

The Malbons – A Local Family

Barbara Lynch

This is a family with eight hundred years of history behind it in this area. In her book, Barbara Lynch takes the long view of them

This story of the Malbons of Cheshire and their descendants spans several Midland counties, including Staffordshire, and more than eight centuries of English history.

Family members were: feudal overlords in the ancient barony of Wich Malbank in Nantwich; gentlemen and yeomen in the fertile lands of southeastern Cheshire; tradesmen and public officials in Congleton; clerics and smallholders in the Staffordshire Moorlands; farmers, agricultural labourers and miners in the Cheadle (Staffs) area; and tailors, smiths, potters, miners and labourers in and around the burgeoning cities of Nottingham and the Potteries.

A few went to London, where some had dealings with the North American colonies. Their experiences were typical of many Norman and English families.

Here are some excerpts from their long story - with some of the individuals, and some of the major events...

Nantwich

The long history of the Malbon family in England began shortly after the Conquest, when a Norman adventurer named William Malbedeng acquired huge land holdings in Cheshire and became the first baron of Wich Malbank, or Nantwich, as it is known today.

William was not at the Battle of Hastings in 1066. However; he arrived with a later Norman force around 1069 — a fact that prompted Walter Draycot, in his unpublished history of the Draycot and Malbon families, to suggest somewhat disparagingly that William had waited until the fighting was over before stepping in to claim a prize.

But that is unlikely: Norman overlords did not bestow rich rewards on reluctant warriors, particularly when there was an abundance of war-hardened nobles eagerly competing for the spoils of victory.

Haslington and Barthomley in South Cheshire

After the demise of the barony came a period of more than five hundred years when Malbank descendants lived on in Cheshire, but in the comparative obscurity that was often the fate of a junior branch of a once noble family.

Surviving documents indicate that from shortly after the end of the barony until 1726 a continuous line of Malbons lived at Bradeley Hall, Haslington, in the parish of Barthomley, seven miles east of the old baronial capital of Wich Malbank. A deed survives, dated around 1230, in which Joan Mauban, widow of Reginald de Valletort, granted land and appurtenances at "Bradilee" to her kinsman, William

Malban, for the token sum of one mark. Joan was a granddaughter of the last baron, William II, while William Malban was a son of Baron William II's brother, Philip, who was probably a member of his entourage.

By the early 1640s, Thomas Malbon [of Bradeley Hall] was probably well satisfied with his many achievements. But his most enduring work was still to come, for he lived long enough to witness the horrors of the Civil War.

In 1642, when the war began, Thomas was sixty-five and too old to fight, but he participated nonetheless by recording events in Cheshire, and especially in Nantwich, from the viewpoint of a committed Parliamentarian. His diary, *Memorials of the Civil War in Cheshire and the Adjacent Counties*, is considered one of the four essential contemporary sources for the history of the Civil War in Cheshire.

Congleton

In or around the year 1646, another Thomas Malbon left home and family and moved to the town of Congleton, there to learn the craft of feltmaking. For the next seven years, under the terms of a written contract which doubtless cost his father or guardian a fee, Thomas was housed, fed, clothed and treated as a member of his master's family, while he absorbed the various skills involved in the production of felt hats, from raw materials to finished product.

The Staffordshire Moorlands

In 1675, young John Malbon left home to learn his trade, just as his father, the feltmaker, had done nearly thirty years before.

He was nineteen, older than his father had been, and his own calling, the ministry, required three or four years of study at a university many miles from his birthplace, possibly followed by a posting even farther away.

As things turned out, however, his whole life as a cleric was spent less than twenty miles from Congleton, yet in an entirely different world from that bustling market town where he had been born and raised. The Staffordshire Peak District, where he was to serve for nearly seventy years, was one of the most isolated areas in England, a place where a man might live and die without leaving any trace beyond the records in the parish register.

Cheadle, Ashbourne and Nottingham

With the descendants of parish clerk John Malbon, eldest son of Butterton's curate, the Malbon history moves into a new, often confusing phase, in which there is less to tell of individuals and more to tell of generations as a whole, reacting to the twin forces of capitalism and industrialisation that were disrupting the traditional networks of extended family and parish, leaving individuals and nuclear families to sink or swim alone.

Along with countless others, these Staffordshire Malbons struggled to earn a living, but while some discovered a modest niche in the newly industrialised economy, others found themselves sliding helplessly down the social scale in a country that, despite the many changes, remained as class-conscious as ever.

The Court of Chancery

On 11 December 1826, in Congleton, Cheshire, an event occurred that would not only spread enmity and discord throughout the Malbon family but also exhaust the finances, patience, courage and hope of several of its members in the process.

On that date, William (Gorst) Malbon died at Dane Bank House, on the outskirts of Congleton, unwed and childless, leaving behind him rich estates in Cheshire and Staffordshire, the rightful heir to which was far from clear. The task of determining the identity of that "right heir" would occupy several firms of solicitors and the Court of Chancery in London for eight long years, bringing to winner and losers alike the heartbreak so vividly evoked by Dickens's novel Bleak House.

The Potteries

By August 1843 Francis Malbon, and probably Sampson also, had found work at the Broadfield Colliery at Fenton Park, immediately north of Lane End, where they were living.

Potteries historian Simeon Shaw calls attention to the glorious view to be had from an "eminence, at Fenton Park, a prospect, at once so rich and greatly diversified, as not to be equalled in this district, and scarcely possibly to be excelled in any part of the kingdom."

Most of the colliery's employees were likely too weary to appreciate the view, but its beauty may have touched the soul of the odd miner as he emerged, blinking, into the daylight at the end of his long shift underground. Though there is no way of knowing, one hopes that young Francis Malbon had time to enjoy the natural beauty that still surrounded both Cheadle and the Potteries. For on Wednesday, 2 August 1843, the cruel reality of his occupation caught up with him – a tragedy that you can easily guess at.

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'The Malbons: Eight Hundred Years of History' is available through the Picture Bookshop in Leek, or on the Internet, from Booksurge.co.uk, Amazon.com or www.alibris.com.