

At the October meeting of Sandbach History Society, Richard Vickery shared his research on Elworth Hall. He said that it had started after the Society received an email from Bruce Crook, of New Zealand, in 2023, requesting information about the Plant family of Elworth Hall, to which he is related.

Mr Vickery had also done research on the memorials at St Mary's Church, Sandbach, and there were two which referred to Elworth Hall: Thomas and Anne Hulse (18th century) and the Plant family (19th century).

He said that he had received help from a number of people but particularly Mrs Mary Alcock, who had grown up at Marsh Green Farm, next door to the hall.

Elworth today is a residential area about one mile north-west of Sandbach centre. On the 1841 tithe map, the area was mainly fields, apart from a few houses at Booth Lane Head. The other substantial buildings were Elworth Hall and the nearby Marsh Green Farm. The parish of Elworth came into existence in 1847 and by the end of the 19th century the landscape had changed considerably. Sandbach railway station had opened at Booth Lane Head and, due to the railway, workshops and foundries opened in the area. The OS map of 1889 shows the area called Elworth, taking its name from the Hall.

With regard to the origins of the Elworth estate, George Ormerod and John Earwaker, notable Cheshire historians, have different views. Ormerod (1819) says that Richard de Bradwall, of Bradwall Manor, gave the Elworth estate to his younger son Thomas, who assumed the name Thomas de Helleworth which eventually became Elworth. Earwaker (1890) says that the estate was granted by William, son of Richard de Bradwall, to Ralph his son who took the name Ralph de Elworth in the early 14th century. However, they both agree that the estate passed, by marriage, to the Raven family and remained with them until the end of the 17th century.

Elworth Hall was built in the late 13th or 14th century. In 1621 it was described as a house with a new brick façade with gables and an older rear made of timber and plaster. There were at least eight chambers, and a garret, in addition to a cellar, buttery, dairy, kitchen, hall, and parlour. Ormerod (1819) described it as a "very respectable mansion of the second class".

When William Raven died in 1691, leaving no children, his sister Mary inherited the estate. She married Thomas Hulse from Clive (between Middlewich and Winsford) in 1679 and the estate passed to the Hulse family. The eldest son, also Thomas, inherited the Hall. Thomas married Anne Webb of Middlewich who had a considerable fortune due to the family ownership of brine pits. Thomas and Anne

had nineteen children, the eldest of whom was John Hulse, born in 1708. Anne died in 1750 and Thomas in 1753 and they are remembered in a memorial in St Mary's Church, Sandbach.

Mr Vickery said that John Hulse was a fascinating character. Very early in his life he was removed from the family home and looked after by a cottage woman on the Elworth estate – the reason for him being abandoned is not known – but shortly afterwards his grandfather took him to his own house and from then on brought him up. He attended Congleton Grammar School and in 1724, at the age of sixteen, was accepted for entry to St John's College, Cambridge.

Whilst at Cambridge John's grandfather died. Although his father inherited Elworth Hall, the estate was entailed to John to ensure it was passed to him in its entirety when his father died. His father gave him no financial support whilst at Cambridge, but St John's College awarded him exhibitions in order that he should complete his studies. This was a gesture he never forgot, said Mr Vickery, and led to his generosity towards the college in his will.

He graduated with a BA in theology at the age of twenty and, after ordination, was appointed curate at Yoxall, Staffordshire. In 1733 he married Mary Hall of the Hermitage, Holmes Chapel. They had a son, Edward, in 1734 but he died at the age of twenty-two. In 1735 John Hulse was appointed curate at Goostrey. When his father died in 1753 and he inherited Elworth Hall, he gave up his curacy and moved to live at the hall. After his wife died in 1770, he lived a quiet, frugal and reclusive life being cared for by just two servants. He was apparently a very talented musician, playing the flute and violin, but also suffered poor health.

When he died in 1790, aged eighty-two, he had great wealth. He was buried in the church of St Michael and All Angels, Middlewich, where a memorial can be found. In his 400-page will he made provision for his relatives and other people living in the Elworth area and left a bequest to the churchwardens at St Mary's Church, Sandbach for the relief of the poor. The majority of his estate, however, passed to Cambridge University with the proviso that Thomas and Elizabeth Plant, his faithful servants, should live at the hall rent-free for the rest of their lives and that after their death, their descendants should become tenants. This arrangement continued until 1914.

The rents from the land and other properties were to be used to support the "Hulsean Scholarship for the Advancement and Reward of Religious Learning" at Cambridge University. There were four aspects to the scholarship: three annual divinity scholarships at St John's College for sons of the clergy; an annual prize for the best religious dissertation; the creation of the post of Christian advocate; and

the appointment of a Hulsean lecturer to give regular sermons at the university. The Hulsean Scholarship is still active with the most recent lecture being given in 2024.

The tenancy at the hall passed through four generations of the Plant family. Thomas Plant (born 1852) lived at Elworth Hall with his stepmother and half-brother John Whittingham Plant. John farmed in Shropshire and in 1910 he, his wife and children, emigrated to New Zealand. He bought a farm in South Auckland which they named Elworth in honour of John's roots. He died in 1914 and is remembered, along with his mother and sisters, on a tombstone in St Peters churchyard, Elworth. His descendant is Bruce Crook who had contacted Sandbach History Society in 2023 requesting information about Elworth Hall. Mr Vickery said that he and Mrs Alcock had been pleased to meet Mr and Mrs Crook on two visits to England and to give them a conducted tour of the area.

Mr Vickery mentioned that there was a link between Elworth Hall and Foden's. Foden's originated from the Plant and Hancock foundry started in 1848 by Thomas Plant from Elworth Hall and George Hancock, an engineer from London.

The tenants who followed the Plant families at Elworth Hall were Edwin and Annie Richardson who moved from Home Farm at Bradwall in 1915. They stayed there until 1947 when Cambridge University sold the hall, the farm, and land, to Arthur Lea. The sales brochure stated that the hall had three reception rooms, six bedrooms, two dressing rooms, and a maid's bedroom and sitting room. It was also an arable and dairy farm with various outbuildings. Unfortunately, the hall was badly damaged by fire in 1959 and was subsequently demolished. The land on which it stood is now part of a residential estate. The only remaining evidence of the hall is the name of the local primary school and road names on the housing estate.

For further information about Elworth Hall see R. Vickery, *The History of Elworth Hall*, 2025 (email info@sandbachhistorysociety.org.uk to obtain a copy) and his article in *Cheshire History* journal, no.65, October 2025.