

CHAPTER 7.

THE PARISH

AT the northern end of the parish a lane crosses over the main Macclesfield—Congleton road, and this area has long been known as the Warren. Here stands the modernised building which still serves as Gawsworth Post Office and sole village shop, the home of Cyrus Fytton, well past three score years and ten, whose father Cyrus was the village tailor, postman and clerk to the parish council. It is interesting to record that the Warren Fyttons have lived in the village since the beginning of the last century, when Mr. Cyrus Fytton's grandmother was born in the existing cottage, which was formerly half timbered and thatched.

The present Mr. Cyrus Fytton's late wife, Lois Annie Fytton, was one of the oldest members of Gawsworth Women's Institute,¹ and belonged to another old village family, her mother being a Mottershead. She was well known in the village for almost seventy years, and a member of the church choir for more than thirty years. She used to enjoy relating the story of the choir outing of 1895 when they had to be up at three o'clock in the morning to be taken by wagonette to Macclesfield in time to catch the four o'clock train to Llandudno.² Mrs. Fytton left a note that the famous avenue of limes by the church was planted at the time of her grandfather's wedding in 1827.

¹ Founded in 1930.

² This excursion is referred to in the parish magazine for July, 1895, as follows:— "The junior members of the Church Choir had their Annual Excursion on Monday, June 24th. Under the guidance of the Rector and Mr. Godwin, a party of 20 started at 4 a.m. for Llandudno. The morning was gloomy, and rain fell on the journey, but, arrived at the Naples of North Wales, the clouds rolled away, and a more glorious day never was enjoyed. In the brilliant sunshine the mountains, cliffs and sea looked their grandest, and the beauties of the scenery were thoroughly appreciated. Most of the party went on the sea, and some went into it. The Rector spent a wet and anxious quarter of an hour with half a score of juvenile bathers, none of whom could swim. When will this most useful and invigorating art become a necessary part of the instruction in all Schools? It might surely come in under the head of "Varied Occupations!" Musicians white and minstrels black charmed and amused us, and busy caterers made ample provision for hungry appetites. And finally, laden with mementos of the day, the weary party were brought safely home, arriving at Gawsworth about midnight, after 23 hours of unstinted enjoyment." Indeed a remarkable day, and speaks well for the endurance and fortitude of the junior members of the choir.

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The small red brick Wesleyan chapel situated close to the Warren has no pretension to architectural distinction. The chapel has no resident minister, but since its erection in 1894 it has served as the meeting place of local non-conformity, and has established itself as part of the religious life of the community. There is seating for 120. The Wesleyan Record of 1894¹ provides a most interesting account of non-conformist activities in Gawsworth in late Victorian days, particularly the period prior to the building of the Chapel, the paper recording that

“One day in May, 1892, Mr. James Whittaker, of Lowes Farm, and his neighbour, Mr. William Oliver, of Gawsworth, drove up to the house of the superintendent-minister at Macclesfield with a letter of ominous dimensions, sealed with red wax. “Here,” said they, somewhat excitedly for elderly men, “is the deed of conveyance; we received it this morning by post from Lord Harrington’s London lawyers; and we want you to get the case of the new chapel passed at the District Meeting to which you are going to-morrow.”

The three venerables rejoiced together, but the minister explained that before sanction could be obtained for the erection of the chapel, plans must be drawn showing the dimensions of the building; estimates must be formed of the probable cost, and such an amount of subscriptions promised as would secure the success of the undertaking.

On a beautiful summer day the superintendent drove off with Mr. Whittaker and Mrs. William Oliver to Northwood Farm to ask the first subscription for the proposed chapel from Mrs. Thompstone, as the most likely to help them with a good start. In the drive of six miles the minister talked with the farmer of the dairy industry of this part of Cheshire, and found that a farmer’s ability was measured by the number of cows he “milked,” just as cannon are described as “a thirty-pounder,” or “a sixty-pounder.” “This farm,” said his friend, “belongs to So-and-so, who milks thirty cows; the farmer who lives yonder milks sixty cows.”

Mrs. Thompstone was apprised of their coming, and received them very graciously. Although aged and feeble she was quite willing to speak about Gawsworth, and was much pleased to hear that Lord Harrington had made them a free gift of a site for a chapel. It was

¹ Volume 3, Numbers 25 and 26. January and February, 1894.



Gawsworth Sports.
The author presenting prizes.



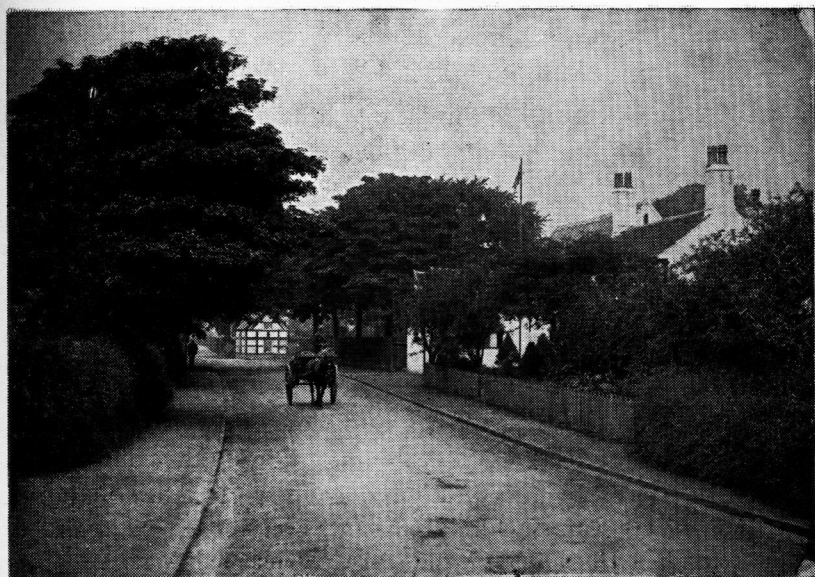
The Warren, Four Lane Ends, with the Fitton Cottage on the left, circa 1875.

The Manor of Gawsworth

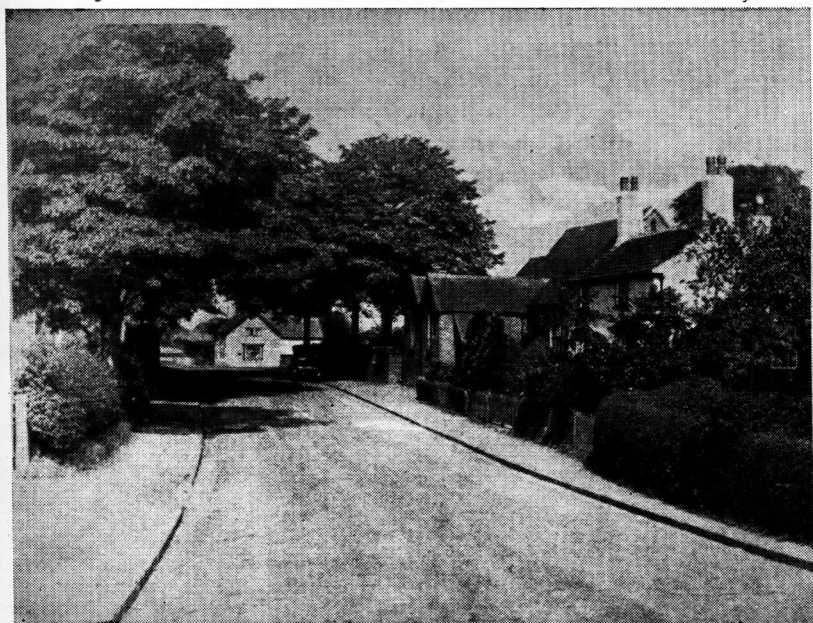
then that she told them that her father was present as a young child in his mother's arms at Maggoty Johnson's funeral. Coming to the object of their visit, she spared them the trouble of begging. Addressing her grand-daughter, she said, "Bring me that cup." The little maiden left the room, and soon returned with a tea-cup, in which there was something heavy and bright. "Here," said Mrs. Thompstone, handing the cup to Mr. Whittaker, "I have been keeping this for you to help you to build a chapel at Gawsworth." The good man took the cup with a look of pleasure, and counted out the shining contents. The superintendent watched the counting process, glad to see so many minted effigies of good Queen Victoria, and was delighted when Mr. Whittaker announced the total one hundred sovereigns! Mrs. Oliver was in tears of thankfulness and joy. That £100 was the first contribution to Gawsworth Chapel.

Stone-laying day drew a crowd of well-wishers. Mrs. Thompstone was too unwell to lay a memorial stone herself, but her daughter, Mrs. Stevens, did it for her mother. The day was very nearly made sadly memorable by an alarming accident. Amongst those who went from Macclesfield to Gawsworth were four young people—a son and daughter of a leading layman and a son and daughter of the superintendent minister—who drove out in a stanhope, drawn by a fleet-footed mare, to which was given the name Stella. While the meeting was being held after tea, they extended their drive on the Congleton Road. In meeting a van Stella took fright, bolted suddenly to the right, and leaping madly through a thin hedge, carried with her the stanhope and its four occupants. On the other side of the hedge the ground lay twelve feet below the level of the road. The marvellous thing is that the whole four escaped without a scratch. The results of the day were that the memorial stones were laid, satisfactory collections made, and four young lives saved by what looked like a miracle of Providence.

The opening day was "an high day." There came from Macclesfield and the regions round about pedestrians and equestrians, riders on bicycles and tricycles, and in vehicles of every shape and style. The dedicatory sermon was preached by the Rev. W. Wilson. Tea was served, and a public meeting held in a large marquee, presided over by a worthy alderman of the Cheshire County Council, and addressed by ministers and laymen. The conditions were fulfilled as to finance, and the grants promised by the Chapel Committee



The Warren in 1912.



The Warren in 1935.

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and the Extension Fund Committee were promptly remitted, so that Gawsworth Chapel has not left upon it one farthing debt.”¹

A remarkable account of Gawsworth early last century was written by George Slater, a devout Nonconformist. He died November 1854, aged 83, and lies buried in his native village. In this paper he states:

“I was born in the farm at Gawsworth where my forbears had lived for generations. We all hail from that one place which is the source of all my family connections.

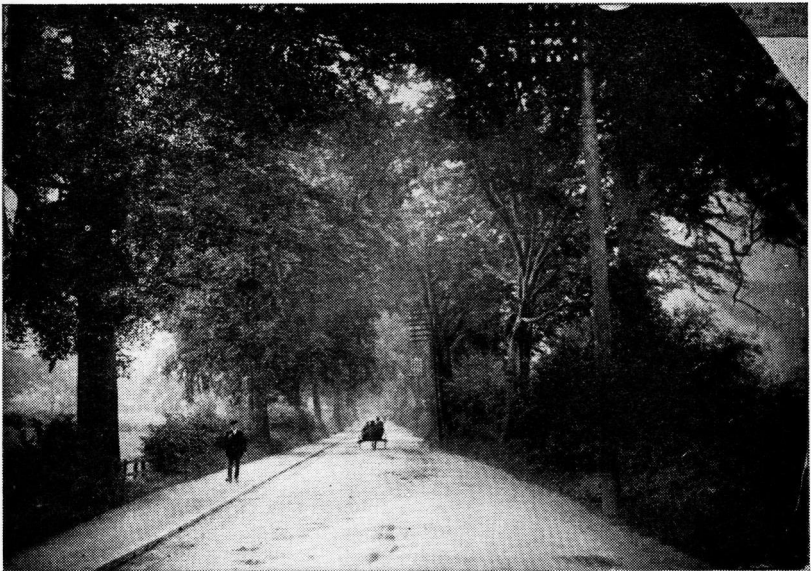
The old farm house was built chiefly of timber and thatched with straw. A few years after my father succeeded to the property he built a new farm house more convenient to the highway. I have often heard him say that he was present at the great Camp Meeting of the Primitive Methodists, which was held upon the Mow Mountain (Mow Cop), on May 31st, in the year 1807, and I have heard him say that he was an eye-witness of the conference which took place between the celebrated Hugh Bourne and a Mr. Stephenson—a magistrate—and his friends, who came upon the ground and blustered and threatened to disperse the meeting.

Upon our farm in Gawsworth we had a source of profit of which many farmers never heard; we had a great number of very large birch trees, many of them measuring from six to ten feet in circumference. It was our practice in the spring-time to bore holes through the bark with a large gimlet, a foot or two above the ground, and to insert a small wooden tube in each hole, by which means the sap was carried into a vessel which was set to catch it. The yield was remarkable. By this means we secured about a one-horse cartload of sap, called birch water, every day during the season. It was an article

¹ Following the opening of this chapel, the Rev. John Trevenen Penrose, the Rector of Gawsworth in his Parish Magazine for January 1894 wrote:—“The year that is now passing away has seen the opening of a Wesleyan Chapel in the parish. For some time I did not think there was any need for it. But I have come to see that there are many sincere Wesleyans among us who felt it to be a genuine want. And I must honour them for their desire to have a place of worship of their own, worthy of its object, as well as for the zeal and perseverance with which they have brought the enterprise to a successful issue. It is our duty to respect the conscientious differences of all Christians. I am most anxious to do so myself, and I trust that all my friends, especially Church people, will show an example in this respect, however firmly they hold their own views. While I claim the liberty to believe that the Church of England holds and teaches the Truth of Christ most fully, and has the best form of Government, I wish to remember and respect the liberty of others, who, with quite as much sincerity, think differently. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. But at the same time let us live peaceably with all men, bidding God speed to all who in Christ’s name are trying to ‘turn the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just.’”



Medieval preaching cross and Warren, circa 1890.



Congleton Road. Gawsworth, seen from the Warren cross roads, before the beech trees were felled 1920.

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which was easily sold in Macclesfield, and was manufactured into birch wine, which was reckoned a great luxury in those days.

Since then I have seen that the patriarchal old birch trees, which had stood for centuries, had fallen before the ruthless axe of the nineteenth century; and as far as I can hear, this article, which may be reckoned as the fruit of the ground, has slipped out of the sight of the Cheshire farmer, and many of them have never even heard of such a thing as a tenant raising his rent from the sap of the old birch trees.

From the days of my early boyhood, I was, like all my brothers, brought up to regular work; my father never would allow us to spend our time in idleness; nor would he ever allow us to attend any place of vain amusements. In those days bear-baiting was practised at a public-house in Gawsworth, and nearly all the lads in the parish were permitted to see the sights and enjoy the sports.

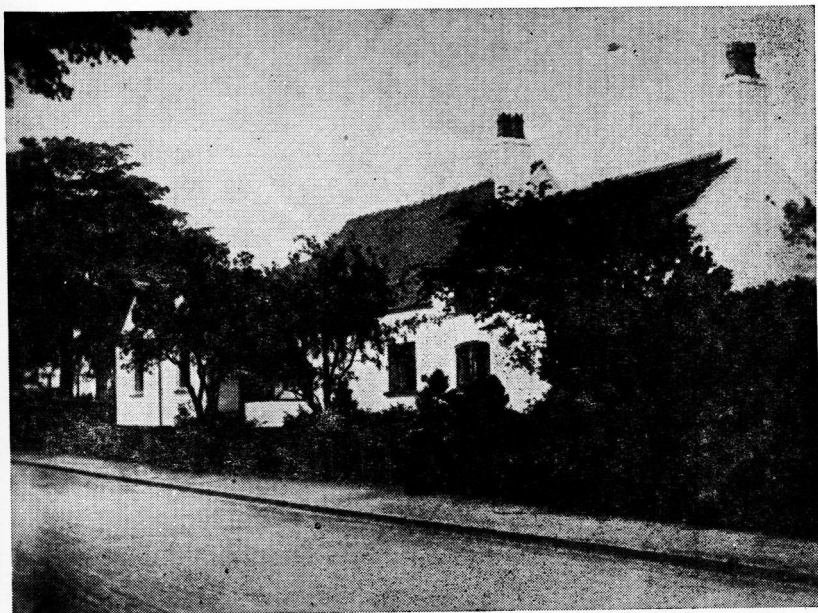
In those days farming was worse, if possible, than it has been in recent years. Prices of all sorts of produce were generally very low, and farmers had hard work to make all ends meet. We had upon our farm a moss room, where we regularly got every summer a large lot of peat, called "turf," which we sold in Macclesfield at seven shillings for a one-horse load.

One of the first things that I remember was being carried to school on the back of my nurse Elizabeth Adderley, and being taught the vowels of the alphabet. I went to this school for two or three years at least. At this time the school was on the premises adjacent to the Rectory. The minister himself was the schoolmaster. His name was Crabtree;¹ he had short legs and a short body, and was very corpulent. I do not doubt that his circumference was far greater than his length. He had a good school, and was reckoned a jovial fellow, and was pretty well liked in the parish. He was frequently invited to the farm houses on their special occasions, such as what they called "Shutting of Shearing," or Harvest Home. Notwithstanding his great corpulence, he prided himself in knowing how to step it. It was rare fun for the swains, when all hearts were merry, to see their parson with his big stomach and short legs, and without coat or waistcoat, leading off in an Irish jig, or dancing a hornpipe with the servant-maids.

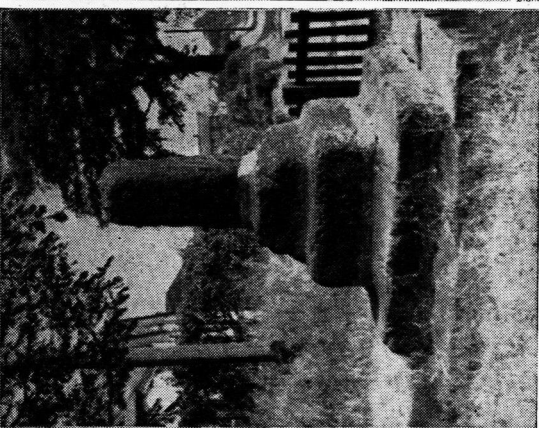
¹ The Rev. James Crabtree, Curate in charge 1788-1818.



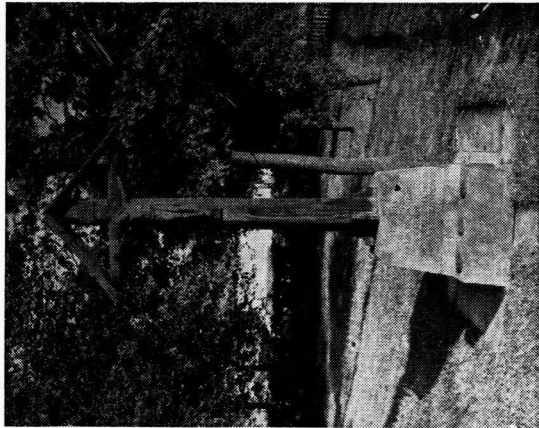
The "Queen of Gawsworth's Cottage," destroyed early this century.



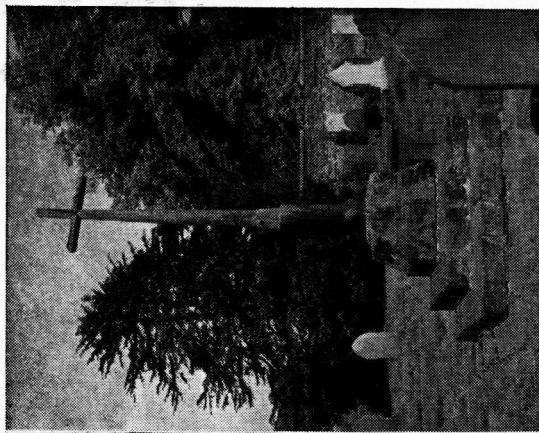
The School, circa 1880.



The medieval Preaching Cross at the Warren.



The Gawsworth Calvary.



The Churchyard Preaching Cross.

The Parish

We had a fresh minister in 1818, a young man new from college. One of the first lessons that we were required to learn at school was the exact name, at full length of our new clergyman. His name was "Francis Frederic Grimshaw Brandt."¹ We were given to understand that it was a very grand name, and that we must learn it off by heart and never forget it. The name was so hammered into my head for years that I still remember it.

Our new clergyman had not only a grand name, but we were taught to regard him as a very grand man. He gave strict orders that all the boys on meeting him on the road must pay him the homage due to his position. Little did I think in those days that I should live to know his son as a barrister, learned in the law. The prescribed form of salutation was, that the boy must take off his cap or hat with his left hand, and with his right hand wide open, must stroke down his bare head from his crown to his nose; and if any luckless lad broke this law, he was forthwith brought before a sort of court-martial, to take his trial and receive his doom.

I remember Mr. Brandt coming into school one day and ordering the old schoolmaster to strip a boy for this offence down to the waist, and to cane his bare back without mercy; Mr. Brandt standing by and urging the old schoolmaster to lay on and lay on. We all trembled in our shoes, and I, for one, never forgot it. It was a very unmistakable method of teaching us all how "to order ourselves lowly and reverently to all our betters."

I remember several freaks of this young clergyman, but I will name only one. There is an ornamental sheet of water called by the boys "Parson's Pool"; the water is deep, and it lies between the Church and the Old Rectory. It was winter, the pool was frozen over, but the strength of the ice was uncertain, and our new parson wished to test it. He called the biggest boy on the bank to go upon the ice; the boy hesitated, but he was urged to go further and further, and then he ordered the boy to jump and jump; the boy was in mortal fear, but he durst not disobey, and at length he jumped again and again till Mr. Brandt was satisfied of its strength. He then went into the Rectory and forthwith came back, and putting on his skates he disported himself all afternoon. If the boy had dropped through the ice and been drowned he might probably have been honoured with a

¹The Rev. Francis Brandt, Curate in charge 1818-1844.

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funeral sermon on the following Sunday, and we should, perhaps, have been told that the lad lost his life in the discharge of his duty."

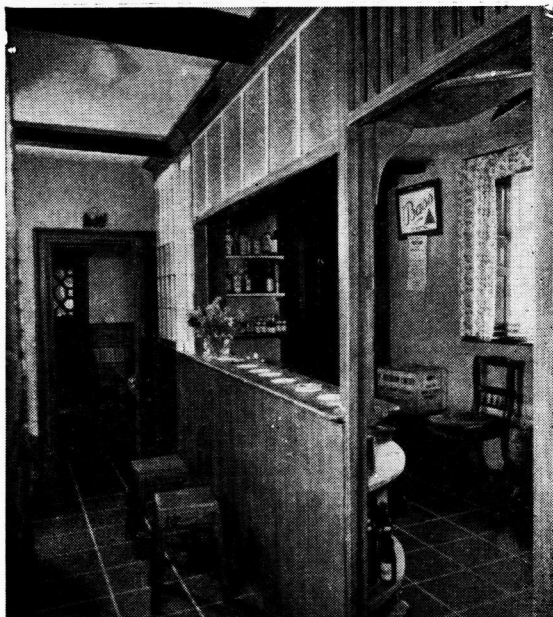
A feature of the village at this period, and working until comparatively recent times, was the old water mill of Gawsworth, said to have been one of the finest corn mills of its kind in East Cheshire. Alas like many of its kind it is no more, tractor and hammer mill taking the place of the two water wheels and huge grind stones. These stones were housed on the second floor, there being four floors in all; the upper two serving as store rooms. The ground floor was the miller's warehouse with two loading bays, and at one end of the building was a kiln. Miss Emmie Hague recalls many happy hours spent playing around the mill, loving the smell of roasted grain. It was customary after Christmas for the farmers to take their feathers to be roasted. Many a bed had its beginnings at Gawsworth Mill. The wheels were fed by a stream dammed to form a pool, known as the "Millpool." It was a sanctuary for bird life, with swans, wild duck and moor hens. The pool was fringed by about half an acre of reed beds, where hundreds of starlings would gather for evensong and roost on summer evenings. Beyond the reeds was the poolhead, and Miss Hague's father once shot an otter there. It was truly a naturalist's paradise in former times.

Gawsworth Mill was worked by the Thompstone family for over a hundred years. When the last Miller Thompstone died there was no son to follow, and as a result the wheels never turned again. All that remains in Mill Lane today is the miller's cottage and the stream running through the low lying land which used to be Gawsworth Mill-pool.

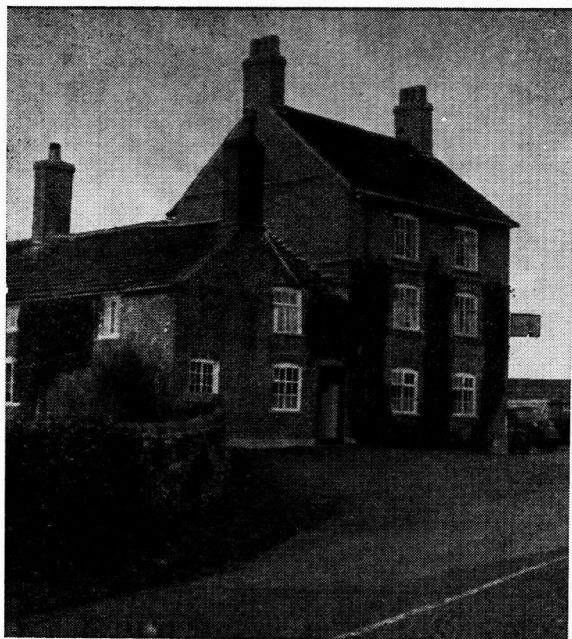
The village of Gawsworth possesses a number of interesting old houses and two inns. The Harrington Arms is situated at the bend of the main highway from Macclesfield to Congleton, and at the western extremity of the long avenue of lime trees. It is a rare Queen Anne house, very little changed since it was built. The forecourt is cobbled, and the old bar, with its original furniture, is a splendid survival of the early eighteenth century. It is very much a farmer's and countryman's inn, and long may it remain so. During the last decade the following Licencees have "kept" the Harrington: Albert Bailey, Tom Shaw, Mark Pierson,¹ William Chapman and John Cheetham.¹ The farm attached to the property is of some ninety acres.

At the northern end of the village, on the road to Macclesfield, is the Rising Sun Inn, which has been remodelled out of all recognition

¹ Both are buried close to the yew tree in the south west side of the churchyard.



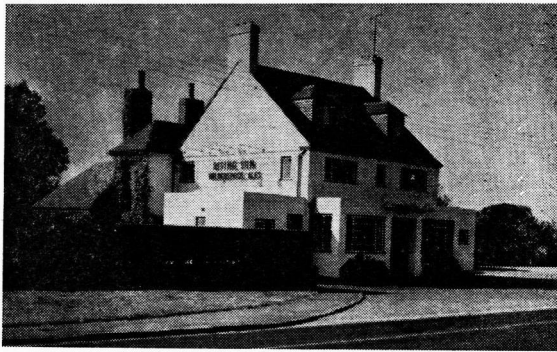
The Bar Passage.



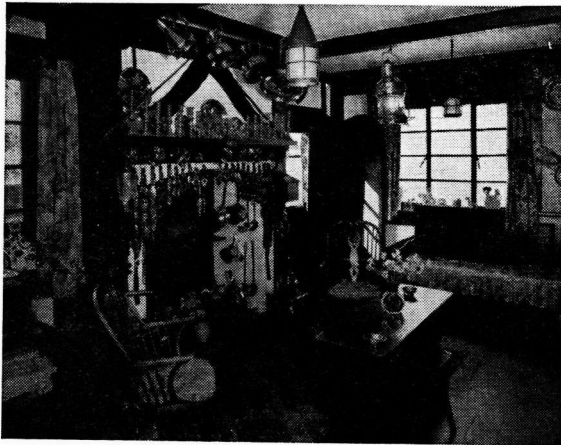
The Harrington Arms Inn.
An interesting and unrestored Stuart hostelry.



Rising Sun Inn circa 1890.



Rising Sun Inn as re-modelled in 1935.



The "Roughley's" Kitchen.

The Parish

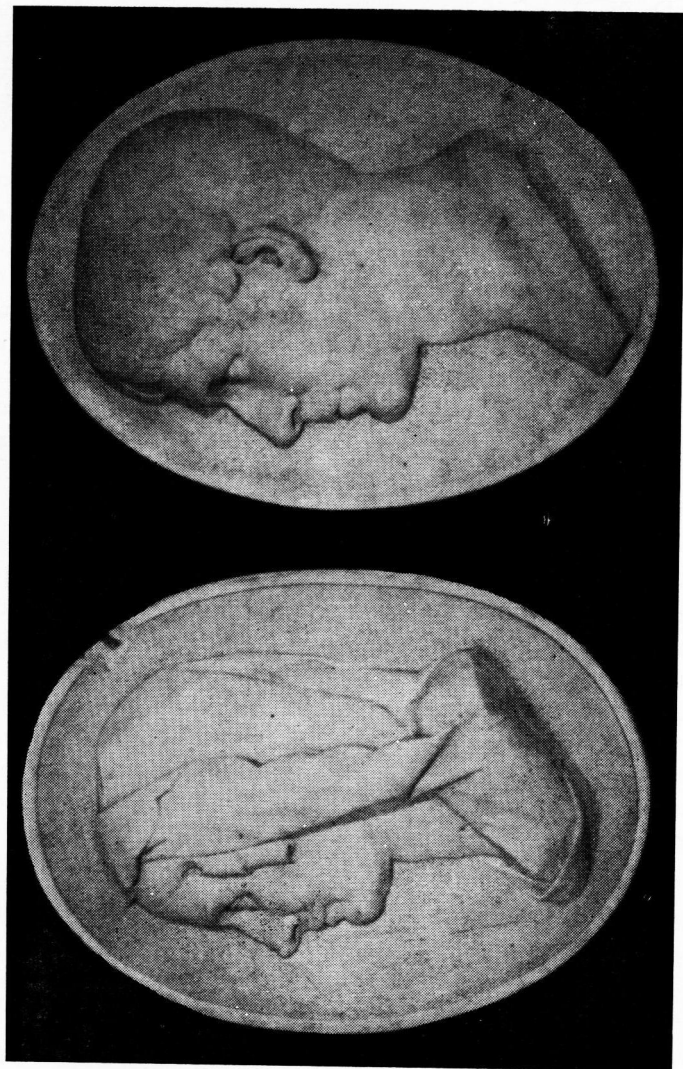
of its original form. It stands on high ground, and before the present Licencee, William Norman Roughley, took possession in 1935, was tenanted by William George Wilkinson, who first rented the hostelry and adjoining farm towards the end of the nineteenth century. In those days it was a picturesque property, of which nearly all trace has been lost in the 1935 rebuilding. Previous to Wilkinson's occupation the property was tenanted by Andrew B. Lomas. Formerly John Linell "kept" the Rising Sun until his death in 1853 at the age of 58.

Both Gawsworth's smithies are now defunct. Until 1921 Harry Poole, who succeeded George Massey and John Layton, operated the blacksmith's shop at the Warren, and as children we often worked the bellows in his workshop. The High Lane smithy has not been worked for over fifty years. The property was built by John Holland, who employed "Whistling Tommy" of Congleton to do the bricksetting. In later years William Holland and then his son, Noah Holland, carried on the craft of blacksmith and wheelwright. The present owner of the property, Mrs. Downes, is the daughter of Noah Holland, and the great granddaughter of old John Holland who first built the house and workshop in the opening years of last century.

A short distance away lies the cottage of Mrs. Mycock, the granddaughter of old Abraham Holland who was sexton at Gawsworth for many years (and a relative of Holland the blacksmith). It is said of Abraham Holland that he knew the position of every verse in the Bible, which he read nightly to his wife Sarah, who could neither read nor write. As a countryman Abraham Holland possessed the unique gift of being a blood charmer. I have heard many accounts of this healing ability from Mark Pierson and his grand-daughter Edith Mottishead, who married William Massey of Mere Farm, Marton. He claimed that everyone who read the Bible over and over again would find the passage which gave this gift of blood-healing.

The present road which passes through High Lane from Macclesfield to Congleton, formerly took a different course, and the route of the old trace may be easily followed on land to the south of the existing highway.

Nearly all the many farms of Gawsworth are picturesque, but none more so than Big Tidnock Farm, the largest in the parish, covering 270 acres, and claimed by Elfrida Thornycroft to be "the finest farm for cheese in Gawsworth—crumbly with a delicious slightly beery flavour." This house was the home of the celebrated Cheshire sculptor



Plaques by Thomas Thorneycroft, the Gawsworth sculptor. On the left "Ann Thorneycroft by her son, 1857."
And on the right "W. B. Dickinson, surgeon of Macclesfield." Both in the author's collection.

The Parish

Thomas Thornycroft (1815-1885), who was the father of the still more famous Sir W. Hamo Thornicroft.

Thomas Thornycroft left his native village in August 1835 to work in London, but he often returned to Big Tidnock, and in a letter dated August 20th 1836, addressed to Mary Francis, herself a noted sculptress, whom he eventually married, he writes of Gawsworth "As for the country, it is beautiful as ever; its pastures are clothed with as rich a green, its woods with as fragrant and cool a shade as when I first trod them. The old hills, as the blue mist rolls from their summits each morning, present the same outline they have borne for ages."

In January 1956 the Warrington family of Adlington, direct descendants of the Thornycrofts of Tidnock, Gawsworth, very generously presented the author with two important plaques by Thomas Thornycroft. One is of his mother, and is incised on the edge "Ann Thornicroft by her son 1837," and the other is thought to be of his friend and patron W. B. Dickinson, surgeon of Macclesfield. The portrait of Ann Thornycroft appears to have been exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1838 under the title "Medallion of a Lady."

Thomas Thornycroft's father, John, married Ann Cheetham, daughter of a farmer at Bosley, in the year of the Battle of Waterloo, 1815, and in his day farming Big Tidnock Farm presented many problems to the family. As stated by Elfrida Thornycroft, with the peace following the Napoleonic wars came a fall in farm prices and a rise in taxation, whereby many farmers were ruined, and all suffered the utmost misery. For twenty years farming remained at its lowest ebb, and in the midst of this sad time in March 1822 John Thornycroft died, leaving his young widow with three infant sons in possession of the farm.

After the death of her husband Ann Thornycroft continued to farm at Tidnock for over twenty years. She had a character for being independent, and during the Anti-Corn Law riots a mob surrounded the market at Macclesfield and refused to let the farmers go home, threatening to stone the first who attempted to leave. None of the farmers dared to make the first move until Ann Thornycroft rode forward and cleared a way through the crowd. It is said of her that trespassers who came to steal her cranberries would not merely be ordered off her land, but have their baskets and rakes boldly taken from them by the mistress of Tidnock. Yet she always kept a big custard baked in a cup of raised-pie-crust ready for needy wayfarers who came to beg for food at the farm.

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In view of this pressure of farm work it is not perhaps surprising that Mrs. Ann Thornycroft was perplexed at her eldest son Thomas when old enough to be useful, instead of going to work he spent his time drawing lines and circles on the farmhouse table, and making figures of animals.

In his later life apart from being a distinguished sculptor, Thomas Thornycroft was also a most capable marine engineer, and he founded the well known Thornycroft yard at Chiswick. Always remembering with affection his boyhood home at Gawsworth, he built for his mother a threshing machine. This machine was one of the first of its kind to be operated by steam power, and is said to have worked successfully at Tidnock for over fifty years.

The farm is still a picturesque old property, but must have been more so before the great fire of 1874 when an oil lantern was knocked over, setting fire to the large shippon, resulting in many of the cattle perishing in their chains. A brick in the yard is carved with the initials and date W.T. 1860. The property is now owned by Colonel Bromley Davenport of Capesthorpe, and farmed by William Nixon.

Some of Gawsworth's loveliest scenery is in the vicinity, and the view from the Mollard's farm, looking in the direction of Gawsworth Church, with the hills in the background is quite outstanding

The second largest farm in the parish is at Crow Halt, a property of 211 acres, farmed by George Edgecox. The farm has an interesting old stone carved with the date "1663 G.R." placed over the mullion window in the western gable.

Park House, close to the manorial pigeon-house, now divided into two properties, retains the remains of a fine seventeenth century oak staircase. The pigeon-house, remodelled by Mrs. Walter in 1950, and now the home of Mr. and Mrs. Howarth, is coeval with the New Hall, and would be built by Lord Mohun about 1707 as a columbarium. It stands boldly at the eastern extremity of the Gawsworth pools.

In 1956 Mr. Richard A. Riseley acquired Oak Bank Cottage. This property dating from late Tudor times has been carefully restored, exposing all the original oak framing. The main centre wall proving to be of entire wattle and daub construction, a portion has been left exposed. Another pleasing feature of this house is the original peat oven with its arched top, which forms part of the living room.

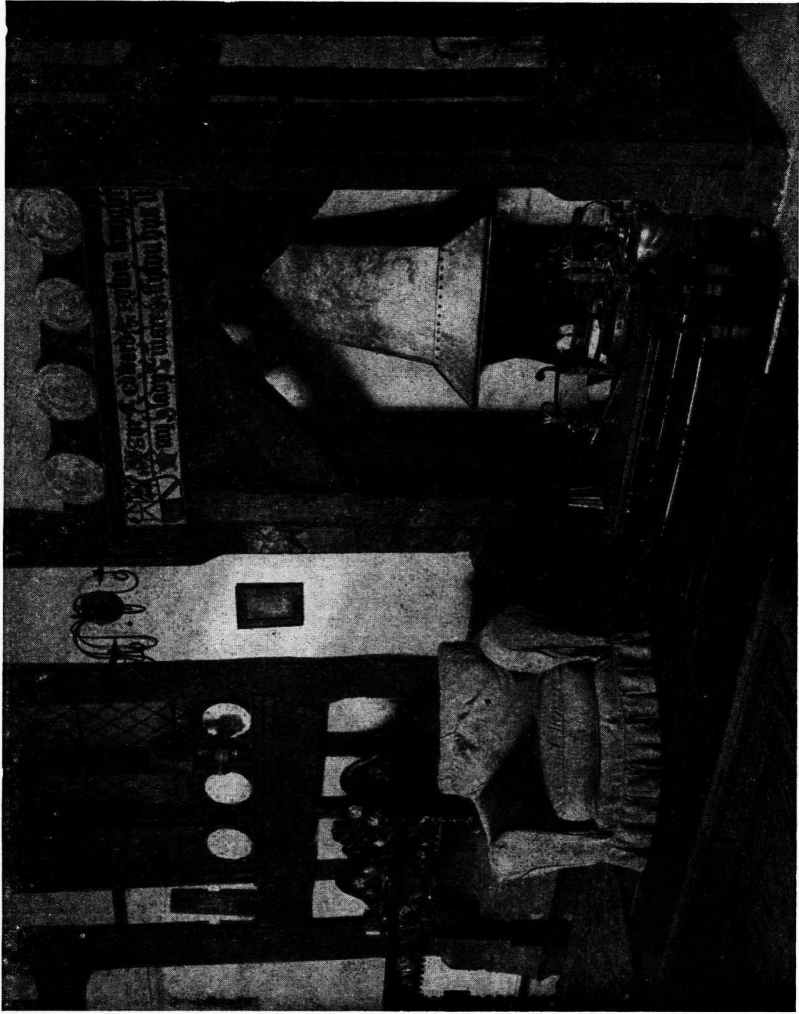
The Parish

The ancient tithe barn adjacent to the Old Rectory, which originally formed part of the curtilage, has also been remodelled, but all the old timber and medieval features preserved in the new structure.

Finally, although the old order changeth at Gawsworth, the character of the village is still old world, and it is pleasing to find the old families of Thornicroft, Lomas, Hague, Thompstone, Trueman and Allibone, still farming or residing in the parish, and their way of life becomes Gawsworth well.



The Pigeon House, built by Lord Mohun as a columbarium, early eighteenth century



Gawsorth Rectory. Hall Fireplace.