***INHABITANTS OF AINSWORTH HALL 1700-1890.***

***The Dorning Family: (c1700-1751)***

The Dorning family were farmers, originally from Culcheth, Winwick Parish, twenty miles east of Liverpool, in the mid-16th century. In the 17th century, the Dorning family aquired estates in Farnworth (Birch Hall), Kearsley (Clamorclough) and Ainsworth (Ainsworth Hall).

Nathaniel Dorning (1652-1727), married Maria Eddowes from Middle Hulton, Deane, in 1689 and they lived in Ainsworth Hall until moving to Farnworth in the early 1700s. Nathan was a prominent gentleman in Farnworth and Bolton. He was a founder & trustee of Farnworth Grammar / Dixon Green School (1715) and Bank Street Unitarian Chapel, Bolton (1719). His son, Jonathan (1690-1726), is said to be the oldest grave in the Ainsworth Christ Church graveyard.

When Nathan's daughter, Elizabeth (born 1692), married Lomax Lewis, in 1717, she was described as a ‘co-heiress of Nathan Dorning’. In a 1717 pre-nuptial he “bequeathed 600 pounds, with any further amounts dependant on the number and gender of the children that she bore.”

Elizabeth & Lomax had a son, Nathan Lewis, born in 1718. Lomax Lewis inherited Ainsworth Hall through his marriage and then undertook a major rebuild.

 The building in 1731 was described:

**“Ainsworth Hall is a red brick building with stone dressings on an earlier stone mansion. There are extensive cellars and underground passages. The lead downspouts are inscribed L LE 1730.”**

Nathan Dorning died in 1727 while living at Birch Hall, Farnworth.

Lomax Lewis was a 'bleacher, dyer & chapman' and like many in his trade, fell on hard times, despite his wife's inheritance. He declared bankruptcy in 1747 and sold Ainsworth Hall to Sir Richard Assheton, who was then Lord of the Manor of Middleton, of which Ainsworth was a township. The land and title at this time was said to have been disputed, possibly by the Dorning family. In 1751 Lomax Lewis is said to have committed suicide in the Hall that same year.

Nathan Dorning's other daughter, Hannah, in 1729 married Peter Ramsbotham (1692-1762). Their son, Dorning Ramsbotham (1730-1791), who lived in Birch Hall, Farnworth, was a famous artist, writer, Justice of the Peace and in 1769 was appointed High Sheriff of Lancashire.

The Assheton family ran out of male heirs in 1765 and through marriage of an Assheton daughter, Ainsworth passed to Sir Thomas Egerton, who in 1801 accepted a peerage, as the Earl of Wilton.

***The Wilson Family: 1760-1783.***

Sir Thomas Egerton (later Earl of Wilton) owned most of the land around Ainsworth, including Ainsworth Hall. The Wilton family was based at Heaton Hall, near Manchester, and leased out most of their land and buildings in Ainsworth for most of the next century.

The next recorded inhabitant of Ainsworth Hall was the famous 'chemist & cotton innovator', John Wilson. He was originally a 'Fustian Manufacturer' in Manchester but went on then to develop innovative techniques for making cotton velvets and calico printing (calico took its name from the town in India, Calicut)):

“**By his unwearied efforts and carefully attending to his weavers, John Wilson brought the manufacture of cotton velvets to perfection.”**

John Wilson later, with his knowledge of applied chemistry, made many important discoveries, which brought about major improvements to the dyeing process and he was considered an outstanding figure in the cotton industry.

It was around this time that he moved to Ainsworth Hall and was operating a calico printing works nearby.

**“Mr. Wilson resolved to give full scope to his improvements by taking a house and ground at Ainsworth, Cockey Moor and commenced a dresser, bleacher & dyer business, principally on his own goods, which he brought to such high perfection as to aquire the highest character, both at London and foreign markets. Persons were articled to him for seven years and taught all the various operations in the different departments. Having succeeded in dyeing many rich colours he looked for others. ”**

The relatively remote location of Ainsworth, Cockey Moor would have likely been chosen at that time as a result of many factors.

**“Rent for bleaching grounds and manufactories was cheaper, clean water was plentiful, workmen lived cheaper and it was only two miles from Bolton, three miles from Bury and ten miles from Manchester**

In 1753 he sent an employee to Greece to discover the 'secrets' of the 'Turkish Red Dye Process'. In 1761 & 1763 he won awards for his work from the Manchester Society of Arts and as a result, a considerable portion of the calico printing business was transferred from London to Lancashire. In 1786 he presented his findings in two essays:

**“John Wilson presented his discoveries to the Philosophical & Literary Society of Manchester. He had them printed and distributed amongst his friends after he retired.”**

John Wilson himself described his dying process as ' tedious & expensive' and at some stage he left Ainsworth, with the calico printing business being carried on by his son, William.

An adjacent printing works, across the Blackshaw Brook, was situated at Breightmet Fold and in 1779 this advertisement, to let the Breightmet Bleaching Croft property, appeared in the Manchester Mercury.

**“This noted and well reputed Bleaching Croft at Breightmet Fold is still in active operation and probably more reputed than it was 101 years ago. The above premises are situated and adjoining the great high road leading from Bury to Bolton and are only divided by a small rivulet of water from Mr. Wilson's Printing Works at Ainsworth.”**

This Mr. Wilson was William Wilson, who now resided at Ainsworth Hall, with the printing works close by. William was born in 1756 and married Cordelia Maude, from Bolton Hall, Yorkshire, in 1777.

William Wilson purchased the lease on the bleaching croft at Breightmet Fold and in 1780 he was granted another lease by Sir Thomas Egerton (Lord Wilton) on land ‘to construct a road from Ainsworth Hall to Radcliffe’. Unfortunately William Wilson died in 1783, at the age of 27, and his calico printing works at Ainsworth and Breightmet were put up for sale along with Ainsworth Hall, which was described then:

**“Ainsworth Hall is a genteel modern well-built sashed house with coach house, stables, gardens and conveniences suitable for a large family.”**

The next record of Ainsworth Hall was a 1784 advertisement in the Manchester Mercury & Journal referring to a partnership of ‘Thomas Cooper, John Whitehead and Nathaniel Chadwick of Ainsworth Hall’, now owners of the calico printing works.

The Whitehead family would be the next family to reside in Ainsworth Hall.

***The Whitehead Family: (c1783-1840).***

John Whitehead was originally a 'crofter and bleacher' from Levenhulme, Manchester, recorded there in 1779. He eventually developed a very successful cotton printing business and 'at the end of the 18th century began calico printing at both Breightmet and Ainsworth, living then at Ainsworth Hall.'

**“The firm, 'John Whitehead & Sons cotton printing business', was very successful and amassed great wealth. One pattern alone, called the 'Bird's -eye', realised upwards of 30,000 pounds. It was a circle with two lines, one blue, the other white on a chocolate ground. There was scarcely a village dame in the kingdom who did not feel proud of her bird's-eye print gown.”**

The Whiteheads introduced some interesting and famous people to Ainsworth during their time there. One of John Whitehead's partners in the calico printing firm in the 1780s in Ainsworth was Thomas Cooper (1759-1834). He was a pioneer in the cotton industry of the, 'bleaching with chlorine' process. He also became famous as a 'radical reformer' and after he was threatened with prosecution by the British Government, 'escaped ' in 1793 to America.

There he continued with his political and scientific careers, becoming a close personal friend of President Thomas Jefferson who described Cooper as, 'One of the ablest men in America.'

 Thomas Cooper went on to become Professor of Applied Chemistry at the Universities of Pennsylvania (1815-19) and South Carolina (1819-1834).

In 1795, during the Whitehead's tenure at Ainsworth, a James Adkin, from Ainsworth Hall, was named in a legal dispute with the famous inventor, Samuel Crompton (1753-1827). The exact wording of the lawsuit was:

 **“Theft of invention by James Adkin of Ainsworth Hall, of Samuel Crompton's own invention.”**

This was referring to the invention of the spinning machine, 'The Mule', developed by Crompton in Bolton in 1779. The mule combined the 'moving carriage of the spinning jenny' with the 'rollers of the water frame' and revolutionised the spinning of yarn. Crompton however lacked the means to take out a patent and only made his invention public on the promise by a number of manufacturers to pay him for the use of the mule. All that he received was 60 pounds and as the mule was unpatented, others soon manufactured it, presumably including James Adkin at Ainsworth Mill.

Early in the 19th century, the John Whitehead & Sons business devolved to the sons John, James & Thomas'. James Whitehead had been one of the original investors and a director in the 'Mersey & Irwell Navigation Company', which provided a navigable route from the Mersey Estuary to Manchester, greatly enhancing the textile business there.

In the 1825 Bury Directory, the Whiteheads were recorded as 'Calico Printers, living at Ainsworth Hall', but by the1828 Bolton Directory, they had moved their business solely to Breightmet.

The1850 Bury directory had no record of the company, although the Whiteheads still had some land holdings in the area. By the 1870s, the only mention of the Whitehead family was their estate at Burnage, Manchester and they seemed to suffer the fate of many families in those days without male heirs:

**“Of all the great wealth of this family of the Whiteheads, only Burnage Hall Estate is now held by a Whitehead, a widow, the remainder being taken by females to others, or dissipated.”**

The 'Levenhulme Whiteheads' should not be confused with the Whitehead family that had located in Lowercroft, Elton, between Ainsworth and Bury. Robert Whitehead (1752-1841), was the son of Thomas Whitehead (1711-1788), the Vicar of Westhoughton. Robert had moved to Lowercroft in 1771 to start a steam powered cotton mill and settled with his family at nearby Haslam Hay. His sons James, born 1788, and John, born 1790 continued to run the family business and developed the famous 'Whitehead Lodges' that dominate the area above the old mill site.

John Whitehead married Elizabeth Oram, who was the great granddaughter of the famous inventor of the 'Flying Shuttle', John Kay (1704-1779).

This Whitehead family would become great benefactors of both Ainsworth and Bury through the generosity of Sir Henry Whitehead (1842-1921), a grandson of John.

**“In 1867, when the Bury Parish Church was being rebuilt, the altar, pulpit, lectern and priest's stall were purchased by Henry Whitehead and brought to Ainsworth Christ Church. “**

Henry Whitehead, who became High Sheriff and later Deputy Lieutenant of Lancashire, was also responsible for the Recreation Parks in Ainsworth and Elton, the Bury Clock Tower and the John Kay Memorial. His brother, Walter, was a distinguished surgeon and President of the British Medical Association, while his uncle, Robert, was the famous inventor of the 'Whitehead Torpedo'.

The arrival of steam power led to great changes in the textile industry and to villages like Ainsworth. In 1770 there were 60-70 houses but by the 1820s there were over 270 and in 1841 the population was over 1,600.

The person who probably had the most influence on Ainsworth and likely led to the demise of the old mill at Ainsworth Hall, was John Rylands (1801-1889), who was the start of a new breed of cotton industrialists. He aquired a mill on the New Bury Road in 1839 and was one of the first to diversify his business.

**“John Rylands became the producer of all that he sold right from the coalmine, flaxfield, spinning mill, weaving shed, bleach works, dye works, printing shop and finally the the warehouse dealer. In the Ainsworth Mill in 1840, they spun 20 tons of cotton per week, which was weaved into 15 tons of calico fabric, employing 1, 000 persons”**

Rylands was described as a 'Christian Capitalist' and softened the blow to the community of handloom weavers by providing the village with a chapel, schools and a library.

The next inhabitant of Ainsworth Hall would have no connection with the textile industry.

***The Taylor Family: (1843-1850).***

John Taylor was born in Bolton in 1811, attended Bolton Grammar School and then articled in Bolton, in both medicine and law. He dabbled in Lancashire politics and in 1836 was briefly editor of the Bolton Free Press, which he described as 'an expiring political paper, on its last legs.'

He married Jane Salt in Bolton in 1835 and in 1839 was appointed as the first coroner of Bolton.

In1840 John and Jane Taylor moved to live at Ainsworth House, on the Bury New Road in the village of Ainsworth.

**“The nearest church was the Church at Cockey Moor, but the clergyman in charge of that church being at war with part of his congregation and ultimately suspended for misconduct, for peace's sake I decided to take a pew at Christ Church, Harwood. This was a mile and a half from Ainsworth and had just been consecrated and opened for public worship in November 1840.”**

John & Jane had 4 of their 10 children born in Ainsworth and baptised at Harwood between 1841 & 48.

**“Ainsworth House did not altogether suit us; the west end towards Bolton was always damp and the paper of the dining room was damaged from the effects thereof. The house fronted the road side and rendered us subject to the annoyance of all the tramps upon the highway between Bolton and Bury. During the Chartist Riots in the autumn of 1842 a large mob going from Bury to Bolton paraded the streets, entered the shops and by force stole bread and other provisions and took complete possession of the town. On their return to Bury the same evening a large number of rioters entered our garden and threatened to enter our house if we did not give them food. I told them that they should have all the bread we had and they were pacified. I also ordered the servants to bring a large 20 quart can of water and in their presence emptied two bottles of sherry into the water and filled glasses round as far as the mixture would go. On its being finished they shouted for me, and I saw the ragamuffins leave the grounds and continue their route to Bury.”**

In the summer of 1843, John Taylor, on several evenings, visited the garden and grounds of Ainsworth Hall, about half a mile from Ainsworth House. It was then empty and 'in a sad state of repair'. Despite this, it was in a better location and 'capable of being more habitable.'

**“Lord Wilton's steward heard of my viewing of the house and I hastily offered him 20 pounds a year to take it and do all the repairs on having a return, which he accepted. I set about repairs and removed and got settled in August.”**

In 1847 there had been 'disruption and uncertainty of the church services at Ainsworth Christ Church'. As a result of this, John Taylor had started Sunday and Tuesday evening gatherings at Ainsworth Hall, which became 'a keeping together of the congregation'.

**“On the 9th July 1848, we held our first service and about 68 persons joined therein. Up to this time the order of service was singing, free prayer and the reading of some popular sermon. I found after increased familiarity with scripture that I was able to speak freely from notes and to lead my hearers to read and become acquainted with the Bible.”**

These little services grew until the place was overcrowded with great inconvenience to his family.

**“I decided to fit up the brew-house as a small chapel. I bought an organ, made necessary arrangements for seating about 120 persons and my governess became the organist. On Sunday evenings the clergyman sent by the Bishop, frequently attended and on whose behalf I assisted without success to get an exchange of the Ainsworth Church.”**

In 1850 John Taylor 'resolved to close the chapel' and moved his family back to Bolton.

**“The state of my health, attributable to the great excitement produced by constant reading and study, in addition to my full professional engagements, compelled me to remove to Bolton and endeavor to confine my duties to my ordinary work.”**

John Wilson retired as coroner of Bolton in 1876 and was succeeded by his oldest son, Rowland.

In 1850 he had sublet Ainsworth Hall to a George Gorton from Bury, which was about to herald a new lease on life for the old building.

***The Gorton & Barnsdale Families: (1850-1890).***

In 1850 when John Taylor decided to leave Ainsworth, he leased Ainsworth Hall to a George Gorton.

**“On the 17th February 1850, I let Ainsworth Hall to George Gorton of Bury, uncle to the Misses Barnsdale, for the majority of my term.”**

The Gortons were a well-established Bury family who ‘had been prosperous in the cotton trade’.

**“In 1770, John Gorton had bought Tottington Hall and Estate near Bury. Various family members owned properties and businesses in the village and contributed greatly to the prosperity and expansion of Tottington from 1790 to 1820, through the development of Tottington & Kirklees Mills and Leemings Hill Bleachworks.”**

John Gorton helped finance St. Annes Church, which was built in Tottington in 1799.

John Gorton’s daughter, Ann (1787-1847), married Rev. John Barnsdale (1787-1869) in 1819. He was the Curate of Ringley Chapel and their daughters, Elizabeth Anne & Sarah Ella Barnsdale, were baptised by their father there, in 1822 and 1826 respectively.

Ann Gorton’s brother, George, was a ‘land agent & surveyor’ in Bury, when he took over the lease of Ainsworth Hall in February 1850. George’s wife, Lydia, had died in January 1850 and he would marry a second time, Ester Lomax in September 1851. It was not clear how long George Gorton and his new wife lived in Ainsworth Hall.

The next record of Ainsworth Hall was in the 1871 census, by which time George Gorton’s two nieces, Elizabeth Ann & Sarah Ella Barnsdale, had opened a girls Boarding School in the premises.

The idea of opening a school there might well have come from the fact that when the Gorton family had sold Tottington Hall in 1863, it had similarly been converted into a Boarding School and was shown as such in the 1871 census.

The 1881 census recorded that ‘Ainsworth Hall Boarding School’ had eleven students, aged between seven and sixteen years old.

By 1891, Elizabeth Ann Barnsdale was running the school on her own, as her sister Sarah Ella had moved to Chorlton. The school must have closed sometime between 1891 and 1897, as Elizabeth Ann Barnsdale died in 1897, at the age of 75, while living with her sister, Sarah Ella, in Chorlton.