

A History of Bretby Village, with the Chesterfield and Wain Families

A talk given by Richard Wain in August 2012
at Bretby church to
members of Repton Village History Group.

Welcome to Bretby. My talk is based on the booklet 'A Brief History of Bretby' written by H.J.Wain (my father) in 1964, and 'Exploring History in south Derbyshire' by Richard Stone (2009). I lived in Bretby for the first thirty years of my life and I returned to the area twelve years ago.

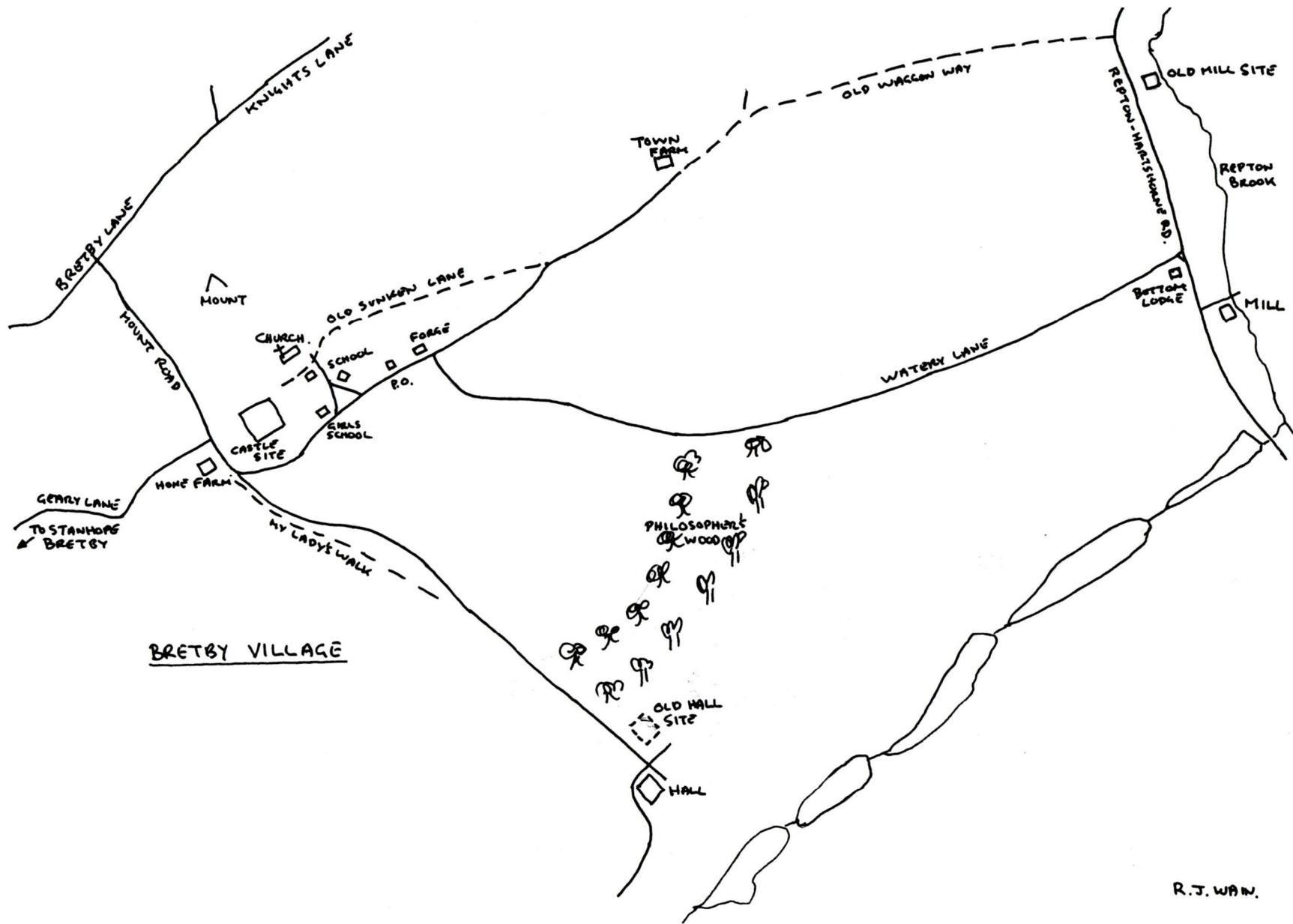
The earliest evidence for the existence of Bretby is the name, which is Danish, and means 'the dwelling-place of the Britons (Celts)'. The land was occupied by Anglo-Saxons when the Danes invaded and made their base at Repton in 874AD, so the settlement was probably given a Danish name to distinguish it from other Anglo-Saxon villages. The area became part of the Danelaw but the settlement retained its name when the Anglo-Saxons won it back.

The first written record of Bretby is the Domesday Book of 1086 AD. This book was a Norman tax record of land ownership and value. (See the entry for Bretby in Domesday). Bretby was then part of the bailiwick of Newton and had been owned by Earl Algar but was now owned by King William. It consisted of 900 acres of cultivated land, supporting 5 plough teams (oxen), 12 acres of common meadow for hay and woodland, measuring two miles by 3 furlongs. It supported 19 villeins and 1 smallholder, probably 100 people in total, and was worth 100 shillings. King William gave the land to various nobles and eventually it passed to the Earl of Chester. In 1209 he sold Bretby to Steven Segrave and Newton to the Solney family (hence the name became Newton Solney).

Steven Segrave was of Saxon origin and came from Leicestershire, He trained as a clerk, became a lawyer and then travelling Justice for Derbyshire under King John. He bought Bretby to establish a home in the area and later became Chief Justice for seven local counties. He built a mansion at Bretby with a courtyard and outbuildings, surrounded by a moat. He built the first church, on the current site, and a mill by the Repton Brook. A road connected the house, church, farms and the mill. It can still be seen as an old sunken lane. Steven's grandson John obtained a licence to crenellate the house and it became Bretby Castle. The site lies to the west of the churchyard. Six generations of Segraves lived at Bretby before it passed to the Mowbray family by marriage in 1353.

Eight generations of Mowbrays lived at Bretby until it passed to the Berkley family in 1480. The last generation were absent landlords and the castle was leased.

In 1585 Sir Tom Stanhope bought Bretby, but the lease did not expire until 1610. Sir Tom also owned land at Cubley near Ashbourne. In 1610 Tom's grandson, Sir Philip Stanhope, took possession of Bretby. He demolished the castle and in 1620 built the first Bretby Hall (about half a mile to the South). The hall was designed by Inigo Jones and used some stone from the castle. Other houses in the village also made use of this stone, including the Home Farm. Sir Philip also established Bretby Park, including the six lakes, and moved the mill to the current site.



R.J. WAN.

In 1628 Philip was created 1st Earl of Chesterfield. However he supported the Royalist side in the Civil War and the estate was sequestrated by Parliament. He died in London and his grandson (also Philip) became the 2nd Earl. He fled abroad and returned with Charles II. He got back the Bretby estate and improved the Hall and gardens, the latter with water fountains that were said to rival Versailles. These gardens lay where Philosopher's Wood is now. (see map). He bought Hartshorne and Brizlingcote to enlarge the estate and built the mansion which is now Brizlingcote Hall in 1713. He also planted the cedar tree to the North of the hall, which lived from 1676 to 1954.

The 3rd Earl (also Philip) spent his life at Bretby with his dogs and falcon. His son (Philip Dormer) became 4th Earl and was appointed Ambassador at The Hague. He rarely visited Bretby and is more famous for the letters which he wrote to his illegitimate son telling him how to deport himself. The 4th Earl also introduced, through Parliament, the Gregorian Calendar to bring Britain in line with Europe. It caused an outcry over the 'lost' eleven days.

The 5th Earl (also Philip) was a direct descendant of the 1st Earl and after his marriage he demolished the old hall and had the present hall built, designed by Jeffrey Wyattville. The Earl was a friend of George III (known as Farmer George). He was interested in agriculture and rebuilt the farmhouses, cottages and schools in the village, bearing the dates 1805 to 1815. Many of these buildings utilize the castle stone.

His son George became the 6th Earl and inherited a fortune, which he gambled away on horse racing. He retired to Bretby and built the gallop race-track on the south side of the park and also stables where the care home is now. He was educated by the vicar of Cubley. (Cubley had been part of the Chesterfield estate since Sir Tom Stanhope in 1585).

The Wain family have been in Cubley since 1700; there are gravestones in the churchyard there dating back to 1730. It is possible that members of the Wain family were also taught by the vicar of Cubley, because in 1830 John Wain II, a tenant farmer, was asked by the 6th Earl of Chesterfield to take the tenancy of the Town Farm at Bretby. He brought with him his family and possessions, including a pair of granite gateposts which now stand at the entrance to Bretby church.

The 7th Earl of Chesterfield (also George) inherited in 1866. There is a painting, which has been authenticated as the 7th Earl, painted in 1852 by W. Martin, who was the architect in charge of the Hall. It was found behind another picture in the Chesterfield Arms at Bretby, in 1950. My great-uncle Henry Shaw kept the pub and the painting was discovered on his death. The 7th Earl was interested in game preservation and was an excellent shot. He also laid out a cricket pitch in the park and it was reckoned he could hit a ball into the third pond. He took an interest in the colliery opened up at Stanhope Bretby and had the houses and cottage built at Doggy Square (Ashby Road East) for the miners.

In 1865 John Wain III was the tenant farmer at the Town Farm. There is a photograph of him and his wife with five sons and one daughter. John Wain III was my great-grandfather. His eldest son John James inherited the Town Farm tenancy but died in his twenties; William George married Polly Brown from Repton and farmed Greysich; Richard Withnall became stationmaster at Langley Mill; Thomas was the park-keeper at the Bottom Lodge, and Henry Mathews Wain, my grandfather, became head gamekeeper at the Bretby Park.

Richard was the joker of the family. One sunny morning in April he called on the housewives in the village saying 'the missus' (his mother) wanted to see them now at the Town Farm. As she was wife of the senior tenant, they all went up there, complaining to each other. Mrs. Wain said she had not asked for the, at which point Richard poked his head over the wall and called 'April Fool!' then ran way.

The 7th Earl unfortunately died in 1871 at the age of 40, unmarried. He and the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) were visiting the Earl of Londesborough at Scarborough when they contracted typhoid fever. The Prince recovered but the Earl died. As the Bretby estate was not, as sometimes happened, entailed to a male heir, it passed to his widowed mother.

Anne, Countess of Chesterfield continued living at Bretby Hall. In 1877 she had the village church rebuilt as a memorial to her husband and son. She had an organ installed in the Hall and gave musical recitals to guests, among whom was the future Queen Mary. A room was set aside for the Countess at the Home Farm, which she visited using the footpath known as 'My Lady's Walk'.

Disraeli, the Prime Minister, became her friend after the death of his wife. He often stayed at Bretby and finally proposed marriage to Lady Chesterfield, but was gracefully refused. They remained firm friends and on his death in 1881 she erected a tablet in the Church in his memory. When visiting Bretby, Disraeli used to walk across the fields to the Town Farm, where he would discuss agricultural matters, such as the price of corn, with my great-grandfather, John Wain III.

Lady Chesterfield's daughter Evelyn had married Henry, 4th Earl of Carnarvon, who lived at Highclere Castle near Newbury and they had a son, George. When Lady Chesterfield died in 1885, her daughter was already dead, so the Bretby estate passed to George, Lord Porchester, who became 5th Earl of Carnarvon in 1890. He continued to live at Highclere but kept a skeleton staff at Bretby Hall and paid frequent visits with shooting parties.

Highclere is currently in the public eye with the TV series 'Downton Abbey' which probably reflects life at such a stately home. However I feel that life at Bretby Hall is better reflected in the novel 'The Shooting Party' which was made into a film with Edward G. Robinson. Several of the characters shown in the film actually came to shoot at Bretby. There was a railway wharf at Stanhope Bretby and the guest travelled by train to Burton, where a special train took them on to Bretby. They then travelled by carriage to the Hall. My grandfather, Henry Wain, was then head gamekeeper and organized the shoots. The Bretby railway was used for coal hauling until 1953.

The 5th Earl had a motoring accident in 1901 and from then on wintered abroad, where he became interested in archaeology. He leased the Bretby shooting to J.D. Wragg of Swadlincote, who owned claypits and a pipeworks there. The Earl began selling outlying parts of the estate such as Hartshorne, Boundary and Midway in 1910, and in 1915 he sold the Bretby estate to J.D. Wragg. The contents of Bretby Hall were disposed of, some being sold and other taken to Highclere. It is said that the money raised helped to finance the 5th Earl's excavation with Howard Carter in Egypt, which resulted in the discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb in 1922.

As mentioned earlier the original church at Bretby was built in 1209 by Steven Segrave. It was a chapel of Repton Church and shared the same patron saint, St. Wistan. In 1876 the Countess of Chesterfield had the church rebuilt in memory of her husband and son (the 6th and 7th Earls). The West wall of the church is the original wall of 1209. The church has five bells and some interesting windows and monuments. The North window has three lights and is dedicated to the 7th Earl. The East window has three lights and is dedicated to the 6th Earl. It depicts Jesus as 'The Light of the World', from the painting by Holman Hunt. The South window is dedicated to the Countess and depicts St. Cecilia, the patron saint of music, in the style of Burne Jones. The painting behind the altar, the 'Descent from the Cross', was given by the Countess. It is a Victorian copy of the Van der Weyden painting of 1435 which hangs in the Prado in Madrid. It shows Mary grieving for her son, and so connects with Lady

Chesterfield's grief for her own son. On the South wall is a tablet commemorating the life of Prime Minister Disraeli, praising him as a statesman and friend. There were no interments at Bretby, apart from the Chesterfields, until 1895 when part of the castle field was consecrated.

J.D.Wragg, who bought the Bretby estate in 1915 died in 1917. Three of his sons died, two of them in the Great War. Herbert Wragg, the remaining son, now took over the family business and moved to live at Stanhope Bretby. He became an M.P. for the Belper constituency in 1923, was knighted in 1944 and died in 1956. Bretby Hall and park was sold to Derbyshire County Council in 1926 and the Hall became an orthopaedic hospital. This was closed and the building was sold in 1997; in 2000 it was converted into apartments.

In 1942 the park was under the control of the War Agricultural Committee, who appointed a bailiff to manage it. Part of the park was ploughed to grow crops and part was pasture land. In 1954 the park was bought by J.Saunders of Stenson. The land was eventually purchased by Richard Perkins (Sir Herbert Wragg's grandson) who lives on a farm at the edge of the park. Over the years the Wragg family and its descendants sold off the houses in the village and they are now privately owned.

A short tour of the village showed the site of the castle, the churchyard, the original west wall of the church and the old sunken lane leading to the mill (no longer a public route). Houses around the village green included 'The Foresters', which is late 19th century but has stone from the castle on the lower courses of the wall, and the two buildings which were the girls' and boys' schools in 1806, now both private dwellings. Further along the road are the houses that were the old post office and the forge for the village blacksmith. On the south side of the green is a pump which is the village war memorial, erected in 1920, and three beech trees planted to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of George V in 1935.

Post-Meeting postscript.

My grandfather, Henry Mathew Wain, died aged 50 in 1911 and my father, Henry John Wain, had to leave school to support his widowed mother and younger brother and sister. He joined Bass-Worthington as a clerk and became an accountant. His career was interrupted by the 1914-18 war, when he joined the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and fought in the trenches. On his return, he lived in Bretby and wrote nature articles for the 'Burton Observer' (see the archives in The Magic Attic). In 1920 he became Clerk to Bretby Parish Council and served as a Councillor and then Chairman until 1979. In 1973 he was awarded an honorary MSc. By Keele University for his work in nature conservation.