

Greg Dawson tells us more Limbo Lane in Irby, an Ancient Bridleway...



Looking across Thingwall Road to the entrance of Limbo Lane. Where the red car is parked on the service road, was the site of Brook Cottage.

Limbo Lane is thought to have once been part of an ancient series of packhorse tracks which followed the line of the Roman road from Chester to Meols, through the once wild and remote Wirral peninsula. We know that before and after the Roman occupation of Britain, there was a Celtic village (now under the sea) off Dove Point in Meols. The 20th Roman Legion stationed at Deva (Chester) had an outpost at the port of Meols which traded mainly with other English ports, Wales and Ireland. In later centuries the port was used by the Saxons and Vikings. Hundreds of coins have been found at Meols, including scores of Roman, a large number of old English, some Saxon, Danish, Irish and a few Scottish. Also many artefacts have been recovered including weapons, spurs, finger rings, and Roman fibulas, which were used to fasten cloaks. Coming from the Chester High Road, the route to Meols was believed to have followed what are now Telegraph Road, Downham Road South, Downham Road North, Pensby Road, Whaley Lane, Limbo Lane, Barker Lane or Mill Lane, Pump Lane, Heron Road, Birkenhead Road and Dove Point Road.

During the Viking age I'm sure that Limbo Lane would have often been used by the many Scandinavian settlers and visitors to Wirral who had strong links with Ireland via the port of Meols. Limbo Lane was originally called Limber Lane (as can be seen on the Arrove Tithes) taking its name from fields on the Irby side of the Lane, called Big Limbers and Little Limbers, now used for horse grazing and growing hay. These fields were once part of the Manor of Irby, granted in 1089, to the Benedictine Abbey of St Werburgh in Chester, by Hugh d'Avranches, Earl of Chester (Werburgh was an Anglo-Saxon princess who became a nun trained by St Chad). The Manor of Irby was farmed by monks based in an 11th century manor house and farm which was moated and fortified against Welsh raids from across the River Dee. The monks also ran a leper hospital nearby and operated a windmill. In 1534, the Act of Supremacy brought the Church directly under the control of Henry VIII. After the Dissolution of the Monasteries, the abbey's lands were confiscated and became property of the Crown. In 1579, land in Irby and other local villages was granted by Queen Elizabeth I to several landowners who leased much of the land out. Thomas Younge, Yeoman of Irby, leased a number of fields including Le Limbre hey (in Limbo Lane) and Le Portoe feyld (now Porto Hey Road). The site of the monks of St Werburghs manor house is now occupied by Irby Hall, built in the early 1600s. When walking past the Hall, part of the 1,000-year-old moat can be seen by looking over the wall to the left side of the property.

On Thingwall Road, at the corner of Limbo Lane were two old brick cottages. One was inhabited by William Sherlock and his wife Margery who was born in Tranmere and next door lived Stephen Sherlock and his wife Alice from Little Sutton. William and Stephen were brothers, both born in Arrove: William in 1791 and Stephen

in 1800. Their fresh water supply came from an old well across the road, roughly where 128 Thingwall Road now stands. The Sherlocks worked as farm labourers and also ran their gardens and a few crofts as smallholdings to supplement their incomes. The cottage nearest Limbo Lane was called Brook Cottage. When entering the lane from the Thingwall Road end, the narrow strip of land to the left, between the lane and the brook were vegetable gardens, now completely overgrown. On the right were two long crofts, now part of the large field called Gills Arrove. In 1936, the former cottages of the Sherlock family were demolished when Thingwall Road was widened and the service road was extended. All that is left of the smallholding Brook Cottage, is a large sandstone gatepost known locally as Sherlocks Post which stands 200 yards down the lane. Arrove Brook, which runs parallel to the Lane, was once the ancient boundary between the medieval townships of Arrove and Irby, until 1927, when the boundary was moved to the edge of Arrove Park, so that the fields between Limbo Lane and Arrove Park became part of Irby.



For decades, during dry spells, this white substance has been oozing out into Arrove Brook from two freshwater land drains along the Lane. One drain is 15 yards from Glenwood Drive bridge towards Arrove Brook Road and the other is 30 yards in the other direction. However, little shoals of Jack Sharps still survive in the water close by.



Sherlocks Post, 200 yards down the lane, with some of the original ironwork still affixed to it. The wood on the right was planted in the 1850s by John Ralph Nicholson Shaw of Arrove Hall and is officially called Limbo Lane Plantation.

During the 1920s, when my dad was a young man, some of the farmers and market gardeners from Thingwall, Barnston and Pensby used to lead their big workhorses down Limbo Lane to be shod in Frankby by Clyde Fairclough, said to be one of the best blacksmiths in Wirral (assisted by his striker Jack Youds from Irby). Today, horses are often ridden down Limbo Lane and along a bridle path from