

Having a field day with historical documents!

Eccleston in the news

Forget the notion of Eccleston being a sleepy village in the past. A detailed search of the British Library online newspaper archive has revealed that Victorian Eccleston was a lively tourist destination, with frequent pleasure boat trips arriving to enjoy "*cakes and the sweet peal of bells*". Visitors may not have been quite so keen listening to the 1867 Eccleston Church Choir, which included a man with a fine bass voice that he used "*rather too freely and conspicuously*". Accidents, rescues and drownings in the River Dee were not uncommon and thefts and petty crime rife, items stolen including a pair of trousers and some chickens from Rake Farm. There are frequent mentions of trespassers, poachers and servants absconding. Some of the locals clearly enjoyed a tippie or two, leading to prosecutions for being inebriated in charge of a horse and cart or for driving carts dangerously. Fortunately in 1868 the Eccleston shoemaker James Tyson was on foot when he was found drunk and "*guilty of riotous behaviour, making use of abusive language, and waving a stick about*". In between adverts of ducklings for sale or carts required for manure handling, are gruesome tales of suicides and even infanticide.

Eccleston field names

A study of the field names recorded on John Billington's 1721 map of Eccleston has been equally illuminating. Some fields are named after past or present man-made structures (*Stone Bridg Hey*), others describe field size (*Long Crofts*) or give an indication of field shape (*Hook*). The nature of the land is revealed by names such as *Gorsty Fields* and *Wood Heads*, and the agricultural use of some fields is clear, as in *Wheat Heys* or *Cow Pastures*. *Rough Hey* and *Lame Croft* suggest land that was difficult to plough. References to the lost hamlets of Figdale and Morris Oak occur in the fields *Figden* and *Mores Oak* and a few fields are named after their owners, such as *Dones Heyes*. Subsequent research has located 13th and 14th century marriages between the *Done* family of Utkinton, later Master Foresters of Delamere Forest, and both the *Venables* and the *Eaton* families. Although field names are subject to change over time, some of the Eccleston names are clearly longstanding. The four fields named *Banbury's* refer to a parcel of land called *Great Banbury* which was granted to Hugh Rawlinson the elder in 1563. *Long Meadow* has retained its name since at least 1537, when Sir William Venables leased it to a William Snayde, Esquire.

(Information compiled by Carolyn Barnwell, Chester Archaeology Society desk-based researcher)