

A short walk to look at historic points of interest in the original village centre of Thelwall

Researched and planned by Geraldine Foden and Sheila Williams

– Thelwall History Group



Starting point – Car park at Thelwall Parish Hall, Bell Lane, Thelwall, WA4 2SX
Distance – under 1 mile. The route is almost entirely flat but has uneven surfaces.

1. Leave car park, turning left along Bell Lane
2. After The Little Manor turn right into the playing field (Elizabeth Park). The Little Manor (formerly The Cottage), was built around 1660 for the Percival family. Thomas Percival (1704–1784) held important offices such as coroner, surveyor of the highways and agent to the lord of the manor. He would have assessed and enforced window and land taxes, repaired highways, and negotiated deals for the lord of the manor who at that time was John Pickering. He also planned and planted gardens and orchards at Thelwall Hall. The family lived well and he travelled widely. Thomas Percival kept diaries, three of which survive, these have provided a wealth of information about life at the time. The Percivals held the house for about 100 years before selling to the Stanton family.
3. Turn so you are looking across Bell Lane at the building that is now Chaigeley School.

It was built in 1775 for the Stanton family, and was called Greenfields. John Stanton built the first gunpowder mill in the north-west on the river Mersey, near where Woolston weir is today, on the Thelwall side of the river. The mill was a massive concern. The raw ingredients for the gunpowder (saltpetre, brimstone and charcoal) were brought by river to the mill, which was powered by three millstreams taken from

the Mersey. The mill made the Stantons very rich and it was with this money that they built Greenfields and bought Percival's house, which they called The Cottage. They used it as a cadet house for the eldest son to live in before they inherited the large house. The Stanton family lived here for 4 generations, spanning 150 years, but this all came to an end in 1858 when the gunpowder mill was destroyed by a massive explosion. The Stanton family moved away in the 1890s when they inherited Derbyshire estates by marriage. They did so much for the village – doubling the size of the church and built a Sunday School house which you will see later on the walk. John Stanton is buried with his wife in St Wilfrid's, Grappenhall as is his son but the tomb of subsequent generations is the large rectangular structure on the east side of All Saints' Church. Stanton Drive is named after this family. Greenfields passed to a Major Gardiner, and it was he who gave some land to the village on which to build a Parish Hall. In 1946 it became a school, named after Chaigeley Manor in Clitheroe where the school was originally situated.

4.

Turning slightly to the right, you will see the war memorial on the corner and Bell Cottage opposite. This is one of the oldest cottages in the village and was formerly known as Rachel's Cottage. Rachel was born in 1805 and was a maid at Greenfields house, apparently a quirky character, who would sit with her clay pipe and curtsy to passers-by. One of the village wells is at this location, the other being by the Parish Hall. Further around the lane are Old Hall Farm and Laskey Farm, these are both very old buildings.

To return to The Little Manor, by 1891 the Holden family were living there. Mr Holden was a businessman in the engineering industry and a local JP. The family lived there until the 40s. In 1950 it became the Cottage Restaurant and Guesthouse and comprised many small rooms, not the open plan layout we see today. It then passed into the hands of breweries and about 1984 became known as The Little Manor – although it never was the manor house of Thelwall!

This brings us to Thelwall Hall, which was the manor house. Elizabeth Park, in which you are standing, formed the original grounds of Thelwall Hall, but there are no remains of the hall itself today. If you stand with your back to Bell Lane, the house would have stood in the far left of the plot, with gardens running down to what is now Thelwall New Road. The first lords of the manor were the Dutton family in about 1258, then the Clayton family. By the 1600s the Brookes of Norton held the manor, and then the Moores. In 1661, Robert Pickering bought the estate, comprising of 10 farms and about 40 cottages. Thomas Percival was estate steward for his grandson, John Pickering. In 1755 a new hall was built with bricks made in Lymm and designed by Hope who worked on Dunham Hall. Thelwall Hall was enlarged by the four generations of Pickerings who lived there. There was a Pickering vault under the 'ancient' manorial chapel that was demolished in 1855/6. The Pickering memorials are now visible on the church side of the Stanton tomb.

The hall had walled gardens and orchards, and Thomas Percival rented them. In his diaries he documents the grafting of 87 fruit trees, 17 varieties of apples and pears, along with gooseberries, grapes and vegetables grown there. Cuttings were taken from an old apple tree in Elizabeth Park a few years ago, and grafted onto new

rootstock, so we might have Thelwall apples once again. According to Percival's diaries, the Pickering family would ride to Dunham Hall for the evening, and take carriage trips to London. Pickering himself worked at Gray's Inn in London. The Pickerings are remembered in Thelwall by the pub (The Pickering Arms) and Pickering Crescent.

After 175 years of Pickerings, the hall passed to the Nicolson family in 1837. They ran a law firm in Warrington, and were to find that the estate was in debt by about £20,000 (1.5 million in today's money). They worked hard to clear the debt, selling 13 pieces of land to the Railway Company, and others.

By 1889 the Admiral John Parry Jones-Parry inherited the lordship from his brother-in-law, James Nicholson. James and Elizabeth had no children to inherit the estate. The Admiral was remembered as a stern man who kept a sharp eye on anyone crossing his land. He had to remortgage the estate several times, and died in 1920 – the last Lord of the Manor of Thelwall. (Parry Drive) The house was briefly lived in by the Chorlton family, but was then requisitioned during WW2. The time for these large houses had ended, and after the war it fell into a dilapidated state and was demolished in 1955.

5. Follow the path along the side of the Little Manor and round the back. Skirt round the children's playground and pick up the path (Gig Lane) that goes down to Thelwall New Road. Shortly after leaving the park you will see a white building on the left with a sign at the top showing 'Church of England Sunday School, AD 1835, JS'. This building was provided by James Stanton and at that time provided the only education for village children. They went each Sunday to learn to read and write. The schoolmaster lived in the house.
6. The next building along, facing Thelwall New Road, is the old Thelwall School, now a private residence. This was built around 1873 under the National Schools Programme. It had three classes – lower, middle and upper. It was used until the 1960's when Thelwall Junior School was built, followed by the Infant school in 1976.
7. As you leave Gig Lane, the land opposite the school was played on by the school children and also contained an air raid shelter during the war. Cross over Thelwall New Road (this used to be Chapel Lane) and walk along to the right.
8. Gig is the old name for Flax, and the stream you are walking beside was used for soaking the flax to enable it to be stripped. Flax was grown a lot in the area, and was used to make rope and linen. Hemp was also grown and its fibres woven into sailcloth by the men and women of Thelwall and used by the shipyards at Bank Quay in Warrington where 50 shipwrights were employed in the mid 1800s.
9. Continue along Thelwall New Road and cross over Ferry Lane. You will see the Pickering Arms on the corner. The first mention of a public house was in 1755; it has been known as the Unicorn and as the Red Lion. It would have been a farmhouse before then, maybe

selling beer. The small, white building on the left of the pub was part of the blacksmiths and the cartwright's shop was on the other side of the pub.

10. The inscription high up on the end wall of the pub states 'In the year AD 923 Edward the Elder founded a city and called it Thelwall'. During this time King Edward was defending the river crossing, and any village that was fortified was referred to as a city. The original date was 920 but this was changed after the First World War to allow time to organise a celebration of the 1000 year anniversary of Thelwall.

The celebration took place in 1923 in the field by Greenfields and brought about 15,000 visitors by rail, coach and foot, many more than the expected 5,000. Food and drink on the field ran out and the pub was drunk dry. Money from this event went towards paying for the war memorial on the corner of Bell Lane, and every schoolchild was given a half crown, a medallion and a mug.

Opposite the Pickering Arms is the original Post Office, complete with red telephone kiosk. The post office was built in the 1800s as an agent for carriers, and was eventually taken over by the GPO. It was also a general store for the village and remains mostly unchanged.

11. Now turn down Ferry Lane. Within a few yards you will see a cobbled lane off to the right. This was the original Ferry Lane as it led down to the original course of the River Mersey, before the Ship Canal was built. The old ferryman's house is still there, later the home of the undertaker, who had a chapel of rest in the garden. Continue down the current Ferry Lane, which was previously called Eyes Lane, 'eyes' meaning 'land by water'. The river would have run along the back of the properties on the right hand side of the lane, and salmon would have been fished until the early 1800s.

12. Half way down the lane, on the right hand side, is Ivy Cottage, this is built on very old foundations and with the river running along the back of the house held some of the fishing rights. The red sandstone building of Thelwall Old Hall is just next door. The earliest part of the hall dates from the 16th century and was probably built by Thomas Brooke, who was Lord of the Manor about that time. It later became Bolds Farm and was split into 2 cottages. It was then owned by the Stanton family before being bought by William Fox of Statham Lodge, Lymm, to increase his estate. In the 1900's it was bought by the Manchester Ship Canal Company and named Thelwall Old Hall.

13. Carry on down Ferry Lane and before the footpath turns to the right you can see over a low wall the original course of the Mersey although it is now covered with vegetation. Don't follow the path to the right, but keep straight ahead to the Manchester Ship Canal and following the path to the left along the canal.

The MSC was started in 1887 to bring trade into Manchester. It cut through Thelwall, isolating the farmland on the north side, and leaving the loop of the Mersey to the

south which eventually dried up. Fractured parts of the river on the North side were re-connected so the river could flow. Gradually the land, about 200 acres, was incorporated into Latchford and Woolston. There were many accidents during the digging of the canal and those killed whilst working on this stretch are buried in unmarked graves in All Saints' churchyard. In November 1893 the canal was flooded and officially opened in 1894 by Queen Victoria. During its construction and once open, the canal stank. In Thelwall it was referred to as 'That Pestilential Ditch'. The sewage it carried from Manchester took three days to reach Thelwall, and then carried on to the sea. It would be several years before Manchester built a sewage works to relieve the canal.

14.

A few yards along the canal you will see where the ferryman runs the ferry to cross the canal, having had to move from the river crossing he previously operated. There was a chain ferry here first, which pulled people and live-stock across. A tragic accident involving a horse walking off the pontoon with its cart saw the pontoon replaced by a single oar boat for foot passengers only, which is the style still used today. The location of the chain ferry on the banks of the canal is visible on both sides of the canal today. In the 40's the ferry was very popular due to petrol rationing. There is an Act of Parliament stating that a ferry must be provided, and after 125 years it still runs, 3 times a day, for 11p. (weather and staff permitting). It is one of the smallest ferries in the world, with just 4 seats.

You should now re-trace your steps along Ferry Lane. When you reach Thelwall New Road, turn left and in 50 metres you will arrive back at Thelwall Parish Hall.

