

Stories from Early Modern Talke

The most intriguing reference to Talk'o'th'hill is found in the 17th Century manuscripts of Lord Kenyon, from Peel Hall in Little Hulton and is stored in the Lancashire record office. It records a conversation between Robert Barber (the speaker here) and Roger Kenyon at the 'Sword and Buckler;' in Holborn, on the 16 November 1681.

"Pray, sir, present my service to Mr. Justice Lighbound; and I hope, betwixt you and him, that you will not forgett the bad wayes att Talke-on-the-Hill; by which you will very much serve both King and country."

1681 was a dramatic year for Britain when the Catholic King James II, brother to Charles II, had been thrown out by the protestant William of Orange and his wife Queen Mary. Who was the king being referred to in this conversation, William or James, and did this mean that there were struggles or even violence at Talke- or was it just referring to 'bad habits'?

By the 18th Century Talke (based around the church and Swan) had been joined by a separate village, Talke Pits (where the modern High Street is). Thanks to a survey done by Roger Parrot, we know that there were only 80 houses between Red Street and Butt Lane. Most were small, with either tiled or thatched roofs.

Early modern Talke was far more than a tranquil country retreat for the local Squires. It was a lively village, and there are tales of raucous wife selling from this period. In 1720 a collier paraded his wife around the market to sell her to the highest bidder. She was bought for 5 shillings, and the evening passed away 'with much drinking at the expense of the husband and the buyer.' This is not the only tale of wife-selling I have come across. Was it just a bit of fun, a serious insult to the wife, or something even worse?

Talke was 'officially created' as a hamlet (small village) and ecclesiastical parish on the 27 September 1859 including Talke and Butt Lane. Previously it had been just a village within the parish of Audley. Talke also became part of Newcastle-under-Lyme Union following the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. The poor law stated that handouts to the unemployed led to laziness, so they should go to the harsh workhouse until they got a job. This workhouse system needed huge organizational units under the control of poor law guardians.

In 1932, the area became part of the Kidsgrove Urban district, and contained four villages, Butt lane, Talke, Talk'o'th'Hill and Talke Pits! However, White's Gazetteer gives us six villages in one, Talk'o'th'hill, Butt Lane, Harding's Wood, Hollins, New Road and Red Street! The modern boundary between Talke and Kidsgrove was finally settled in 1961.