

# THE MARKET DRAYTON HISTORIC FOOD TRAIL



Town Centre 1902

*The Story of the Town told through its Food, its Drink and its Market*



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# O n the far side of St

**Mary's Churchyard opposite the Church Gates** it all begins. There is a sandstone precipice into the valley, at the bottom of which winds the River Tern, and all around is the domain held by a Saxon called Godwin before the Norman Conquest, and afterwards by William Pantulph from the Barony of Wem.

## **Draitune**

It was water and a high place that formed the settlement of Draitune – “a farmstead where loads are dragged”, and possibly up the hill! The Domesday Book records that at the time it consisted of two oxherds, two crofters' families, and a priest. But there were, of course, the estates and fields around, probably amounting to 250 souls. All of these collected at the Church on a Sunday, and used the opportunity for a bit of barter and dealing in the churchyard.... until, that is, an edict from the Pope put a stop to it all in 1201.

## **Combermere**

In the early 1100s just before he died Pantulph gave the lands of Drayton Magna to the Abbey of St Evroul in Normandy (as an expiation for big sins regretted), and about a century later they passed to the Cistercian Abbey of Combermere in Cheshire, which had been building up other holdings in the area. In fact the Abbays were much more organised landlords than the local barons, and had the commercial expertise which the others did not.

### **WATER**

When it comes to water Drayton is special. There are underground springs, rivers and lakes serving many farming and other communities.

One company actually bottles and sells the spring water. Another multinational extracts a supply for its own industrial processes. The area also sits on a unique watershed – one river flows east into the Trent (and the North Sea), another south into the Severn (and the English Channel), and a third north into the Dee (and the Irish Sea).

### **MARKETS & FAIRS**

In medieval times it all came down to travel and transport. A market was a weekly event for local traders, who didn't have too far to come. A fair was an occasional market to bring strangers in from outside the district, over longer distances. Such a rare occasion was also a time for celebration and fun. We've now split the fair in two - trade fair and funfair. Improved and easier transport, however, reduced the need for the two events. It also resulted in more competition from more powerful players, wherever they were based, and in less reliance on local goods.

## **The Market Charter**

In 1245 Abbot Simon sought and was given a Market Charter by Henry III (the King may have given some 60 in Shropshire, but only half a dozen survive). It bestowed the right to hold a weekly market (on a Wednesday) and an annual fair (in September) in the now larger settlement, and of course to take the major profits via tolls and rights and rents and so on. The Abbey then encouraged tradesmen to settle in the area by granting them burgages (or strips of land, with trading on the street frontage and perhaps a smallholding behind), and formed a town of streets and a market place.

## **The Decline of the Abbey**

Over the next 100 years (1400-1500), however, the commercial prowess of the Abbey declined. Probably it fixed rights and rents at too low a rate for too long a period, and probably it stretched its resources too far. Undoubtedly the manorial mill and bakehouse were unpopular, and various other management practices. Almost certainly it assumed powers it had no rights to, and almost as certainly the Draytonians of the time (true to tradition) turned irascible and wouldn't have it!

## **Sir Rowland Hill**

And then the Abbey was dissolved in 1539, and off went the last Abbot, John Massy, to a 30 year retirement in Chester. *A little further along the south side of the Churchyard is the Old Grammar School*, which was founded in 1555 by Sir Rowland Hill (who was the first Protestant Lord Mayor of London) – it was here, later on, that the infant Robert

Clive had his primary schooling.

Rowland Hill took over the lands and debts of the Manor from Combermere Abbey, confirmed his rights with a new Charter, and then set a firm grip on both the organisation and execution of his Manor.



### **The Old Market Cross**

*Walk on past the East End of the Church for 10 metres, and, on the right, is the octagonal base of the old Market Cross – this was moved from the Market Square in favour of Queen Victoria's Jubilee Fountain. The actual cross was stolen comparatively recently, and probably now sits happily and in ignorance in someone's garden (with a sundial perched on top). The Cross dates back to the 14th or 15th Centuries, and is really the emblem of this first part of the Market story.*

### **MILLS & OVENS**

The Lords of the Manor had the right to insist that flour was milled in their mills, and that bread was baked in their ovens. This was particularly so if the bread was to be sold. Apart from market days, strangers could not bring bread into the town for sale.

### **A Rum Do at the Bakery**

*Walk on and turn right outside the Side Gate. In a couple of paces there's the junction with the High Street. On the righthand corner is the site of the original Billington's Bakery. Although not the first, gingerbread began to be baked here in 1817 by a Mr Thomas*

(through the bricked up door down in the cellar - the tall oven chimney is long gone now). Richard Billington, a cousin, took over in 1864. So secret was the recipe that no-one was allowed near the upstairs room when the mixture was being prepared. It did (and still does) contain rum, and a later Mr Billington (Samuel Percy) always felt obliged to taste it first thing in the morning "to make sure that it hadn't gone off". He baked here until his death in 1925.

### **The New Lords of the Manor**

*20 metres up the High Street, and on the opposite side, is the Corbet Arms. At Rowland Hill's death in 1562 the Manor passed to his niece Alice, who had married into the Corbet family. She outlived her husband, a judge, and their sons, eventually dying in 1603. The Corbets retained the rights over the Market until as late as the 1920s, when control was passed to the Town. Unfortunately the Town then held it for only fifty years before the present Barony of Wem (the North Shropshire District Council) took on the management. The Corbet Family nominally are still Lords of the Manor.*

### **The Corbet Arms**

For many years this was the centre for manorial court matters (then called the Talbot Arms, though), and, right up to Victorian times, the County Court proceedings (or equivalent) took place here, with the frequent nearby affrays and disturbances for which Drayton was noted.

### **COURTS AND RIGHTS**

The Lords of the Manor regulated everything in the Town - from tolls on the roads, to measures for ale and grain, clearing after the market, exacting taxes and selling exclusive rights, settling disputes and causes. The Byelaws of the time were contained in the Book of Peynes (or penalties). These were executed mainly by the Court Leet (the Trading Standards Dept) with their searchers, sealers, leavelookers, ale-conners, constables and bailiff. The bailiff was latterly the Lord of the Manor's steward, usually the, Landlord of the Corbet Arms, and habitually known as the Mayor, and often the Lord Mayor. By Victorian times all this had become little more than ceremonial.

### **MILK, HOPS ETC**

It was only after the 1550s that cows' milk began to be drunk generally. Before that the average peasant drank milk from ewes or goats. At this time also hops were introduced from Europe and, in a sense, ale became beer. For sweetening elsewhere, of course, you used honey.

### **The Market and the Town Square**

*Walk up the hill and cross over onto the Square. Up to this point in the 1500s there was one long wide street in front of you – the buildings directly ahead did not always exist. They probably appeared in the next 100 years. The Market Cross was in front of you, and somewhere to the left, backing onto Cheshire Street, was the "Crosse Howsse", where the stalls were stored, together with various ladders, poles, hooks, buckets and so forth. It was looked after by the Bellman – we're not too sure of his real function. Probably in the main square was the grain market (a byelaw in the Book of Peynes indicates this) – together with vegetables, fruit, dairy products and so on – while the livestock markets were in the roads opening off – the Horsemarket and Stocke*

Lane ahead, Sheepmarket and Lamb Shutt to the right, and the Beastmarket back at the bottom of the hill. In fact the streets were also known by these as well as by their original names. There is no mention of pigs at the time – presumably every cottage had one – and they are notoriously difficult to restrain (only in 1855 is there mention of a pig market). In fact the Market was always a mixture of retail and wholesale. The Square was also the site of the annual Damson Fair. Many trees still survive in the area, but the Fair never quite makes it now. A Damson Feast takes place occasionally nearby, and is worth looking out for.

### The Butchers

Meat was sold from stands in the street, and in not altogether hygienic conditions – later on, in Victorian times, the 16 butchers were housed in the Shambles building, originally on the left pointing into Shropshire Street (this also doubled as a meeting room). It was demolished in the 1960s.



### The Great Fire

The half-timbered buildings around the centre of the town now give a glimpse into the look of the town at that time. They would, however, have been thatched, and in constant danger of fire. And in 1641 came the Great Fire of Drayton, probably beginning with a spark from a bakery with an ill-maintained chimney, perhaps even burning the illegal “heath or

broom”. The surviving houses are still here today (but with slate roofs).

### From Granary to Dairy

The Crosse House was burnt down during the Fire and replaced by a Markett House. It also contained a market bell – no dealing, particularly in corn or grain, could take place in the market before this was rung. This was done to prevent bulk buying, which created artificial shortages and thus forced up prices. Perhaps ringing such a bell was also the job of the Bellman in the Crosse House before. The building lasted for 120 years until, in 1776, for some reason, an old malt mill was adapted for the same purpose at the top of Cheshire Street. Initially it was probably referred to as the Town Hall, but later it was called a buttercross (50 years later being replaced by the present Buttercross). Presumably at that point its main function changed to the sale of dairy products by the farmers’ wives. This probably also reflected the decline in the trading of corn – we know that a rival corn chamber, selling by sample rather than in bulk, had been established in the Phoenix Inn (at the bottom of the High Street).

### The Changing Times

The 1700s cover the time of Robert Clive, “Clive of India”, who was born at Styche Hall just outside Market Drayton. His era also marks a watershed for transport, trade, industry, and national prosperity. *Walk through to the present Buttercross.*

### Cheese and Gingerbread

The half-timbered building behind the Buttercross was once the Cheshire Cheese Inn.

These two names are quite significant. They mark a new emphasis on milk – and on the County becoming the Nation’s Dairyhouse. Certainly cheesemaking was an important industry, and especially Cheshire Cheese – before the start of the First World War a quarter of all Cheshire Cheese was produced in Shropshire. And now of course we also have Shropshire Blue which is so popular on the Continent. Later the Inn became Billington’s Central Café, where the famous gingerbread was sold, and dunked in tea, port or anything else that came to hand, no doubt.

### HEYDAY OF THE MARKET

Drayton was well placed for trade, being on the corner of three counties. This is reflected in the names of the major streets, which were established early on – Shropshire Street, Cheshire Street, and Staffordshire Street. In the latter half of the 18th Century the Market was the largest and most successful for miles around. However, then came the canals, and transport changed for good. In fact it was the canal at Stone in Staffordshire that first appeared and drew the grain trade from Drayton, and probably much else. The Market was never as successful thereafter. Drayton’s own canal came later.

### CLIVE, SPICE, AND INDUSTRY

Robert Clive secured India and the Spice Trade for Britain. This brought ginger for our gingerbread and also began the British love affair with curry – there are over 8000 curry houses in the UK, and almost as much chicken korma is sold today as fish-and-chips. But it wasn’t only spices – India was also a pivotal trade link. And Clive did not just bring back wealth for himself; he brought back phenomenal wealth for his country, and at the precise moment when it mattered. A flow of cash such as this was vital for stoking the fires of the Industrial Revolution. Without it the Revolution might never have happened.

### Les Petits Pâtés

Another of Clive's culinary bequests are his Petits Pâtés (his Little Pies). These are small bobbin sized pies that are really a relic of the medieval mince pie – a minced mutton filling with apple and chutney flavouring. Although the recipe was once a gift by Clive to the people of Pézenas in the south of France (where he went for a spot of rest and recuperation), it has returned across the Channel and, with a little persistence, can be teased out in a couple of places in or near the Town. Larger pies, pizzas and so on are now mass-produced in Maer Lane by a manufacturer who always manages to retain the Town's affection.

### Brewing up

Many inns made their own beer at this time, and, you would have seen tall chimneys in a number of places – providing the heat for the mashing and the boiling (with the hops from Hereford), before the actual fermentation and the final keggling. Some even produced their own malt. Malting consisted of steeping barley in water until it began to sprout (and change its chemical composition). It was then dried or roasted (in a kiln) before being roughly ground (in a mill). The malted barley was the main ingredient of the recipe for the beer's mash.

### The Age of Mass Production

*Walk a short way down Cheshire Street to the Library Square on the left, and you are walking on to the second half of the 19th Century. This is where the age of mass production is beginning, even for beer. At the far end of the street the Crystal Fountain Brewery had already opened (so named because its owner Richard Pearce had sunk his own well for the pure water – there was no mains water at the time). And on the Library site the Market Drayton Brewery Company then opened its brewery. It also built the Town Hall next door (1899), which was not originally designed as council offices, but as a meeting place and outlet for the Company's products! Of course they are not there now. But, further on, you can still see the (gravity fed) Crown Brewery.*

#### GINGERBREAD

At one time every town had its gingerbread baker. But the practice has since fallen by the wayside, and there are now only a few left. Market Drayton doesn't seriously claim to be the originator of the process, but it has managed to retain its own brand, which it considers the best. So we feel we have the right to style ourselves "Home of *The Gingerbread*". And one day the Signwriters will get it right.

#### YOGURT STORY

Yogurt was first produced commercially in this country by Arthur Hollins at Fordhall Farm. Production took place for some years after World War II. By a strange twist a well-known German manufacturer set up a somewhat larger facility next door in the 1980s, and now fills over a billion pots a year for consumption well beyond the boundaries of Market Drayton.



### The Damson Fair

The 1850s were also a crucial time for the damson industry – the Damascus plum brought back by the Crusaders from the Middle East. The Fair may have been held in September in the High Street, and there may well have been demands for the fruit as a fruit. Indeed the King of Nepal, hosting a banquet in London, sent to Market Drayton for 2 cwts of the fruit for a favourite recipe of lamb with a particular damson chutney. But the damson industry was dependent on the mill owners of Lancashire using the damson as a dye. The farmers brought their cartfuls into Joseph Hickman's yard off Cheshire Street. If there was a glut, then the price went right down. In the mid 18th Century also came the discovery of synthetic dyes. The combination was lethal. On one occasion, with the price so low that Hickman could not afford to buy, Cheshire Street was ankle deep in the fruit which the farmers to a man had tipped into the street.

### The Cheese Fair

Towards the end of the century a Cheese Fair was held in the ground floor of the Town Hall, a celebration of cheese-making with awards for the premier producers. It ended after World War I.

### **The Coming of the Railways**

In the 1860s the Railway came to Drayton, and in the 1870s the Livestock Market moved off the streets of the Town to a newly built Smithfield next to the Railway Station. This was ideal for the transportation of livestock. In fact the coming of the railways made the bulk transportation of most goods over long distances so much a reality that the small local producers were squeezed by the muscular competition into a small minority. This was later accelerated by the glut of ex-army lorries available for carriage after the First World War.

### **Piping in the Water**

This story ends, as it began, with water. In 1892 water was piped into the town

from Burnt Wood and the springs of Cold Comfort Farm.

### **The Smithfield and the Supermarket**

At the end of Cheshire Street is the Railway Hotel, the last of some ten inns and beerhouses that used to be in Cheshire Street. In fact it is also the last remnant of the railway. The Smithfield has now moved on beyond the Bypass, and, where the old Livestock Market and Railway Station used to be, there now stands a supermarket, petrol station and car park.

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### **THE GOOD OLD DAYS**

As the mass-producers dominate and the market becomes the supermarket, the small shops are left behind to provide something special. It's ironic that the specialist shops are now the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker, whereas these were once the everyday trades in town. But there are signs of a revival of interest in specialist shops, especially for food. Perhaps our Shopping Centre is on the way back to the Good Old Days after all.

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