cedric II') was born in Moss Lane in 1827, close by the graveyard, and his earliest recollection reads "When I was a little child I wandered away from the old house and along the road by the burial ground, but my mother soon discovered my absence, and, overtaking me carried me home again rejoicing".
Norbury was by instinct a writer and historian, leaving a simple narration of incidents of local history, 'the chronicler of his age' (he died on 22 July 1910 at the age of 82) and he recalls witnessing many funerals at the Burial Ground noting on one occasion his father and mother placing layers of straw among the overturned earth to prevent body snatching, then still common; and several incidents of this gruesome practice were recorded in Mobberley.

Two houses of historic value to local Quakers are:

HOLLINGEE, Burleyhurst Lane, close to Lindow Moss, said to have been the 'demesne house' of the Radcliffes, originally surrounded by a moat. It was occupied by the Duncalfs in the 16th century and bought from the Radcliffes in 1611 by Randle Blackshaw, the Quaker (b.1626) who succeeded to a somewhat impoverished estate and married Alice Burgess, daughter of Peter Burgess of Wilmslow. They suffered such persecution that in 1683, having sold the property they embarked with their seven young children on the ship '*Submission*' bound for Philadelphia. It is likely that he received some help from Richard Moss as there is a reference in the latter's Will (1633): "And taking into consideration the great affliction and



suffering of many poor and distressed people in the nation commonly called Quakers, I bequeath to such of them in Cheshire who are thought to be objects of charity, £100".

YARWOOD HOUSE, which is situated in Wood Lane, Mobberley, was built by the Yarwood family, freeholders in 1673, an important family known to be associated with the establishment of the Quaker Graveyard. Thomas Yarwood who married Catherine Hewitt of Knutsford in 1627 is buried there. This house is now very close to Manchester Airport's second Runway. A few old buildings were affected. In particular, Hanson House, which has been rebuilt at Withington, Cheshire, and Hillhouse an even better example of a Tudor building, which is being reconstructed (2002) at Nether Alderley.



Some amusing stories are told about the Quakers' antipathy to tithes. On one occasion a Quaker notified the rector that he was gathering apples on the following day; promptly the rector sent round a man with a cart to collect his due of tithe in the fruit. The Quaker gathered ten apples and gave the man one with the remark that he would gather a further ten the next day - the rector received his tenth. The comments of the reverend divine are not recorded.

We are privileged to have such a tangible memorial of Quakerism so near to our parish. It is hoped that this tranquil, still unspoiled corner of our county will be accorded the respect it manifestly deserves after its survival for about 350 years, and indeed more than respect - continuing care and maintenance.

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LOCAL QUAKERS IN COURT

A Postscript

Pamela Savage

The Cheshire Quarter Sessions include many mentions of the Quakers in the latter part of the 17th century which refer to the difficulties and persecutions they underwent at the time. Statements and 'examinations' of many Mobberley Quakers taken in November 1662 speak of the 'unlawful' meetings there.

The sufferings continued from time to time for twenty years with more or less severity and in January 1682 another upsurge in Quakers' appearances before the Quarter Sessions is recorded, the last years of Charles II's reign.

The J.P. Leftwich Oldfield of Leftwich Hall seemed to take upon himself the presenting of Quakers to the presiding magistrates for their various transgressions, "attending unlawful assemblies and conventicles". Many of the men and women so indicted freely admitted to being present at the meetings and chose rather to have their cases heard and tried at the General Sessions or Assizes in Chester. One such was Thomas Buckley, a clothworker of Knutsford who signed his name to the following statement:

> "I, Thomas Buckley of Knutsford stand convicted by Leftwich Oldfield J.P. for being at unlawful assemblies or conventicles of Burial of Alexander Lawrence at the Quaker Burial Place in the Parish of Mobberley, 22nd October last (1681), for then and there hearing a preacher unknown (to him).... in the said Conventicle. I do hereby appeal from the Judgement and Conviction ...unto the next General Sessions for the County, then and there to have a tryall according to the Statute in that case provided". Dated 6 Jan.1682.

The others present at this 'Conventicle' and their fines were also cited. On another occasion Buckley was fined 3s 04d (a typical wage was about 1 shilling a day). It was this conviction that Buckley was appealing against, after which appeal he was put on bail to appear at the Assizes in Chester.

One of the examinations at that time tells exactly how a Quaker burial was conducted: "... a stranger, a certain woman standing by the side of the grave or hole began to speak and teach by way of commendacion of the deceased person and exhortation of the living to follow his example". A practice unchanged for three hundred years.

More conventicles were reported in July 1682, being written at Tabley Hall, and once again in June 1683 when the names of Quakers committed for trial filled two columns.

References: Quarter Sessions Files, Cheshire Record Office: QJF/90/4/96; QJF/109/4/159 and onwards; QJF/110/2; QJF/111/2/133 & 135.

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CHESHIRE LIGHTS

The Quaker Graveyard, Mobberley

'The first 'publishers of light', the original preachers of the Quakers message, were mainly yeomen and craftsmen from the North'. (John Lampen. *If Stones Could Speak).*

A can of Cola rusts;
Pale, shoddy stalks
Obliterate the stone;
No sound obtrudes,
Keep on your hat,
The dead can hear you.

The lettering is Quaker plain,
No message piety could feign:
'John Smith, yeoman, 1659',
Here in this little kingdom out of time,
Sound and tender as the turf,
Tall at his last,
Tough Cheshire oak, and cast
To walk cheerfully through the world
Speaking to God in everyone,

He and his family collected here
Within the walling of a nettle field
Lost paradise regained,
His dwellinghouse beseiged by laws,
Made bread and raised the blind.
Unscarred by rank
Old script deciphered fresh
Leaps in breath of friends
Across the staves of tares
Intestate now.

Beat of Agitators' drum
Hooves of Cavaliers
Struck fire that was to come
Rippling through the placid grove.
Warriors' wounds and widows' weeds
Livid in the lightning flare
Wasting crops and bitter seeds
In the hot, divided air.

When the thatch burned
The hens scattered,
Outraged, the silly ducks
Fluttered the shallow pond

Until, new grain, new pasture gleaned,
The Old Red Plain
Grew lambs again.

Now, John, it is April.
On heels of drum taps dance,
In spring rain leaping
Quit your pain –
Lead me down the guileless lane.

DAVID GERARD 1987

Nb. For those readers who are not familiar with the 'old' money. £1=20s (shillings) and 1s=12d (old pence)

Publications of Wilmslow Historical Society

History Trails

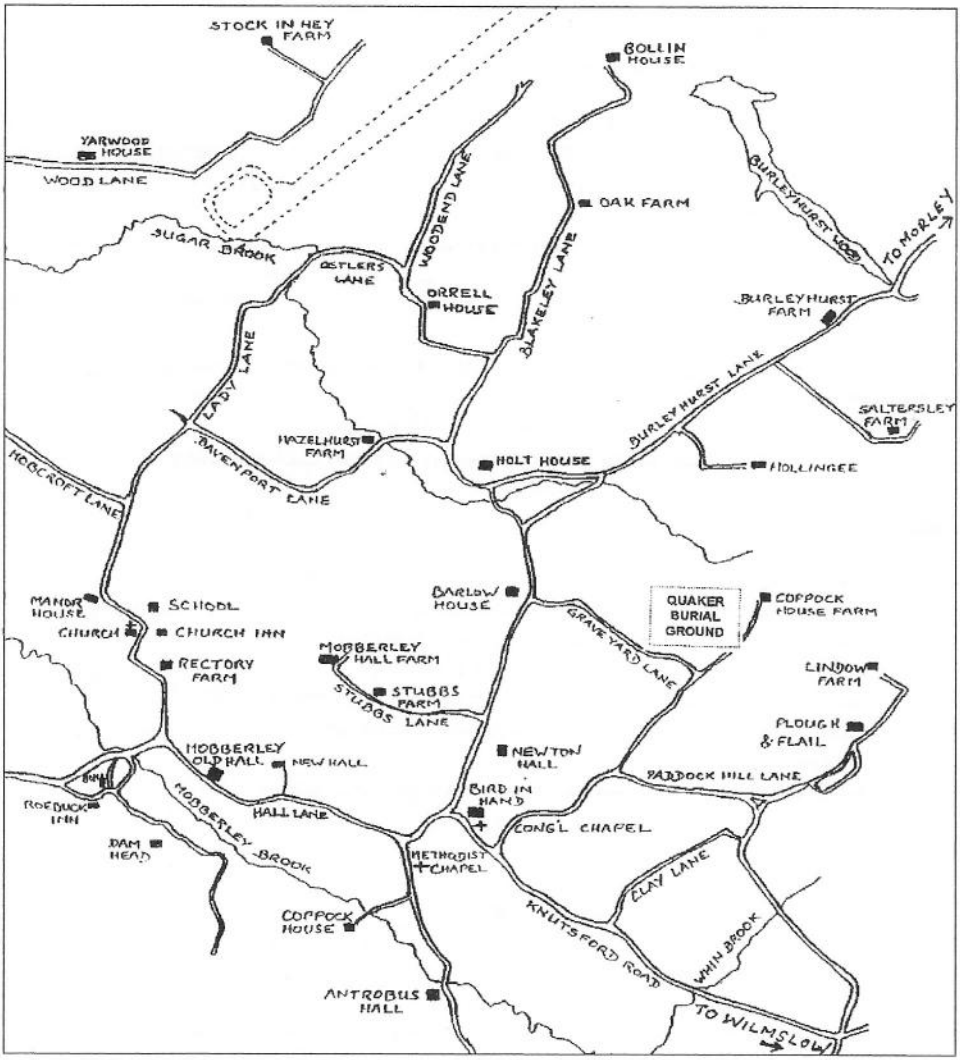
1. The Apprentices' Walk: a walk from Wilmslow to Styal (Out of print)
2. Around the Manor of Bolyn and industrial Wilmslow (Out of print)
3. 'Sans Changer': a walk through Stanley country
4. Fulshaw: a walk around that ancient township (Out of print)
5. Saxon Site to Quaker Ground: a walk from Mobberley Parish Church to Knolls Green and the Quaker Graveyard (Out of print)
6. Wilmslow Historic Trail
7. Mobberley Revisited: a walk through Mobberley village

Pamphlets

1. Pownall Hall: the Chapel of St.Olaf (Out of print)
2. George Gissing at Lindow Grove School, Alderley Edge
3. The Newton Family of Wilmslow
4. Mirrors of an Age: Wilmslow Wills, 1582-1640
5. Church in the Field: Mobberley Quaker Graveyard and its history
6. Oral History in Wilmslow
7. 'Wear It For My Sake': clothes nd jewellery of our ancestors
8. Peter Crosse of Willmeslowe 1561? - 1621
9. Wyches Farm and the Stanley Estate Alderley 1726 - 1997

Other Publications

Three Sundays in Wilmslow
The Fourth Sunday in Wilmslow 1881
Handforth Matters: aspects of parish administration 1773-1836
Victorian Handforth
Handforth National School
'Cotton Town' – Bollington. Swindells Family in the 19th century



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