

Early History of Cheswick Green

Records indicate that Cheswick Green was once the site of an early Saxon settlement which was fortified against marauding robbers who frequented the Forest of Arden in the Middle Ages.

The one-time name "The Mount" and the surrounding terrain support this theory because early Saxon burial grounds were mounds or mounts. The first great Anglo-Saxon poem, "Beowulf", which tells much of the life and habits of the pre-Conquest English, runs:

"And in the midst the warriors laid their lord Lamenting. Then the warriors on the mount Kindled a mighty bale fire; the smoke rose black from the Swedish pine; the sound of flame mingled with the sound of weeping; while smoke Spread over heaven. Then upon the hill the people of the Weders wrought a mound."

The following article is a summary of an examination of the published report on the excavations at Cheswick Green, carried out by Mr T. L. Jones in 1953.

PERIOD I

The construction of the defences, represented by the building trench and possible cobbled floor. This floor is more likely to be associated with a building and not a foundation to the period II defences. It is difficult to associate these structures and worth noting that the building trench is shown below the others on the site. It is also cobbled and possible that there are two phases in the development.

PERIOD II

Abandonment of the earlier structures and the construction of the first defences. These consist of a bank of yellow clay with a forward revetment of timber and possibly a defensive ditch. From the section there are signs of one, but most of the evidence would have been destroyed by the building of the period III ditch. It must also be borne in mind that no detailed examination of the ditch was made. Possibly associated with these defences was the building found in trench VI and other occupation found immediately behind the rampart. This consisted of a circular trench for a building which at a later date was destroyed by the building of a later dwelling which had a stone sill wall.

PERIOD III

Abandonment of building with stone sill and construction of massive defences of red clay. Presumably the Period II defences were not considered strong enough.

One point that the previous excavations failed to look for was the possibility of a palisade fence on top of these later defences. Along with this alteration was the digging of the later and much larger moat. From the report it is not possible to link these defences with the occupation of the interior.

Further excavations took place in 1973. commissioned by the builders of Cheswick Green.

1973 Excavation.

Cheswick, or Cheswick Green, is a little to the north of Sidenhall**. It was owned in early days by the Broughtons, John de Broughton, in 1301 having a grant of

free-warren here, from Edward I. In 1369, Sir Thomas Broughton sold it to John Waring and Richard Gower, but it later seems to have become the property wholly of the family of the latter, whose descendants sold it in the seventeenth century to William Bache, since when it has had various owners.

Here stands, as it has stood for countless centuries, the prehistoric earthwork, known as "The Mount," which Dugdale considered to be a Roman work, while other authorities have differed in opinion. Before the days of artillery, it must have formed a powerful stronghold, protected on two sides by the River Blythe, in addition to a deep and wide moat, and its ramparts of earth. The earthworks, with their enclosure, cover about two acres. Whether built by Romans or Britons, the probability being in favour of the latter, the position would appear to have been most formidable to the attacking party, surrounded as they were by the unfriendly forest.

Dugdale mentions the Manor of Crewenhale as having existed in Tanworth Parish. The family of Crewenhale, with its various spellings, took their name from their estate, where they were situated in the reign of Henry III. (1216-1272). The last of the name was John de Crewenhale, who left an only daughter, married to one Williarn Parker. The Manor eventually came into possession of the Greswolds of Solihull, who owned it in Dugdale's time.

Morden's map of 1695 shows the moated manor of Crewenhale and it seems probable that that corruption of the name has given us "Creynolds Lane." This is now the site of Eliots Hall which is known to have been standing since 1725 but when it was actually built is not clear. It was for many years the home of the Horton family. John Horton, one of the first Masters of Eliots Hall was born in 1761 and in this period grand parties were held.

During the First World War it was used for detaining German prisoners, two of whom are buried in St Patrick's Churchyard. The Hall later became the "Shirley Park Hotel." and had a reputation for its beautiful lawns and lake. Eliots Hall is currently the home of the TSB College and when extensions were being constructed, soils around the building differed enormously, suggesting the presence of a filled in moat.

** This old manor is now a solitary farmhouse, lying in an isolated position near to Waring's Green. It gave its name to the once prominent family of de Sidenhall, who were there in the reign of Edward II, when we hear of one Henry de Sidenhall in 1310. In 1331 it passed to the Fulwodes of Clay Hall, through the marriage of Joan, heiress of "Robert Sydenhalle of Tanworth, Esq. to William Fulwode. The Fulwodes, however sold it to the Hugfords of Henwood, who eventually parted with it to Nathaniel Cookes, of Ingon. Later, it was purchased by Lord Cornwallis, and is now the property of his descendants, the Wykeham-Martins. Part of the old moat is still to be seen.