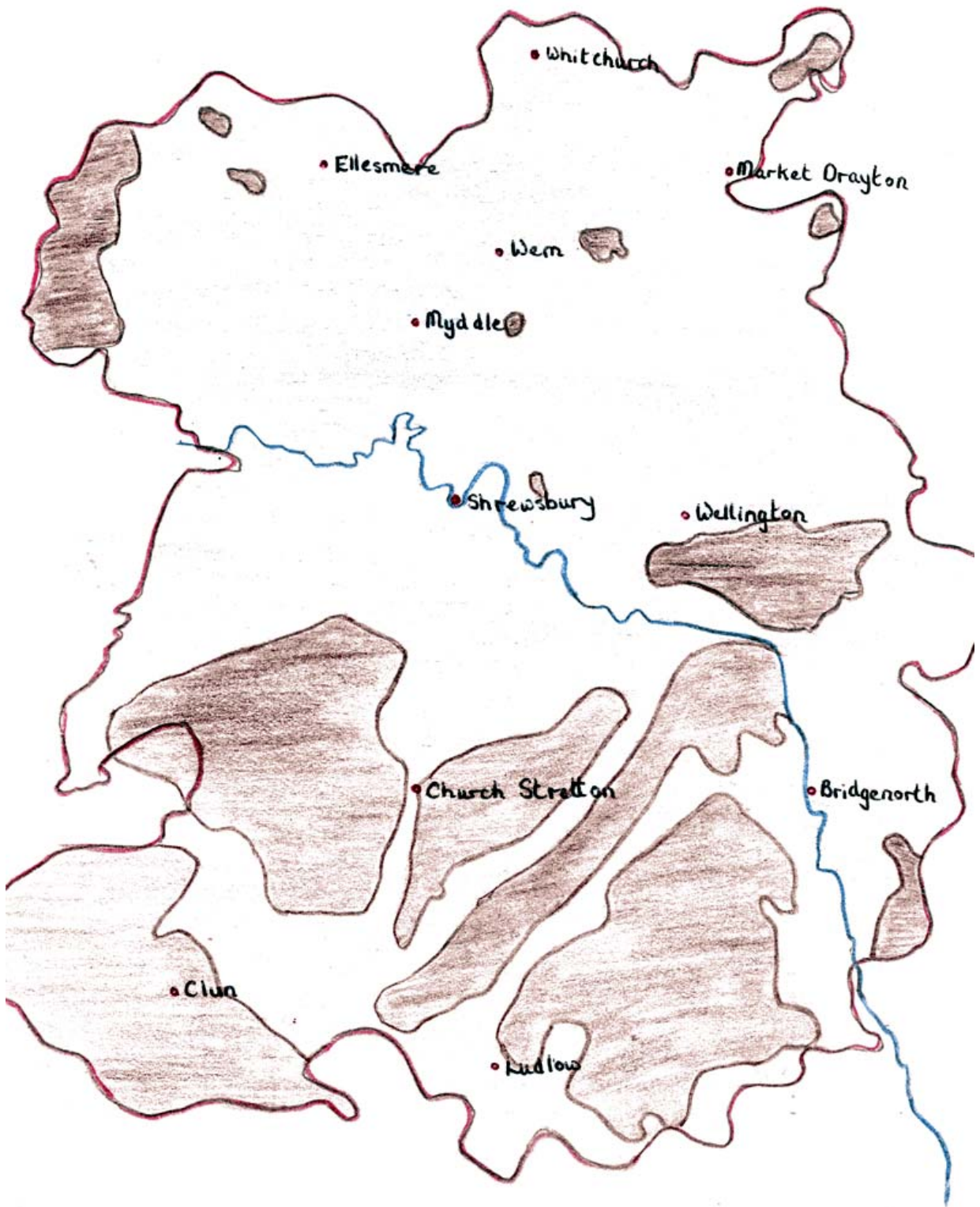


# INTRODUCTION

Fig 1 Physical features of Shropshire



The Physical Features of Shropshire

Shropshire, which is the largest inland county, lies on the border of Wales. The present county is smaller than that of Domesday Shropshire which included parts of other counties. The county of Salop consists of two portions divided by the river Severn of which the north half is mainly flat and the south is almost entirely made up of hill (see Fig 1.).

The Severn was the great highway of communication with the coast in one direction and with towns like Shrewsbury and afterwards by means of canals with Liverpool on the other. For a representation of the Severn traffic in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century (see appendix 1). The Severn barges carried large quantities of coal, grain, pig and bar iron manufactures and earthen wares as well as wool, hops, cider and provisions. It can be seen from this list that the Severn was useful to the county through which it passed. In the return trip up the Severn it is likely some of the barges carried fertilizers.

<sup>1</sup> Shropshire in Neolithic time was practically covered with woods fed by rivers flowing through extensive marshes. In the parish of Conover, Bomere Pool is the largest survivor of a series which can easily be traced all through the neighbourhood. It is highly probable that hut dwellings existed on the borders of some of the Ellesmere meres. The county was occupied by a considerable population is shown by the fact that no less than three canoes made of tree trunks have been discovered at different times in the peat. Berth pool is also thought to have once been a settlement. A stone celt was found in Godden's Lane, Harmer Hill. In the Bronze Age the neighbourhood of Hawkestone seems to have been popular. Spears and daggers as well as arrows formed the offensive weapon of the Bronze Age, the defensive weapon being a small round buckle, an example of which was found near Ellesmere in the 1880's.

Shropshire is not concerned in the military districts but it is included in the non military districts. There are no traces of roman villas in Salop. Except for Vironeonium, Shropshire had no characteristic trade. There were traces of extensive Welsh ravages before the Norman Conquest. Shropshire was in the part of Mercia which fell to King Alfred in the division with the Danes and its liabilities to taxation were still expressed in terms of the ancient unit of assessment – known as the 'hide' while in the neighbouring Danelagh the newer 'carucate' was almost universal. The original meaning of the hide was a family holding – taken roughly as a plough land – the land which could be tilled with a team of eight oxen. In a fair portion of the counties the total amount of land available in 1086 for such teams was found to be approximate to the hidage of the county.

On the basis of agriculture capacity Shropshire in 1086 was a county of low assessment. The total number of its hides as recorded in Domesday was 1437 19/24 and of these 71½ were exempt from the yeld. In a document known as the County's Hidage of the 11<sup>th</sup> century Shropshire is credited with 2400 hides. If this is a correct assessment of the county they must have been reduced by more than ⅓. Shropshire certainly suffered ravages which would have justified some

---

<sup>1</sup> Victoria County History of Shropshire (1908) Volume 1

abatement. Manor after manor which yielded a good income in 1066 is entered as wide when its new holder received it, many were still wastes in 1086 and others were only slowly recovering their old value. Shropshire is the only county included in Domesday except for Cheshire where in 1086 the great proportion of land was held by the King but looked after by the earl of the county. (See Fig 2.).

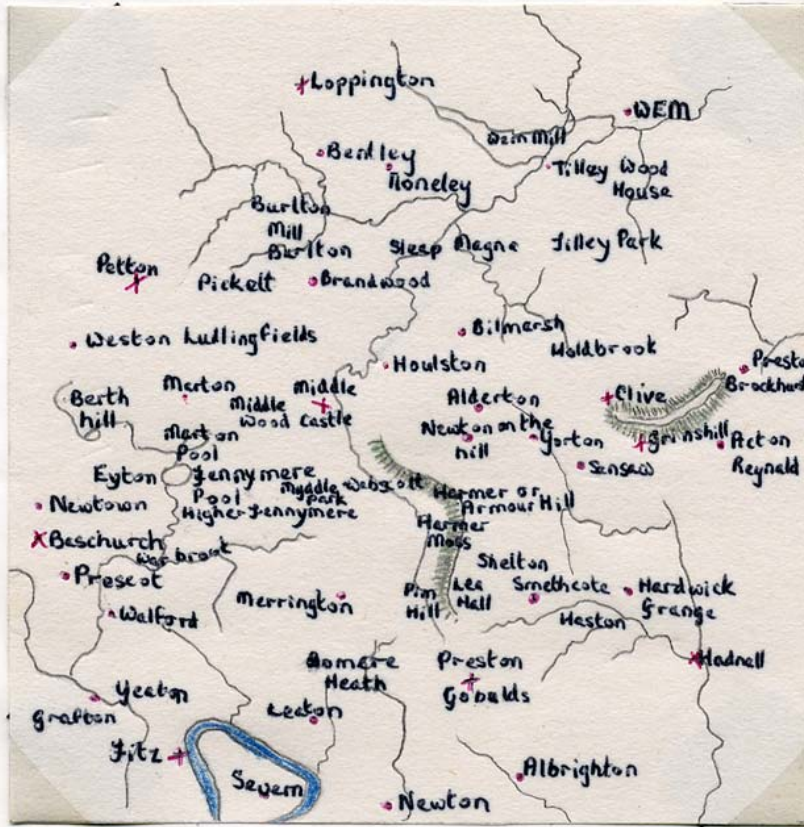
Myddle is a large parish situated among a group of sandstone hills on the road from Shrewsbury to Ellesmere, eight miles north west of Shrewsbury and five miles south west of Wem in the hundred of Pimhill, (See Fig 1.). It is in the rural deanery of Wem, archdeaconry of Shrewsbury in the diocese of Lichfield. It includes the townships of Myddle, Balderton, Newton on the Hill, Marton and part of Sleaf, Alderton and it did include Hadnall with its (vills??) of Haston, Hardwicke, Shotton and Smethcote but on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1856 the chapelry of Hadnall was constituted a separate parish.

<sup>2</sup>In Saxon times Seward held the manor of Myddle. At the Domesday Survey it was held by Rainald the Sheriff under Earl Roger.

---

<sup>2</sup> Shropshire Parish Registers "The Registers of Myddle 1541 – 1812" (Lichfield Diocese) Volume XIX, Page vii

Fig 2



From a map of Shropshire illustrative of the

Domesday Book

Fig 2

From a map of Shropshire illustrative of the Domesday Book

Scale  $\frac{1}{2}$ " to 1 mile

Taken from Eyton's Antiquities of Shropshire.

The possessions of Rainald the Sheriff passed to the Fitz Alans early in the reign of Henry I. Before 1165 John le Strange had acquired much of the Domesday Manor of Myddle – Alderton, part of Balderton and part of Sleaf were original members of Myddle but they separated from it manorially at a very early date. The Lords Le Strange of Knockin held Myddle by the service of one knight's fees under the Fitz Alans of Clun. The Lord John le Strange his son obtained a licence to make a castle of his house at Myddle in 1308. When the house was actually built is not known. He said this house of his was less exposed to the incursions of the Welsh than his castles of Knockin and Ruyton which were often under siege but he just wanted to be sure. <sup>3</sup>In 1329 he was given a grant of free warren in the manor. In 1342 John Le Strange and in 1374 Roger Le Strange levied fines on the manor of Myddle. In 1596 the Queen gave a licence to Thomas Barnston gent and Elizabeth his wife to sell land in Myddle to Robert Charleton and his heirs.

The family of Le Strange were in power of the Manor for about 420 years during the reign of 18 kings but in the reign of Henry VII there was no male issue and Joan the daughter and heiress of the last Lord le Strange was married to Sir George Stanley. They had a son Thomas who became the second Earl of Derby. In 1600 the Stanleys sold the manor to the Lord Keeper Egerton. He had assumed the office of Lord Keeper in 1596. Sir Thomas Egerton wished to invest the profits of his office and so bought the Ellesmere estate of which Myddle was part. Soon after the purchase the Lord Keeper Egerton required all the leases that were granted by William Earl of Derby to be surrendered up. Many were surrendered and new ones were granted on easy terms. After Sir Thomas died King James I elected his son the first Earl of Bridgewater (1579 – 1649). The manor of Myddle was to stay in the hands of the Earls and Dukes of Bridgewater for many years. The eighth Earl of Bridgewater was Francis Henry Egerton who was also Rector of Myddle 1797 – 1829. He was an absentee parson who spent the last twenty six years of his life on the continent. A curate was in charge while he was away. John the seventh Earl of Bridgewater (1753 – 1823) inherited vast sums of money from the Duke of Bridgewater (the Canal Duke) and he left his wealth to the son of the first Earl Brownlow, grandson of his only married sister Lady Louisa Egerton.

In this way the manor of Myddle passed from the Bridgewaters to the Earls Brownlow in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1921 the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Brownlow died and by his will the sale of Ashridge near London the ancestral home of the Egertons was ordered. In 1924 the manor of Myddle was broken up and sold so as to help pay the death duties.

<sup>4</sup>The meaning of Myddle is difficult to ascertain. In Saxon times it was Mutla. It occurs in the Domesday Book as Mulent. Rev Egerton <sup>5</sup>suggests that the Domesday form meant 'millhead' or it possibly connected with the Gaelic 'mull' or

---

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Dukes, The Antiquities of Shropshire (1844)

<sup>4</sup> Shropshire Parish Registers Volume XIX, Page vi

<sup>5</sup> Shropshire Archeological Society 2<sup>nd</sup> series (1895) Volume VII page viii

the Welsh 'moel' meaning rising ground of a spherical shape. <sup>6</sup>In 1121 it had changed its form to become Muthla. About 1172 it was recorded as being Mudle. The Rev. Egerton says that no mill was mentioned in Domesday but in 1172 John le Strange is recorded in a Bull of Pope Alexander III to have given to Haughmond Abbey the mill of Mudle. There is now no stream strong enough to turn a mill though possibly there might have been before Haremere Moss was drained. In 1255 on the Hundred Roll it again appears at Mudle. In 1272 the Inquisitioner post mortem names it as Mudell but by 1292 it had reverted to Mudle and this name was used on a fine of 1299 and the Inquisitioners post mortem of 1309. In 1316 the Monasticon uses the name Mudell but the Inquisitioner nonarum of 1341 again uses the name Mudle. In 1535 the name Medell was used on the Valor Ecclesiasticus. From about 1550 the name Middle was used. In the 1880's Myddle began to be used. The Reverend Egerton said that when he came to Myddle it was always spelt with an 'i' and he did his best to substitute a 'y' which was the way in which it was usually spelt in Gough's manuscript.

Bowcock says that the first part of the name is possibly derived from the Old English (ge mythe (e) muth) which in one sense meant the junction of two roads. The affix is perhaps Anglo Saxon 'leah' meaning a farm enclosure at the junction of the roads. The word 'mud' does not appear to have had a progenitor in Old English.

The castle is one of the oldest buildings in Myddle. John Le Strange obtained a licence to fortify his house in 1308 but when exactly the house was built is not known. The church is thought to have had Saxon origin and it is definitely mentioned in the Domesday book. There is some Norman walling in the tower. The 'Red Lion' is about the oldest house, about 500 years old, but is of course not exactly as it was then. A large proportion of the houses built in the last century were built of local sandstone either from Webbscott quarries which are in the parish of Grinshill which is about three miles from Myddle. The brook which runs through Myddle rises on the Moss Farm, which was once a mere, and then runs towards Myddle and on to Wem into the mill stream. Nothing is really known about Haremere apart from a fine which was made on the fishing of 1581 and a memorandum on the tithe of fish in the mere in 1588. It is thought that the mere was drained at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century but again there are not details.

<sup>7</sup>Balderton was called by that name in a Charter le Strange of 1175. In 1297 however in the Hare manuscript it was called Baldreton. Bowcock believed that the name Balderton probably meant 'Balder's farm or enclosure'. Balder was an Anglo Saxon name. <sup>8</sup>Balderton contained 1½ hides of the Domesday manor of Myddle. One hide was probably separated from Myddle before the estate was given by the Fitz Alans to the Le Stranges. Half a hide of Balderton went together with Myddle to the first John le Strange and his undertenant. John le Strange gave land to Walter of Shelfhore in 1175. In 1179 Walter gave

---

<sup>6</sup> E. M. Bowcock Shropshire Place Names Page 160

<sup>7</sup> E. M. Bowcock Shropshire Place Names Page 34

<sup>8</sup> Rev. R. Eytton The Antiquities of Shropshire Volume X

Haughmond Abbey two virgates of land in Balderton. John Le Strange confirmed Walter's grant and gave to the Abbey nine acres of his own territory of Myddle. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the oldest building is Balderton Hall which was built about 1570. The cottages nearby are black and white with solid oak supports and beams.

<sup>9</sup>Marton is another township in Myddle parish. From 1178-1210 it was called de la Mare. About 1250 Mill of la Mare was used in connection with Marton and in 1324 Bassemere. This Bassemere was also known as Marton Pool. There are two or three large pools near here one of which was called La Mere in 1250. The proximity of these helps to show that the meaning is "the form or enclosure at the mere". <sup>10</sup>Marton went with the manor of Myddle to the Le Stranges. In September 1324 the Abbot of Haughmond conceded to Stephen de Felton for life at a rent of 6/8 a year his fishery and mere of Bassemere reserving power to distrain for the same on Stephen's tenants at Felton (West) and Weston Lullingfields. The oldest house in Marton is probably Tan House which lies right on the border of the parish. It was built about 1560 and was used as a Tannery but is now a comfortable residence. Marton Hall is a modern building (1914) although it appears to be much older. There was another building nearer the road but this was taken down and another hall was built.

<sup>11</sup>Bilmarsh is that part of Sleaf that is in Myddle parish. In 1250 it was called Bilemersch and this became Byllemers when mentioned in the Assizes of 1256. In 1285 it was called Bylemars and this became Bilemers in the Harl manuscript of 1298. It was probably Billan merse – that is the marshland belonging to Billa. This went to the Le Stranges.

Alderton is another township belonging to Myddle parish. In 1195 the Harl manuscript call it Alverton and 1279 it had become Allerton on the Tenure Rolls. In 1280 -90 it was called Alverton super Bylemars. This name connects Alderton and Bilmarsh under one name. Alderton was already separated from Myddle when le Strange was endowed with the central manor. Both of these places have no really noteworthy buildings.

How Newton on the Hill got its name is not known. On first sight there are no buildings which are older than the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A recent discovery suggests that Richard Gough the historian lived at the farm now known as Newton House. This discovery was done by checking the fields of today with those of 1700 and were found to be very much the same. With this in mind it is thought that the house is probably half timbered underneath its modern cover. Certainly there are a number of beams visible inside the building.

---

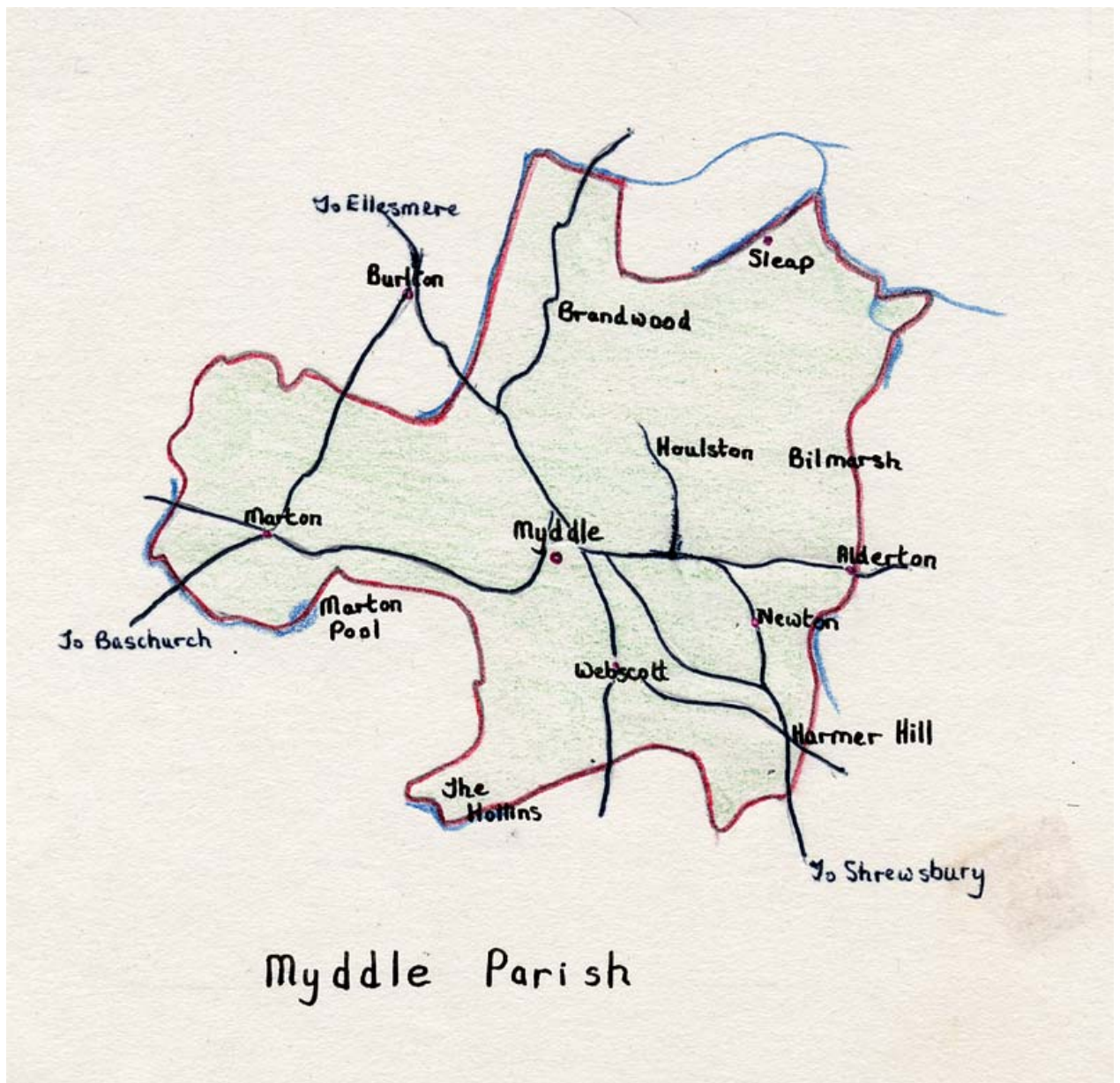
<sup>9</sup> E. M. Bowcock Shropshire Place Names

<sup>10</sup> Rev. R. Eytton The Antiquities of Shropshire Volume X

<sup>11</sup> E.M. Bowcock Shropshire Place Names



Fig 3



Myddle Parish  
Scale 1" to 1 mile

Webbscott is yet another township in Myddle parish. In the Harl manuscript of 1172 it was called Webblescove. <sup>12</sup>In 1230 in the Lilleshall Chartulary it was called Webbeschoue. By 1279 the Harl manuscript called it Weblescote, and in 1283 it had reverted to its 1172 name of Webblescove. In 1333 it had become Webblescoe and the monasticon of 1541 called it Webscove. In Anglo Saxon personal names sometimes became ble so Wigbeald may have given Wibble and Webble. The old Norse skorga meant wood so Webbscott was possibly Wigbealdes scage or Wigbeald's wood.

All these townships are in Myddle parish. Harmer Hill which is now quite an average sized village has not been mentioned as it is of recent origin. Harmer Hill once stood at the side of a large mere but this was drained and eventually the land was used for farming which led to settlement. Although a stone celt was found in Godden's lane Harmer Hill there is nothing now which dates further back than the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and more probably the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the houses are of brick which suggests a later date as local stone was once used.

Brooks divide Myddle from other parishes in a number of cases (see Fig 3). There is one brook on the west side of the parish which rises near Petton and it parts Myddle and Baschurch parishes. It crosses a lane from Marton to Baschurch at which place it has got the name of the Old Mill Brook. It is likely a mill stood here at one time but now there is only a Tan house. This house is now private but in Gough's time it was used for tanning. There is a small bridge over this brook and in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century it fell into disrepair and the Baschurch parish wanted Myddle parish to repair it and vice versa. (see Appendix 2). Another bridge over a brook, but this one is not a boundary, has an interesting piece of folk lore. This bridge is at Webbscott. The bridge is called Bristle bridge and the reason for this name is quite amusing. <sup>13</sup>There is a certain cave in the rock near this bridge which was once a hole in the rock called Goblin Hole and afterwards was made habitable and a stone chimney was built up to it, by Fards and after his death William Preece lived in it. William Preece was apprenticed by his father to a goldsmith in London but he soon got tired of that and became a soldier and served in the Low Countries. When he returned he married the daughter of Chetwall of Peplow and went to live in this cave. (See Fig 4). He told so many stories of his strange adventures that people gave him the name of Scoggan. Among the stories he told was that he killed a huge boar which had very big and sharp bristles on his back. This story was fresh in the minds of the people who were building the bridge that they gave it the name of Bristle Bridge. This bridge was built about 1640.

Myddle parish has its ecclesiastical buildings in the form of the parish church and its subsidiary at Harmer Hill and also a Presbyterian church at Harmer Hill. There were three other chapels one at Webbscott, one at Newton on the Hill, and one at Houlston but these are no longer functioning and in fact Houlston chapel has been demolished. It has a castle which was quite important as it was on the inner line of defence against the Welsh. There is no charity school in the parish

---

<sup>12</sup> E. M. Bowcock Shropshire Place Names

<sup>13</sup> Richard Gough The History and Antiquities of Myddle (1700-1701) Page 11

but there are two parochial schools, one in Myddle and one in Harmer Hill both of which were built in the last century. There was a school in Myddle for a long time before this. It has its folk lore in the form of the story about Bristle Bridge



The cave - the main living room is on the right and the back kitchen on the left. Note thickness of the wall

The holes in the living room wall are beam supports



The cave looking into the living room from the back kitchen. The cave house was cut into the rock but the roof has fallen in. The mark is the chimney outlet

Fig 5



Bristle Bridge

Fig 5

Bristle Bridge