



Plum Tree Cottage, one of the original nine houses of East-of-the-Hill was so named because there were fruit orchards behind. This character farmhouse was built over 170 years ago by Thomas Price senior. His well is still in the front garden.



East O'Hills Close, with Thomas Price's farm, Rose Cottage, standing on the corner and now incorporating his shippon and Dalwhinnie Cottage. This old farmhouse is over 170 years old and was said to have once been a beerhouse for a short while, called the Lord Nelson.

cottages along their lane. Plum Tree Cottage remained detached but Rose Cottage had Jersey Cottage built onto its left gable end and Dalwhinnie built onto the right gable end. Later, work started on Builth Cottages and another row further up the lane which was added to over the years. By the 1890s, there were 16 houses and the name Price's Lane had been dropped; it was officially named Heather Road, but in the early 1900s it was renamed Sandy Lane, which it still is. When Heswall Railway Station opened in 1886 and Heswall Hills Station opened in 1891, the writing was on the wall for the open spaces on Heswall Hill as more people were encouraged to live in the area. The population rocketed from 722 in 1871 to 2,167 by 1901 and 3,616 in 1911.

Much of the property of Thomas Price senior stayed in the family and eventually passed to Miss Annie Price, including Rose Cottage and Plum Tree Cottage. The other original cottage which stood at the bottom of Thomas Price's field, was sold. Eventually it was knocked down and Hesselwell Court was built on the site (next to the Harvest Mouse pub). When Annie Price passed away, she left to her sister's son, Walter Price Smith, several old cottages, including Plum Tree Cottage, Rose Cottage and the adjoining Dalwhinnie cottage. Walter was born in Sandy Lane in 1919 and named Walter after his uncle who was killed in the Great War. Walter himself served right through the Second World War. Whilst training in Scotland he met his wife Margaret, a farmer's daughter from Lanark. After they married, Walter and Margaret settled in the smallholding, Dalwhinnie, Sandy Lane, Heswall. Margaret brought her own pigs down from Scotland to help stock up the farm.

Just like much of the rest of Heswall, between the wars, the rural area around Sandy Lane began to change as more fields and common land was developed. During the 1930s and '40s new roads were built off Sandy Lane, called Gorsehill Road, Constantine Avenue and Heather Road. Many local families lived in the old cottages then and more locals moved into some of the newly built council houses. In those days

council houses were always offered to local people first. In 1950, Walter and Margaret Smith built a bungalow, numbered 27A, between Dalwhinnie and Plum Tree Cottage and ran the farm from there. Sandy Lane was more like a dirt track and remained that way for many years. When I was courting my wife Jenny, 49 years ago, I often walked along Sandy Lane at night, back and to from her house in Constantine Avenue. It was treacherous on a winter's night, being pitch dark with high hedges, lots of water-filled potholes and only one street lamp at the bottom end. But in daylight, the acres of land behind Walter Smith's farm, the hedges and trees and the rows of old cottages of different ages, shapes and sizes, showed Sandy Lane to be a pleasant surviving corner of old Heswall-on-the Hill.

Walter Smith of Sandy Lane was a friendly man who had a tremendous knowledge of the Heswall area. In his younger days he used to go shooting on many of the local farms and seemed to know everybody. Sadly, Walter Price Smith died in January 1994 and Heswall lost a very pleasant character. A service was held for him in the old chapel in Plum Tree Cottage. Twelve years later his wife Margaret passed away in July 2006. Walters cousin, Alan Smith, a former landscape gardener and lawnmower engineer of Whaley Lane, Irby was another well-known local character. Alan had a lifelong interest in Heswall and in particular, Sandy Lane where he was born and bred. When talking to Alan years ago, as he reminisced, he recalled: "Gone are the days when Heswall slaughterman Jack Hopper would wander down Sandy Lane on a Sunday morning to kill a pig for my grandfather, old 'Slasher Smith', and go halves with him after he had butchered, hung and cured it."

There used to be a little grocer's shop at number 9 Sandy Lane run by Maysie and Jack Snedker. In the 1950s and '60s it was busy, as were many others around Heswall before the supermarkets came along. Maysie was a bit of a character; occasionally she reluctantly allowed some families to have groceries on tick and if there was a bit of a queue, she might offer a box of broken biscuits round to keep people happy. In 1959, the families living in Sandy Lane and their house numbers were: 1 Henshaw, 3 Simpson, 5 Shone, 7 Fell, 9 Snedker, 11 Elder, 13 Apter & Smith, 15 S Wilbraham, 17 Lindfield & Hughes, 19 C Jones, 21 G Wilbraham, 23 Herbert, 25 M Price, 27 F Smith, 27A W Smith, 29 A Price, 31 Steele & Bickerton, 33 Lacy, 35 W Jones, 37 Hignett, 39 M E Jones, 41 Hughes & Fewtrell, 10 J Jones, 12 Gardner, 14 Clarkson, 16 Elder, 18 Timberell and 20 Roberts.

The Sandy Lane area, just like everywhere else in Heswall is constantly changing. Around the corner, off Gorsehill Road, the houses of Milton Crescent were built on the little hill, known in the 1920s as Gorse Hill. In the 1950s and '60s, it was a favourite play area for local children who called it The Black Hill, as the gorse and grass was often set alight, scorching everything black. Children played in the small quarry and the hill was a popular sledding spot in winter and a short cut to the British Legion. During the 1960s, the cottage Dalwhinnie fell into disrepair and was later restored and incorporated into Rose Cottage. By 1969, some of the six houses in the terrace between Plum Tree Cottage and Whitfield Lane had changed hands and other local families moved in, including those of Robert Loynes and Donald Fearon and in number 41 were William Johnson and Joseph and Ramona Jones. A few years later, during the 1970s, this very tall Victorian terrace was demolished and replace by smart modern bungalows for local pensioners, built on land once owned by Thomas Price.

Around the corner from Sandy Lane, at the junction of Whitfield Lane and Pensby Road was Roebucks haulage yard, at the back of Walter Smith's land. The yard was cleared and in 1984, the Harvest Mouse pub was built on the site. In more recent years, Rose Brae Nursery on Pensby Road was cleared and flats were built, on what was long ago, a Price family croft. Today, 2018, the old sandstone cottages along Sandy Lane, including Builth Cottages, Heather Cottage, Jersey Cottage, Rose Cottage, Plum Tree Cottage and others are still standing. Some of the land passed down through the Price family, which Walter and Margaret Smith farmed, has become a close of nice modern houses called East O'Hills, the name used to describe the area in Victorian days. The bungalow of Walter and Margaret Smith, 27A, was demolished by the builders who thoughtfully went to the trouble of replacing it with a modern sandstone house (also 27A) so as to be in keeping with the old stone property on that side of Sandy Lane. However, Thomas Price senior's old farmhouse, Rose Cottage (which stands on the opposite corner) and Plum Tree Cottage, next door to 27A, are still in the family after over 170 years. Rose Cottage is the home of Walter and Margaret Smith's daughter, Mrs Elizabeth Goodwin and Plum Tree Cottage is the home of another daughter, Mrs Ann Rimmer and her husband John.