

# What's in a name?

There are many different ideas about the origins of the name of our village.

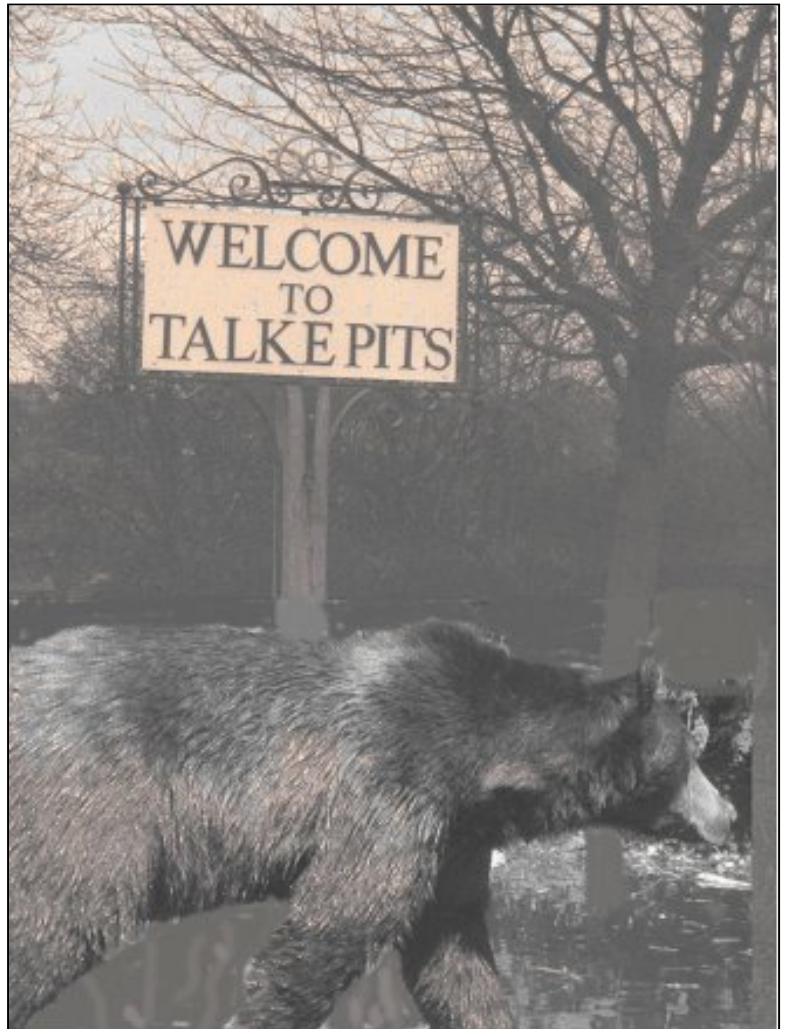
The first historical mention that we have found of Talke is in William the Conqueror's Domesday Book. This was a nation-wide census in 1086 that recorded all land owners in England so that William could collect taxes. Staffordshire has the smallest Domesday entry of any large county as most of the land had become wasteland thanks to William's savage repression of the Northern revolt. Talke was recorded as Talc.

This reference makes the village at least 900 years old! Talke in those days was radically different. Most of the area was wooded with villagers fearful because of wolves and bears. Thankfully Talke is a lot safer today.

In fact, there wasn't a proper village at all. The village was only 30 acres in size. It had a single one acre meadow, and only one plough and eight oxen for the small pastures. The woodland itself was only worth 3 shillings, although that was a great deal of money to a peasant in those days.

Because of its clay soil and height the area only had enough good growing land to support four villeins and their families. Villein was the name for a poor farmer and the origin of the modern day word villain. The only crop that they could grow well was wheat.

However, one later visitor to the area said that this soil was a happy medium between the sterility of sand and the harshness of clay and is adaptable either to tillage or pasture. Perhaps the soil was improved throughout the ages which



allowed the village to support more people, or maybe all the problems of early farmers were due solely to the height of the hill.

Talke's small size may not have been entirely down to its high geography. Many Staffordshire towns and villages had been scarred by William the Conqueror's invasion and suppression of rebellion, the famous Harrowing of the



William the Conqueror

North. Perhaps our earliest record of Talke gives us an unrealistic picture of our village's size; it is possible that more people lived here before William came. However, most of the serious rebellions that destroyed villages happened too far north to affect us, so Talke was probably very small for a long time in its history.

The villagers themselves did not own the land, they were serfs. They could not leave the village or get married without their lord's permission and had to work many days on their lord's farm.

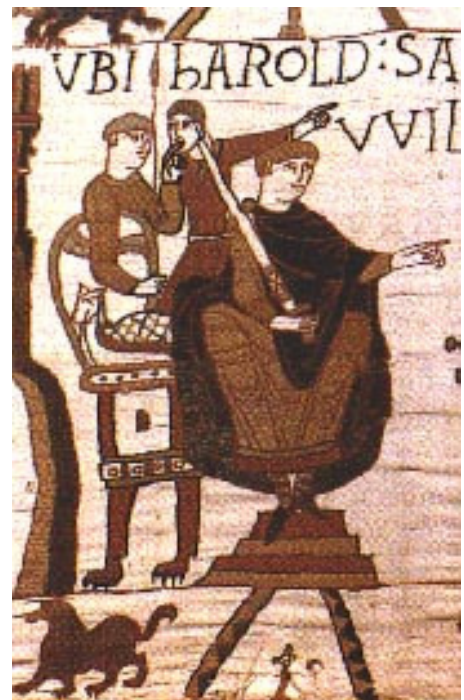
The lord who owned the village, which was referred to as his manor not a village, was a Saxon Thegn called Gamel. He had kept his land during the invasion by throwing in his lot with William the Conqueror. Talke was unusual in

this as most of the land around was directly held by William the Conqueror as a punishment for their rebellion- Gamel must have been one of the few Anglo-Saxon nobles he could trust.

Gamel also owned Audley and Balterley. Before then, the land had been owned by a Lord Godric. Perhaps Gamel had dispossessed this earl, or maybe he was Godric's son. Although feudalism didn't give anyone a right of inheritance except the next king, custom was far too powerful and many sons expected and did get their father's land.

Although the feudal system collapsed after the Black Death in the 1340s Talke still had 'lords of the manor' and 'esquires' who owned most of the land right up to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Most villagers paid rent but their houses were still inherited by their children.

However, Talke and its name probably existed long before the Domesday book. Over the years the origin and meaning of its name has been



The Bayeux Tapestry

hotly debated. Some historians have seen it deriving from a Cymeric-Celtic word 'Tal.' This word means either hill, a bush on top of a hill or 'a high place'. This word perhaps clung on despite the Roman invasion that pushed native Celts into Wales, Scotland and Cornwall. This is why it remains so similar to the Welsh word 'twlch' (pronounced tulk) meaning hill or 'tal' meaning forehead, a good image given the fore-head like shape of Talke's hill. Tal is still used in Welsh place names, for example in 'Tal-Y-Lyn' - a lake in a high place. The name 'twlch' could perhaps explain where the 'c' on the end of 'tal' came from, or perhaps it just got added on over time. We are not sure when tal became talc. There is further confusion as White's Gazetteer sees 'Tal' being used when the market charter was issued in 1253, but the Domesday Book 200 years earlier lists 'Talc.' Perhaps the two were used interchangeably, slipping in and out of fashion.

Other historians see the name 'Talc' having Saxon not Celtic origins. Angles, Saxons and Jutes invaded England around 4-500 AD after the Romans had left, (they came from areas around modern-day Germany and Netherlands). However, both origins of the name could be true as the Anglo-Saxon language, later called Old English, was a mixture of Roman (Latin), Celtic and Saxon (Germanic) words.

Later on, 'Talc' swapped its 'c' for a 'k' and a silent 'e' was added to make the modern-day 'Talke.' We are not quite sure when this happened- maybe you know?



Charles I

However, over the years Talke has also had another longer name, either Talke on the Hill, Talke of the Hill or just Talk'o'th'hill. It has been said that this has its origins in the visit of King Charles I to Talke during the Civil War. He allegedly stayed at Lawton Hall and reportedly said he would go for a 'talk of the hill,' a walk around the hill, to get a better view of the opposing parliamentary troops (please see 'civil war'.)

In 1851 White's History, Gazetteer and Directory of Staffordshire, a local unofficial census, gives us Talke **on** the Hill as its proper name. To confuse matters further, the same census carried out 20 years later in 1871 says the official name is just Talke, listing Talk'o'th'hill is only its common or 'vulgar' name. Nevertheless, this name was certainly used

officially, not least in the Talk'o'th'hill colliery. One theory is that the 'Talk of the hill' refers just to the top of the hill around Swan bank, as separate from the surrounding village.

Talke Pits also has its own controversial if shorter debate on origins and spelling. Sometimes appearing spelt with one 't' and other times as 'Pitts'.