

# Sandy Lane, East Side of Heswall Hill

by Greg Dawson

In 1801, there were only 168 people living in Heswall-cum-Oldfield and 100 in Gayton. Every family in Heswall was engaged in agriculture and in Gayton, all but two. In those days, the village of Heswall was what we now call the Lower Village. The town of Heswall, today centred around the busy area of Telegraph Road and Pensby Road, did not exist. This area was a vast common called Heswall Hills, consisting of over 875 acres of rough grassland, gorse and heather. The few scattered cottages in Heswall Hills were inhabited by smallholders and cottagers who eked out a living by keeping poultry, some livestock and working on farms or as labourers wherever they could find work. The common was very important to these people, who had the right to gather firewood and to allow their livestock to graze and forage there. However, over the years, enclosure acts were passed, whereby areas of the common could be enclosed and sold off to be made into agricultural fields and crofts and for houses to be built. Between 1820 and 1850, 12 enclosure acts were passed in Cheshire and in Heswall, 446 acres of the common were fenced off and sold. At this time, the whole of Gayton Common was enclosed and owned by John Baskervyle Glegg Esquire. However, despite all these enclosures, in 1849, Heswall Hill Common still covered 425 acres and the adjoining Oldfield Common consisted of 43 acres. Also there was still a considerable amount of the adjoining Barnston Common remaining, some of which still exists today under the name of Whitfield Common.

Heswall Hills Common was cut in two by what is now Telegraph Road. Between Telegraph Road and the original Pensby and Barnston borders (in those days, roughly what are now Irby Road and Whitfield Lane) there were only 12 dwellings. These 12 houses included three groups of three cottages and their farm buildings, standing where today we find Sandy Lane, Heswall British Legion and Milner Road. The first two of these little hamlets became known as East-side-of-the-Hill and the other was known as The Slack. Out of the nine cottages and small farms in the three mentioned areas, six were owned by the Price family and two were rented by them from The Lords of the Manor of Heswall. Gradually, year by year, more and more of the Common was enclosed for cultivation or house building. The 1851 census tells us that the population of the Heswall had trebled since 1801 to 513 and Gayton had increased by nearly half to 144. There were now 85 houses in Heswall-cum-Oldfield and 27 in Gayton.

Thomas Price senior of Heswall Hill, owned a small farm called Rose Cottage and two other cottages with shippens, one of which was called Plum Tree Cottage. In 1851, Thomas, who was born in Brimstage, was 77 years old and his wife Catherine, born in Burton, was 65. By 1854, Plum Tree Cottage had passed to his daughter Mary and his other cottage, built in the fields behind, had passed to his son William. At the time of his death in 1855, Thomas owned Rose Cottage and 11 small crofts and market gardens amounting to just under seven acres, what is today the triangle of land between Sandy Lane, Pensby Road and Whitfield Lane. This land had formerly been enclosed common which he bought from the Lords of the Manor of Heswall, in what is today Sandy Lane (then known locally as Price's Lane). It would not have been enough land to keep his family, but being able to use the common to graze his livestock would have made all the difference. Thomas had five sons, Joseph, William, Thomas, Booth, and Richard and three daughters, Mary, who was single, and two who were married, Ann Millington and Jane Amery. In his will dated 1854, "Thomas Price of Heswall Hill in the Parish of Heswall in the County of Chester" left everything to his wife Catherine to enjoy for her lifetime. After her death, his fields, market gardens, house, shippen and other buildings (which were all numbered) were to be divided amongst his sons and daughters, as per the well-thought-out stipulations in his will. Thomas also left instructions for his "freehold dwelling house situate in Bebington now or lately in the occupation of William Williams", to pass to his son Joseph. Thomas's executors were his sons Booth (who lived in Oxton) and Thomas junior.

Evidently the Price family were religious in Victorian days, as Plum Tree Cottage was used for prayer meetings. Eventually, the Presbyterian congregation in Sandy Lane became too big for the old cottage so a tabernacle and then a church were erected opposite the Puddydale, now replaced by the modern United Reform Church, next to Tesco. In the 1850s, there were only three pubs in Heswall, The Ship Inn, White Lion and Black Horse, all were in the Lower Village. But as building increased in the Top Village or Heswall-on-the-Hill as it became known, more houses of refreshment were needed to service the growing number of tradesmen. By 1874, Heswall had six pubs and an 'out-door' (off-licence). The same three pubs were in the Lower Village but there were now beerhouses on Heswall Hill. Standing in The Slack were the Sandon Arms and the Ebenezer Arms (which had room for only 12 drinkers and a bad reputation due to its unsavoury customers). Also, in the neighbourhood known locally as Heswall Rocks and recorded as West-of-the-Hill in 1871 and On-the-Hill in 1874, was Thomas Birkett's beer and wine retailers called Rock Stores, which stood next door to the Dee View Inn. (Rock Stores was demolished in 1961 and became the Dee View car park.) As demand for houses in Heswall increased and their family grew, the industrious Price family built more sandstone



Looking down Sandy Lane (1996) from Gorsehill Road at the old sandstone cottages of different ages, shape and sizes, all built by the Price family.