

# ***The Bowdon Sheaf***

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## **Contents:**

**Some Old Bowdon Houses by Peter Kemp.**

**Altrincham Grammar Schools by Ronald Trenbath.**



Fallow deer in Dunham Massey Park.  
The herd dates from the Saxon Period.

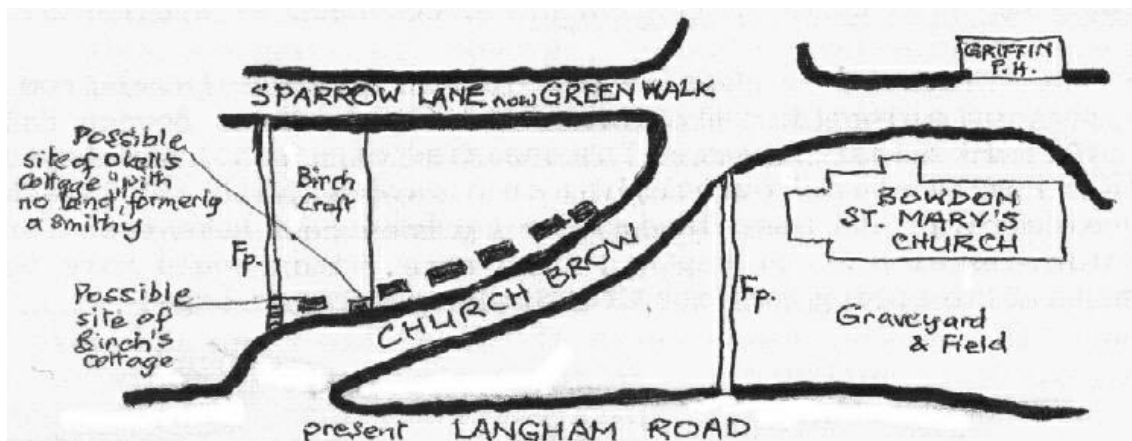
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## Some Old Bowdon Houses by Peter Kemp

We look at our Bowdon area today as a suburb of Altrincham and as a dormitory for residents working further afield built up in Victorian times and to the present day, but what do we know about houses existing before that have long since disappeared? Moss Farm c1500 on South Downs Road is still with us as Bowdon's oldest property together with its cruck barn now converted into a dwelling and, across the road, Moss Cottage 1666 (See Bowdon Sheaf Nos. 9-12 and 17). However, three lost properties have left recorded traces behind fortunately identifying their sites, type and a few of their occupants who paid rent to their owners, as follows :-

### 1. House and Croft called Birch's (A Bowdon Hall estate rental)

Behind the Church Brow cottages but accessed from Green Walk (originally Sparrow Lane) and a driveway leading into a downhill footpath are now situated a large Georgian style house semi-detached called 'The Cedars' and 'Westhill' with, further down, 'Kirklea Mews'. On the 1838 Tithe map this plot was just under 1 acre statute and called 'Birch Croft'. When these properties were erected a huge canted brick wall was built to retain the infill which eliminated the lower steep slope in order to flatten the site. The steepening evident in the 17th century at the bottom of the plot is still evinced by the flight of steps in the footpath down into Langham Road. Whether the cottage of the Birch family was at the top or bottom of this slope is not known, but it is likely that it was situated near the Church Brow cottages and the spring-line for water.



The historical evidence is as follows:-

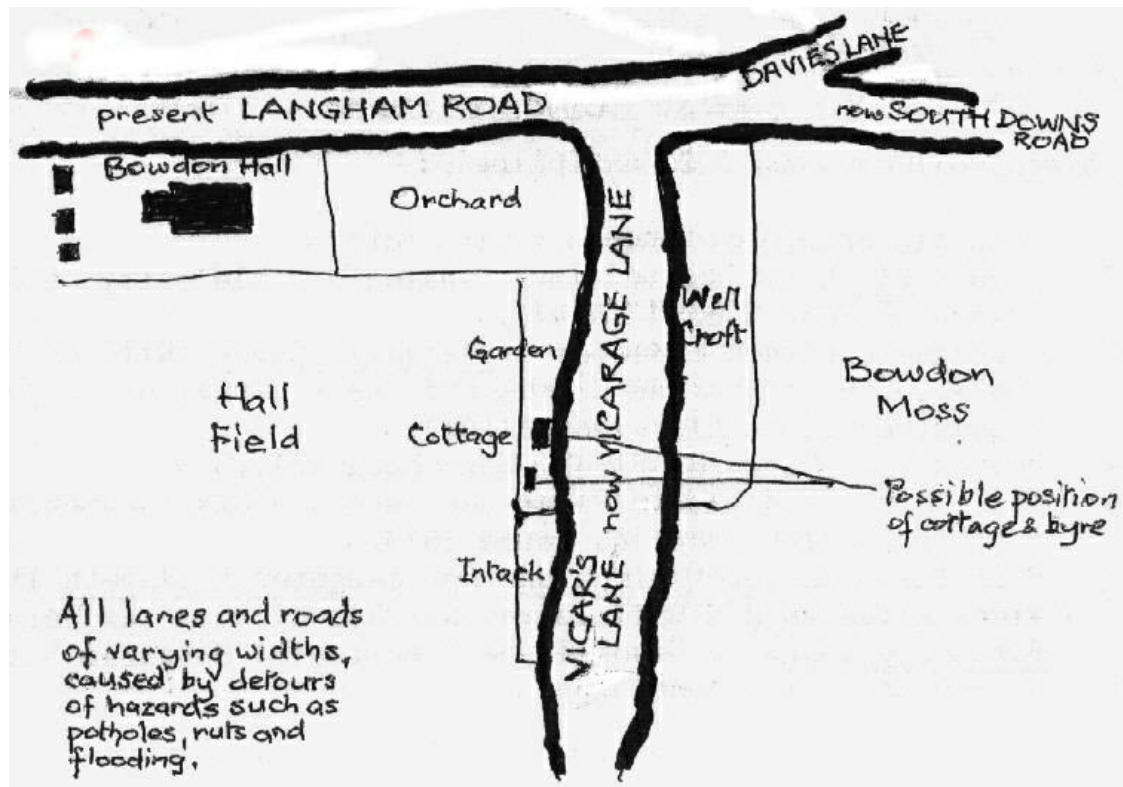
- 16C            Possible origin of house on the croft.
- 1657           A John Birch witnessed Isaac Tipping's Bible entry of land- holding in Bowdon (Bowdon Sheaf No.18).
- 1662           Cottage in Bowdon tenanted by Margaret Birch (will of Robert Tipping 1662/3, steward to the Booths and their tenant of Bowdon Hall, when he bequeathed it to his widow Alice).
- 1664           Hearth Tax. Margaret Birch Not chargeable
- 1666           The above noted by Sir Peter Leycester in his monumental book on Cheshire, Part IV Bucklow Hundred, dated 1673.
- 1667           Poll Tax. Margaret Birch and her daughter Elizabeth living in the cottage.
- 1668/9          Widow Ellen Wood's will leaves all her clothes remaining at Margaret Birch's cottage to "my beloved freind Margaret Buirch."
- 1674           Hearth Tax. Not mentioned.
- 1730           In the Booth steward John Edmonds's time, with his 4 March 173<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> lease of Bowdon Hall and lands, etc., is a lease made by him to a sub-tenant of a cottage on the estate dated 17 July, 1730 at a rent of 6d per annum. This tenant was allowed to "make use of the cloths [sic] hedge in Birch Croft for drying his and his family's Cloths only." One sub-tenant might be the John Okell.
- 1740-52       In Booth steward Thomas Walton's time, he collected rents due to Bowdon Hall from tenant George Edmonds (son of John Edmonds) as part of the financial arrangements for him since Edmonds was by then resident in London. Specifically Walton's account made to Edmonds for 30 June 1743 shows:- "1 year's rent from Sam. Renshall of the Croft behind Birches house £1.1.0d." 1 year's rent from Elizabeth Heath for Birches cottage.

- 12s.8d., by Taxes 7s 4d and in Cash 12s.8d. 1 year's reserved rent from John Okell 6d. [This appears to refer to yet another very small cottage (location not identified) rented by John Okell which was recently a smithy (as shown on a c1760 list of Bowdon Hall leases). Such a smithy must have been at the foot of Church Brow either on or adjacent to Birch Croft. No occupational title is given for John Okell, yet he may have been a blacksmith in need of drying his clothes washed after his grimey labours].
- 1838 Birch Croft is in the location as shown on the sketch map above on the Tithe Schedule and Map, and is in the possession of the Earl of Stamford's tenant of Bowdon Hall, William Warburton, Junior.

Shortly afterwards, Birch Croft was sold for the present-day development.

## **2. A Small Cottage with Garden and Intack (Bowdon Hall estate rental)**

This property was situated just down Vicar's Lane (Vicarage Lane) from its Langham Road junction alongside the former Hall Field behind Bowdon Hall and south of its orchard on that corner. It consisted of a small two-bayed thatched cottage and two-bayed outbuilding in a garden, with an 'intack' or intake (a roadside verge and wasteland). The garden could have been for kitchen vegetable use with a cow kept in the byre. Water would have been drawn from the well or spring in Well Croft across Vicar's Lane.



The historical evidence is as follows :-

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 16C  | Possible origin of cottage (see 1817 description below).  |
| 1674 | Hearth Tax. A 'void' house of 1 hearth held by Alice Tipping, widow of Robert Tipping (steward to the Booths) of Bowdon Hall.   |
| 1701 | Survey of Dunham Massey Estate in Steward John Edmonds's time. A house of 2 bays within and 2 bays without included with Bowdon Hall.   |
| 1760 | Rental c1760. House [Bowdon Hall] Field inclusive of the Cottage facing Bowdon Moss.  |
| 1793 | 1793 Survey of Dunham Massey Estates. Following "House [Bowdon Hall] and Gardens, Lease No.1, Farmyard and Orchards, and House Field" is "A cottage and Garden 1 rood 11 perches Statute or 24 perches Cheshire measure" and "An Intack to ditto" 10 perches Statute or 4 perches Cheshire measure. |

- 1806 In the will of William Pimlott, his widow Sarah was left “the little adjoining house to the Manor House [Bowdon Hall] now tenanted by James Hall.”
- 1817 Valuation Lease No.1 (Bowdon Hall) to Charles Lowndes describes “Cottage held by Mary Worth 2 small bays, walls timber nogged with part brick and part daub covered with thatch, very old building in middleing repair.”
- 1838 Tithe Schedule and Map. Cottage now gone. “The site on which Mary Worth’s cottage stood.”
- 1868 In May, 1868, John Edwards, nephew of William Edwards, owner of Bowdon Hall from 1858, bought from the Earl of Stamford the plot of land east of and adjoining the Hall on the corner of Langham Road and Vicarage Lane amounting to 6000 square yards. In August, he bought the land adjoining to the south down Vicarage Lane amounting to 5000 square yards, intending to build himself a house with an extensive garden and pleasure gardens. However, he had overstretched himself and went bankrupt. No development occurred.
- 1888 Samuel Okell bought the corner plot (as above) and built 2 semi-detached houses, ‘Overley’ for himself and family and ‘Netherley’ to let out, for £2053. 11. 0d.

These two houses still exist. A cottage said to be ‘very old’ and still deteriorating in 1817 must have been well over 250 years old then. It disappeared between 1817 and 1838 and its site together with the modern alignment of the metalled Vicarage Lane is now covered by housing development there and by Hall Road and its houses. Bowdon Hall orchard disappeared under the 1888 Okell houses.

### **3. New Bridge, Dunham Massey**

This Dunham Massey Estate property is included with this Bowdon article since it was situated just over the border across the main Chester Road where Dunham Home Farm is opposite the Bow Green Road junction, and had Tipping family connections.

The New Bridge over the Bollin was an all-weather cart bridge (recorded in 1618) probably built in the late 16C to replace an original horse bridge alongside the ford. That type of bridge may well have existed for many years with the wooden structure being rebuilt each time it collapsed in floods or due to rot. The Masseys and Booths of Dunham Hall would have funded and provided it and charged tolls as a profitable source of revenue. The new bridge gave its name to Newbridge Hollow which had evolved over the years by the wearing away effect of traffic on the floodplain escarpment by feet, hoofs and cartwheels as it descended and ascended from the river crossing — it had veered away from the old Roman Road line. Modern road works have altered the slope and width of this A556 road so much that the hollow-way is hardly apparent today. I remember the 1930s roadway being widened there when steam-powered machines were uprooting the stumps of the well-wooded sides of the hollow. The main entrance driveway of Dunham Massey Hall emerged there between its gatehouses sadly demolished by a bomb in World War II. There was also a field nearby named Newbridge Meadow and Lord Delamer's bailiff is remembered by a field called Tippings Field together with Tippings Bank, part of the escarpment lower down towards the Bollin.

Its 17C history is given in my articles on 'The Booths and the Tippings' Parts 5 and 6 in 'Bowdon Sheaf' Nos. 26 and 28. Following William Tipping's death at age 30 there, its history from that date 23 October 1701 to 1764 has been found in the Dunham Massey Estate papers. Lady Mary Robartes, sister to the 2nd Earl of Warrington, Henry Booth, took over ownership of New Bridge, and William Tipping's widow Elizabeth (who had gone to live in Salford) continued the rental until 1709 when she probably died. The Estate Rental Book No.2 records New Bridge being 'out of lease' in October 1709 with a new tenant of Lady Mary, one Joseph Key being recorded as tenant till 2 February 1764.

We do not know for certain that William Tipping, the elder, yeoman and Bailiff to Lord Delamer of Dunham Massey who was born around 1600 and died in 1671, may have lived at New Bridge, but it is a strong possibility considering its site on the estate next to the main approach to the Hall. His eldest son, William, born 18 December 1630 became a yeoman at Benchill, Wythenshawe from about 1668 and maintained strong links with Bowdon and Dunham Massey estate affairs. He returned to live in Dunham Massey some time after 1684 following the death of the 1st Lord Delamer, possibly in 1686 when his son and heir, also William, came of age and took over the Benchill farm. The 2nd Lord Delamer, who was to become the 1st Earl of Warrington in 1690 probably considered William 2nd too old at 55 to succeed his father as Bailiff having appointed an outsider John Edmonds as his Steward. But William was allowed to rent New Bridge in succession to his father.

The house itself is recorded in the Dunham Rental Book No.2 as “5 Bays within and 8 Bays without”, as large as old Bowdon Hall and an important Booth family property. Five bays would make it about 60 feet long and a cluster of farm buildings amounting to 8 Bays in all indicates a large prosperous farmstead. It was the Home Farm for the Booths, and its siting by the main driveway to the Hall would impress any visitors to the big house. Its tenement lands consisted of 28 acres (5 meadow and 23 arable) and when Joseph Key took over the lease the lands included “2 Street (head) fields, Redmore fields and Longley meadow” also. The value of the New Bridge estate rose from £39.15.0d. a year in 1701 (Rent £2.14.0d.), to £44 p.a. in 1704 (Rent in boons £1.4.2d. plus a herriot of 40s.) to £60 p.a. (to be paid £30 at Martinmas and £30 at Lady Day) in Joseph Key’s time till 1764. It is interesting that the 1701 rental may not have been paid entirely in money, and seems to have consisted of 1 capon and 4 hens, plus a ‘boon’ valued at £1.4.2d. for :-

1 Load of Coal to Dunham Hall  
8 Loads of Turf to Dunham Hall  
20 Loads of Turf ready to cart  
and to perform Barley reaping of 1 acre  
1 Day ploughing  
1 Day mucking with team



The 1704 rental contained an obligation to plant “3 oaks, 2 elms or 2 ashes until 100” with no penalty. Clearly this was a fine working estate farm and, although New Bridge house has long gone, the present Dunham Farm on or very near its site continues to thrive as a ‘Home Farm’ on the edge of the Dunham Massey parkland.

(Further research in the future in the Dunham Massey papers will no doubt reveal more of this property’s history, in particular the Valuation Books 1774-1846 at the Rylands Library, Dunham Massey Papers EGR 14/7/48).

### **Altrincham Grammar Schools by Ronald Trenbath**

On the 26th April 1996, in celebration of Founders’ Day, the pupils of Altrincham Grammar School for Boys assembled in Bowdon Parish Church with the Staff, Governors, Lord Lieutenant of Cheshire, Mayor of Trafford, Ministry of Education Officials and honoured guests, when the York Herald from the College of Arms in full insignia, presented the headmaster with a new school coat of arms, on behalf of Her Majesty the Queen, in recognition of its scholastic success at the national level. This event was followed by a buffet lunch at the school hall with senior boys in attendance.

The school, originally named Altrincham High School for Boys, was founded in 1912 largely through the endeavours of Judge Bradbury, as a fee-paying school with grants from Cheshire County Council for which scholarship boys received free places. Aware that Britain was seriously lagging behind the USA and Europe in training professionals and senior management executives, essential for commerce and industry if the country was to maintain its lead in the world, the government encouraged grammar school and high school education as a means of attaining this end as the public school system only catered for the requirements of non-vocational families.

Saville Laver, the first headmaster, developed a policy based, he claimed, on the French education system and guided the school on the course it was to follow in future years, which included a good general education, character-building, leadership and tenacity of purpose, in accordance with the school's motto *Labore Omnia Vincit*. A strict disciplinarian, he encouraged self discipline rather than enforcement and the results are witnessed in the successes of pupils during the last hundred years which have included judges, QCs, a bishop, ambassadors, professors, lawyers, surgeons, architects, a politician and a noted playwright.

Laver, a Cambridge Classics Scholar, was a striking figure, bald-headed, wearing pinz-nez and a winged collar. Always in academic cap and gown, he inspired respect and affection from scholars and staff but he could be a formidable opponent in adversity.

Extra-mural activities were strongly encouraged as much as games, and boys were free to choose pastimes to suit their personal inclinations. These included a school camp in Wales or Devonshire, a large scout troop (visited by the founder, Lord Baden Powell), a debating society, science visits, concerts, plays, producing films, and fencing (the gym instructor was a champion fencer). During the Second World War, Field Marshal Montgomery visited the School and indicated that he was very impressed.

Early success encouraged many very competent teachers to apply for positions on the staff, including former pupils who returned following graduation at university, usually Oxford and Cambridge.

Fund-raising activities in aid of school requirements not covered by normal funding, were encouraged. Concerts, sales of work, and bridge drives became local social events enjoyed mainly by parents. Some said that it was more like a family than a school. As a result of one such enterprise, money was raised to build the Canadian-style wooden scout headquarters which attracted wide attention at the time.

The Altrincham Grammar School for Girls, originally named Altrincham High School for Girls, was an entirely separate organisation founded in 1910, again through the influence of Judge Bradbury, two years earlier than the boys high school. It was similarly fee paying with grants from Cheshire County Council, to meet the needs of middle-income families who considered the education from local private schools to be totally inadequate.

At the time the female population of the country exceeded that of the male population by more than a million, a situation to be exacerbated fourteen years later by the world war, and women were increasingly having to support themselves and penetrate into employment (including the professions) previously held by men.

To meet these requirements, the new school adopted a policy of providing instruction that would “draw out and strengthen the qualities of the mind, rather than the mere acquisition of knowledge,” with “mental training to make the mind quick and alert with clear thinking and sound judgement and “to overcome difficulties with success.” The school motto “Fortiter, Fedeliter, Feliciter” was carefully considered before acceptance but has proved to be applicable.

Bowdon Lodge, a derelict country lodge with extensive grounds in Bowdon, was purchased and demolished and replaced by a new building designed by architects Sankey & Cubbon, to suit the requirements of a modern school at the time and within easy access of all parts of the catchment area; although suitable at the time it had very little room for future expansion.

Mary Howes Smith, the daughter of an army officer and tutor to the Royal Family, who had studied at Cambridge, was selected as the first headmistress. Known as ‘HS’ she was “formidable, dominant, feared by staff and pupils, governors, and many parents, but she respected those who stood their ground.” Very dedicated she would assist all those who were eager to succeed but would not tolerate uncouth behaviour. A regular guest at Dunham Hall, the earl considered her wit and conversation an asset to a dinner party.

Boys between the ages of seven and ten could attend the preparatory department, giving rise to a elitist, chauvinist minority, until 1934 when it was decided to adopt a girls-only policy and boys changed to the new but independent Altrincham Boys Preparatory School.

Suitable staff were carefully selected as the school intake gradually increased in size to form a harmonious whole.

Aware that most of the pupils would not be career girls, great emphasis was given to domestic science and similar subjects, as well as more cultural pursuits such as art, music, and literature, with extra- mural activities including girl guides, school plays, and garden parties.

A highlight in the early history of the school was the visit by Miss Howes Smith's royal pupil Mary, Princess Royal, daughter of King George V, who requested a visit to the school when staying at Dunham Massey Hall. Local dignitaries with some of the parents assembled with pupils and staff to receive and welcome her. She showed great interest in the school and its wider influence and granted a day's holiday in recognition of the visit.

During the following years the school developed the early policy to achieve high success at national level and enrich the cultural life of Bowdon and adjoining districts, and to witness, with the boys' grammar school, the eclipse of many local private schools including the once-famous Bowdon College.

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