

Medieval



History

Was Talke a Village or a Town?



In medieval times villages could often be bigger than towns. The difference was their legal status. Towns were given a charter of freedom while villages remained part of the 'manorial feudal system.' The villagers were the lord's property, had to work on his farm and had to ask his permission to marry or move away. Townspeople could manage their own affairs and come and go as they pleased.

Talke is unusual. It received a market charter in 1253 from Henry III as part of the Charter of Free Warren given to James de Audley. The market cross was probably built to commemorate this (see overleaf). This made Talke similar to the nearby medieval town of Knutsford (or King Cnute's ford,) but it officially remained a feudal village. The market was held not in a free town but in the 'Manor of Talke.'

Even in Newcastle, which had a charter of township, the manor was still so powerful that it fined the town for moving its market from Sunday to Saturday without its permission.

The market charter allowed for a weekly market on Tuesday and an annual 3-day market on St. Martins' festival, with the festival itself on the middle day. We are not sure when Talke's market and fair died out. White's Gazetteer of 1831 states that the fair had long been obsolete, but a fair is mentioned in an account of the 1781 explosion, so perhaps it ended between these two dates.

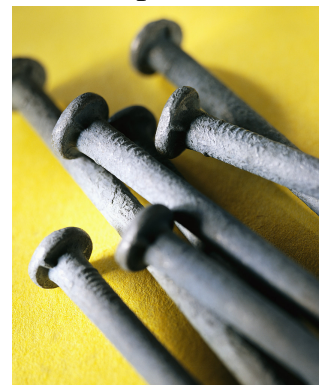
Talke being almost a town is not as strange as it might at first sound, as it almost became one again when a Talke Urban district was discussed, but Talke eventually became part of the Kidsgrove Urban district.

Back in Medieval times, Talke had every chance of becoming a thriving and successful town as it was on a major London-Carlisle route and it even posed a commercial threat to nearby Knutsford despite its smaller size.

Iron was being worked at Talke from the 14th century (1300s) and Talke soon became famous for its nail industry. This may seem strange to us, but in medieval times towns specialised in making one kind of item, decided by what skills and natural resources it had. Newcastle was famous for making frying pans, and Sheffield specialised in making swords. In fact, Newcastle



Henry III



was the centre of the ironstone industry and had its own 'ironmarket' that lives on today.

From the sixteenth century coal was being mined in some Talke areas in order to fuel the developing iron industry. Initially there weren't any underground excavations, holes were dug in the ground to reach surface coal, but Talke's place on top of the North-Staffordshire coal field would soon change its appearance forever.

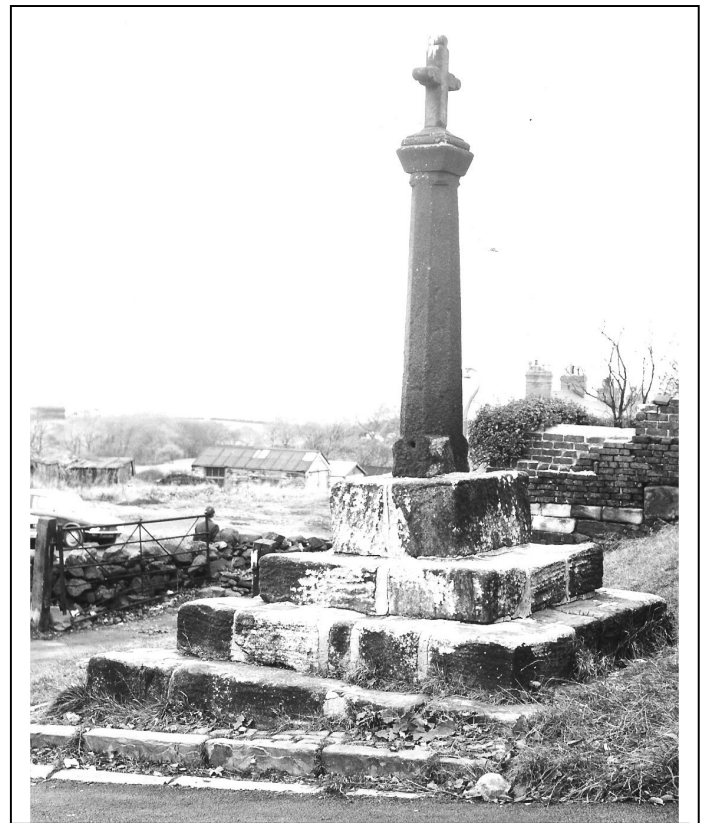


The Cross in 1841, before its restoration

Part of the original cross was believed to have been found in Audley Road, but it was later revealed as an old hitching post for tethering horses outside the Queen's head. The artefact is now in St. Martin's churchyard.

However, the cross may not have been a market cross. Many of the Cheshire crosses are preaching crosses, where villagers gathered to listen to wandering friars and other speakers, and

Another reminder we have of this age is the medieval market cross. Only the steps remain of the original. It was restored in 1887 to celebrate Victoria's diamond jubilee at the great cost then of £8. It was given a new top, and as we can see from the two pictures it wasn't an exact copy of the original. Stories tell that the original top was thrown away. The pillar too is also probably modern. Nevertheless, the base is similar to many other crosses erected in Cheshire during the 13th Century, which could give us a clue to its date.



The Cross before recent cleaning

many had been consecrated so that a preacher could come to say mass at important festivals. An example is the 9th century perching cross found in Baskeyfields farm in Red Street by Mr. E Mills in 1958. Unlike Talke's, this was Celtic in style having a knot of snakes and a trefoil to represent the holy trinity and a picture of Christ triumphant, trampling snakes (the devil) under foot. One theory is that Red Street had an original church which was moved away and this cross marked the spot of the altar.

Theories abound about Talke's cross too. The Oxford museum doubts whether the original cross was medieval at all as the cross is not mentioned in 'Pevsners Volume on Staffordshire in the Building of England' and might even be Victorian. Also, most medieval crosses were covered in patterns and ornamentation, and Talke's is plain (although this could just be the replica cross).

The village stocks used to be next to the cross. It was mostly used for putting drunkards and other public nuisances in. The villagers got their revenge by throwing rotten vegetables at them. At night prisoners were taken to a cell at the top of swan bank. These stocks were broken up and destroyed- a pity as I'm sure we could have found some use for them today!

