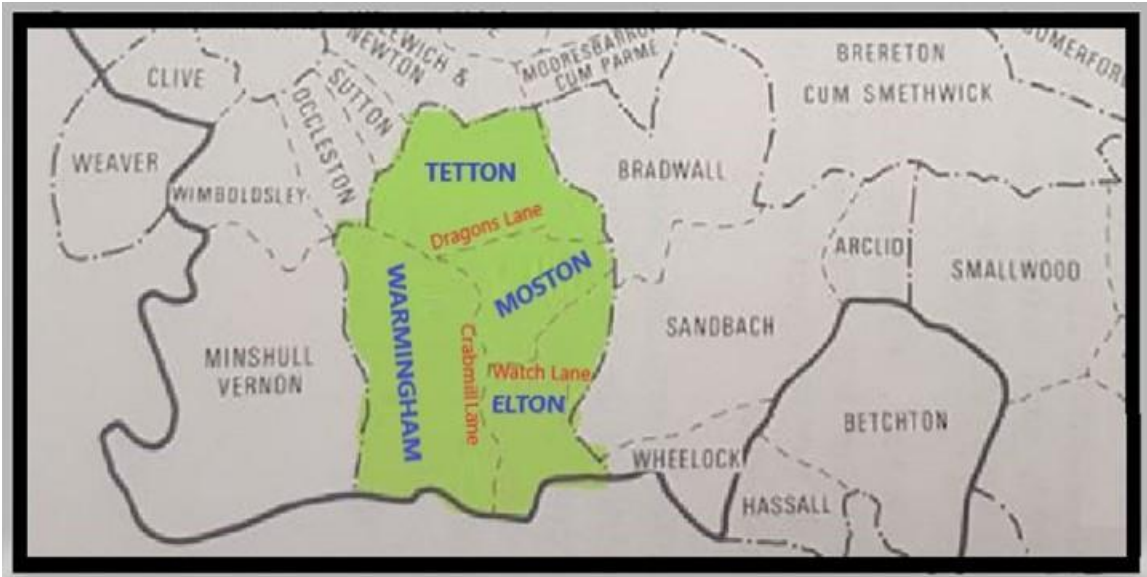


Sandbach History Society: Report of the April 2025 meeting

Speaker: John Pemberton

At the April meeting of Sandbach History Society, John Pemberton, a member of the Society, gave a fascinating talk about the history of Elton. This followed on from his talk last year about the history of the neighbouring township of Moston.

Mr Pemberton explained that Elton was a township in the ancient parish of Warmingham along with Tetton and Moston. It became a civil parish in 1866 but then a hundred years later in 1970 it was subsumed with Tetton into the civil parish of Moston. Elton is situated just to the west of Sandbach. The township itself no longer exists but there are reminders in the local names such as Elton Road, Elton Hall Farm, Elton driving range and Elton Flashes. Originally it covered the area to the east and west of the Trent and Mersey canal but with the development of industry in the nineteenth century such as John Prings in 1834 and Plant and Hancock in 1848, the eastern area became part of Elworth. The area to the west of the canal has changed little since that time.



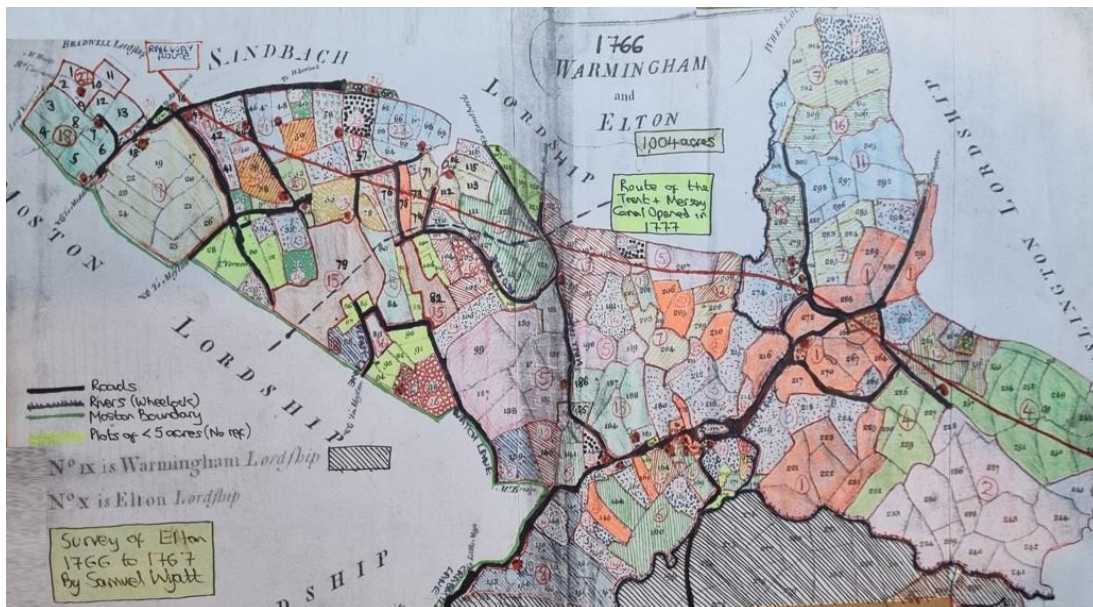
The Northwich Hundred (1840) (Cheshire Archives)

From the early seventeenth century, the land in Elton was owned by the Crewe family of Crewe Hall until the estate was sold in the early twentieth century. Sir Ranulph Crewe (1588-1646) was the first owner of Crewe Hall, and he bought the Warmingham estates which included Elton and parts of Tetton in the early 1600s. He was Lord Chief Justice under King James the First. There is a statue of him on the outside wall of Sandbach Town Hall.



Sir Randolph Crewe – Sandbach Town Hall (John Pemberton)

The Crewe estate passed down the family and in 1763, John Crewe became the first Baron Crewe. He was a very wealthy man with an annual income of more than £10,000 and had a house in Grosvenor Square next to the Prime Minister, George Grenville. On inheriting the estate, he had a survey carried out of his lands by Samuel Wyatt. Mr Pemberton showed the audience a copy of the survey map which he had obtained. This survey was carried out before the canal was built and also pre-dates the railway. Using this map along with the survey book held at Cheshire Archives has enabled Mr Pemberton to identify owners and tenants of the various fields and houses.

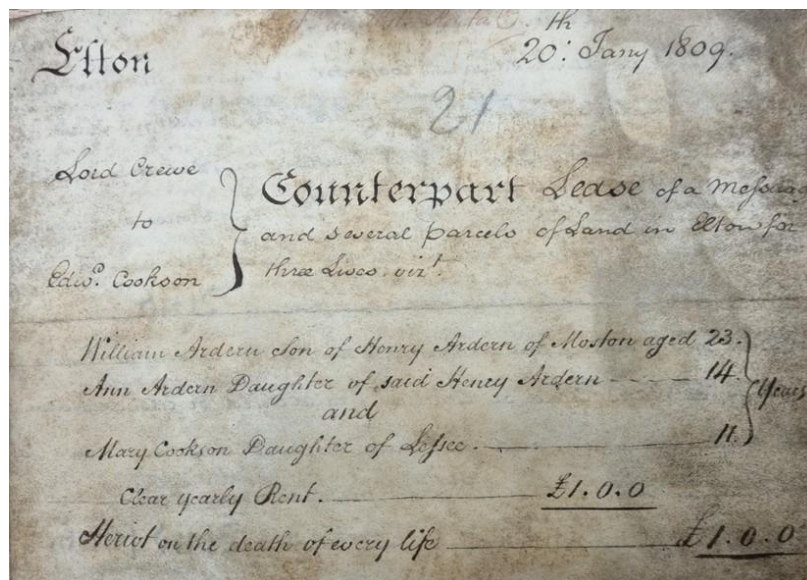


Samuel Wyatt Survey Map (1766) (amended by John Pemberton)

In 1841 the Crewe estate had passed to John Crewe's grandson, Hungerford Crewe (1812-1894), the third Baron Crewe. The tithe map of that year shows that most of the 1028 acres of Elton were owned by him, with 30 acres having been sold for the construction of the Trent and Mersey Canal.

Mr. Pemberton explained that Lord Crewe used two types of rental contract for his tenants in Elton. Rack rent was used for agreements on the larger farms and contained detailed farming requirements and constraints. A typical agreement would be for between ten and fifteen years and would allow annual increases in rent. An example shown was the tenancy agreement for Ledwards farm (now called Flash Farm) which stated that the annual rent was £31, the buildings were to be kept in good order and all corn had to be ground in Lord Crewe's mills. The tenant also had to work with plough or cart one day a year at Crewe Hall.

The other type of contract was a lifehold tenancy which was generally used for small holdings and cottages. It was a long-term agreement which would expire after the death of the last of three named lives. Annual rent was minimal and payable twice a year on Lady Day (March 25th) and Michaelmas Day (October 25th). It was potentially renewable and contained a Heriot charge payable on the death of a tenant. This type of agreement was phased out after the 1830s to give more control to the landlord. An example shown was the tenancy agreement for 1809 for Moss House where Mr Pemberton now lives in Moston. It was for three lives and cost £240 initially. The tenant, Edward Cookson had to do a day's work a year on Lord Crewe's estate and supply him with a cheese annually. There was a Heriot of £1 per life and the provision to add another life for a fee.

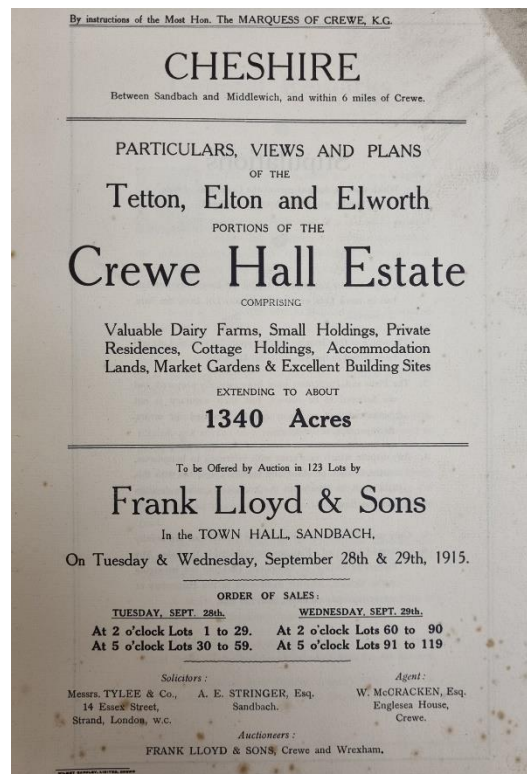


Tenancy Agreement, Moss House 1809 (Cheshire Archives DCR 42/11)

Mr Pemberton then went on to talk about the agricultural depression which affected the whole country including Elton in the second half of the nineteenth century. The repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 meant that British farmers were no longer protected from cheap imports of grain from abroad. Then in 1862 the Homestead Act in the USA granted 160 acres of public land to American citizens to live on and cultivate and much of the resulting grain was exported to the UK in competition with locally grown grain. In 1830 the UK imported 2% of its grain requirements, by 1914 this had risen to 80%.

Agricultural workers were attracted to the large cities to take higher paid employment in industry and landowners were being forced to take out large loans to continue to manage their estates. New technology in the form of reaper/harvester machines were being used, and they only required one person to operate them.

By the start of the twentieth century landowners with large debts were not able to afford to run their large estates and so many were sold off. The six farms in Elton were put up for sale by the Crewe estate in 1915 but two years later they were all sold to the Markham company owned by Charles Markham of Chesterfield. He bought them so he could access the salt which was being extracted in the area and which eventually caused land subsidence and the creation of the Elton flashes. Charles Markham was the managing director of the British Soda Company and in 1923 the farms were registered in the name of the company. Eventually in 1980s once the salt had been extracted the farms were sold back to the tenants who had been living in them.



Sale of Crewe Hall Estate, 1915 (Cheshire Archives D7818-2)

There was a second sale of houses and smallholdings in the Elton Moss part of the Crewe estate in 1918. The 91 acres were bought in bulk by Francis Poole, a lawyer who had bought Elm Tree Farm (in Elworth) in 1915. He then sold them to individuals making a profit in the process.

Finally, Mr Pemberton showed the details of Moss House from the sales brochure of 1918. It consisted of just over nine acres and is of particular interest to him as it is where he lives now. He has been able to find all these records at Cheshire Archives in Chester; at present the archives are closed pending the opening of two new centres in 2026, one in Chester and the other in Crewe.