

Charles Lister Smith - Local Amateur Historian

by Darrell Webb

Charles Lister Smith (1858-1945) was an active Stonehouse trader and businessman for 55 years, he was a baker in 1890 trading as Richard Smith & Son and in 1936 was founder of the Severn Valley Fruit Company, being one of the first to commercialise bottled fruit.

He was elected to the first Parish Council for Stonehouse in the year 1890; he also represented the parish for a time on the Stroud Board of Guardians and the Rural District Council and was a manager for the schools.

He was also for several years a member of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society where from time to time presented documents for safe keeping.

Charles championed the study of local history from original documents and as a result there are in existence a number of books and articles which contain the history of the Parish. Much of his writings appeared in the local press during the 1930's. He also recorded many traditions and theories which in some cases generated misunderstandings.

Writing in 1938, he suggests that 'the early history of Stonehouse is the story of the Manor (Stonehouse Court) and is only loosely connected with Stonehouse town'. He goes on to say that 'there was a little hamlet on Green Street from time immemorial, which we call Woodcock Lane. It was a community of a few manor tenants settled where water was available, and a tavern (the Plough Inn) provided accommodation for travellers on the ancient road from the salt pans at Awre on the river Severn. It traversed the western end of the manor through Oldends and continued up the slope of the hills to the east. Green Street is that portion of the road running past this little settlement.'

Smith is here making a special case for the cluster of manorial holdings at Woodcock Lane, just one of a number of scattered farms and hamlets in the early manor. Most had been drawn together by the twelfth century into a concentration along the Caudle Stream (now Gloucester Road) and the lower road round Doverow Hill (now the High Street). Manor and future town were interwoven, although the focal point of the manor was the site of Stonehouse Court and St Cyr's church.

Smith drew many fine sketch maps, based on a map of the manor lands of about 1728-30, now lost. Blurred photographs of it survive, and can be compared with his sketches. This one shows the roadside 'waste' well, but is mistaken about the location of the Plough Inn. This stood on the corner of Green Street (Woodcock Lane) and Cann Lane (Gloucester Road), where the dentist and Blackwell Close, formerly Plough Motors, are now. Far from being an ancient tavern, it grew from a barn conversion in the early 17th century, and is not described as an inn until after 1800. Stephen's Grave is much more likely to be Stephens' Grove, an area of trees on the manorial waste used by Thomas Stephens, a carpenter who worked on the manorial estate. By 1748 he



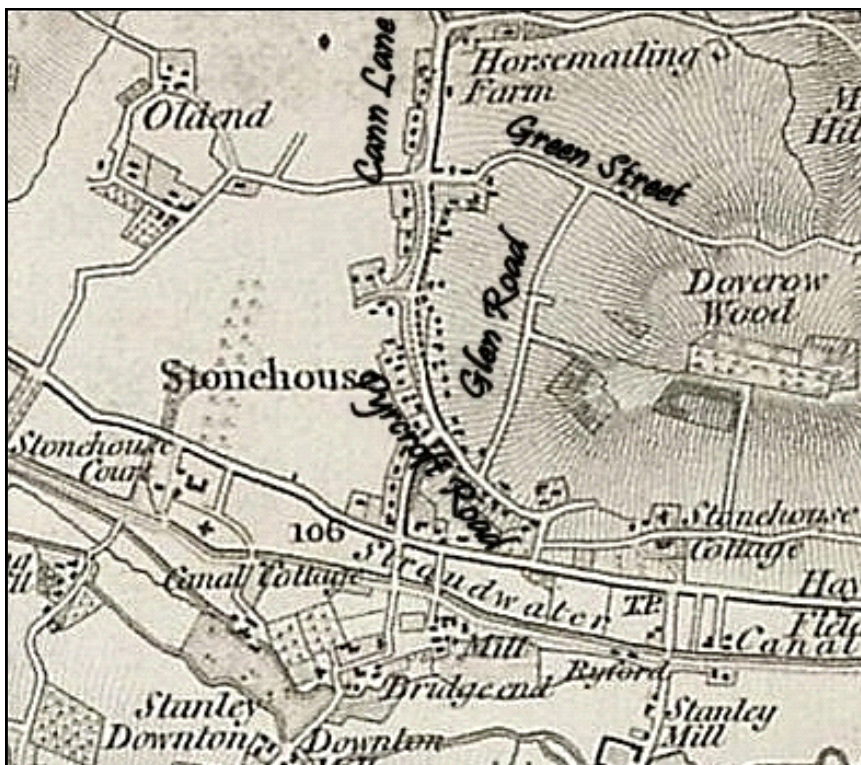
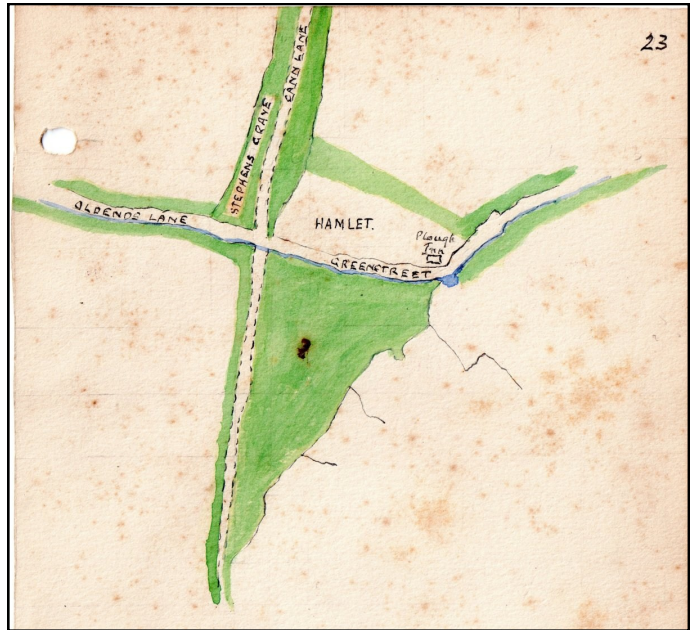
was also the tenant of the adjoining field, and supplying wood for jobs from his property. The waste was sold by the manor in 1831 and is now the frontage to St Joseph's church. This map also shows the main waterway as running down Oldends Lane, although this was a diversion from the Caudle Stream, running south.

Understanding of the early road network has also advanced since Smith's day, and revised ideas about the roads through Oldends are described elsewhere in this issue of the SHG Journal.

Otherwise, however, the following extracts from Smith's writings give a fair picture.

'In front of the hamlet to the South was the large area of land left open as waste of the manor or green for communal use, free to everybody for the ordinary usages of the self-contained village life of the time at that time it extended the full length of the present High Street to Regent Street.'

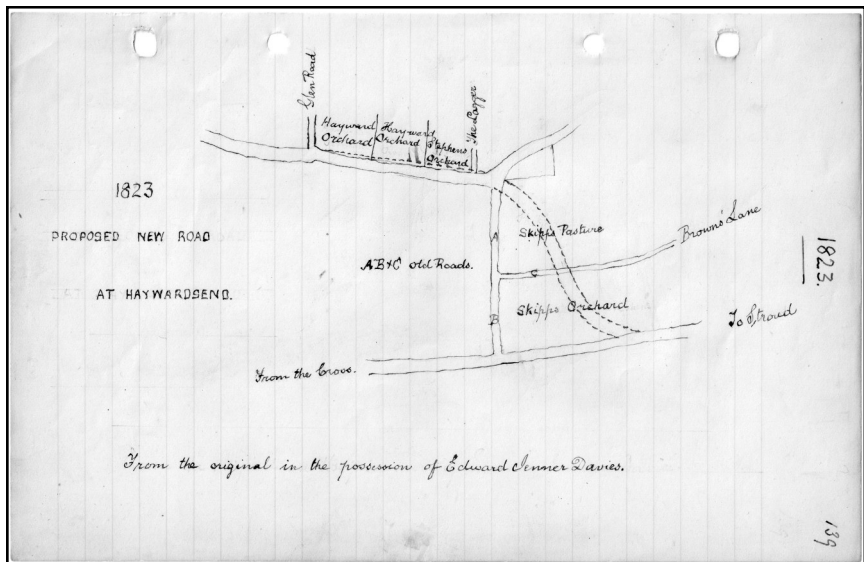
From this main road, coming in from Eastington several thoroughfares radiated in different directions. The first was a road to the left, running from Oldends, past the Spa Inn, through Oldends Farm to Nupend; higher up at the green was Cann Lane, going north over the manor boundary to Horsemarling and Standish. This is now part of Gloucester County Road. Farther up Green Street at the Glen a road branched to the right across country to come out into Pycroft Road. This is Glen Road, and Verney Road and Station Road are part of this highway. Green Street went on uphill where the packhorses wore down the road to the present level across Floret Acre at the back Doverly hill to Westrip.'



'The old Pycroft Road, where Glen Road joins it opposite the Wesleyan Church (Wycliffe Chapel) is now called Bath Road, but only since the Bath coaches commenced running that way. They commenced running down the Cross Lane, but it was a dangerous and narrow right angle turning at the bottom and it was found necessary to make a new exit from Stonehouse by a cutting from Pycroft Road at Haywardsend to the lower end. Pycroft Road continued up the Grove and so eastward.'

It was the main thoroughfare through Ebley, Cainscross and Paganhill coming into Stroud at Badbrook crossing, and up to Gloucester Street.'

'Regent Street was Cross Lane until 1870 when a Stonehouse tradesman opened a shop in house No 1 going down on the right. He placed a name board in the front marked "Regent Street". Passers smiled, but the name stuck and the board is still there.



Proposed road modification diagram to ease the Bath coach's access to Stonehouse found in C L Smiths collection.

It is the "via Brugende" of the manor records. From its junction with Pycroft Road at the south end of the Green, it runs over the river at Bridgend to Stanley St. Leonards and Frocester. These are the ancient roads of the present parish as we find them described in rolls of court proceedings during the years 1490 to 1601. Where the record is in Latin, the term used is via Regis; where written in English the term is Kings Road, Royal Road or Public road. All of them appear on the old Borough map of Stroud.'

Smith ends with the dismissive comment that 'the present High street does not appear at any time to have been repaired under ordinance. It seems to have been recognised as restricted to common rights and was never a highway in feudal times. There was a road way marked on Ball's map of 1728, by which period no doubt, the vestry had taken it in hand.' The High Street section is less likely to have been mentioned in the manorial court books because it is less likely to have been obstructed or neglected. It is called 'the street' in 1676 and 1723, and there are references to the 'king's highway' along the modern Gloucester Road in 1586, 'the highway' outside the modern Broomhall's butchers in 1689, and 'the highway' past Ivy Grove in 1629. It was central to the turnpike trust established in 1726 (Street).

Sources of information: GA = Gloucester Archives

Stroud News 2nd March 1945 - Charles Lister Smith Obituary.

Charles Lister Smith books and writings – Tom Round Smith.

Map: diversion of Caudle Stream, manor court book 1589, GA D4289/M1; partition of farm and barn 1618, GA D149/T770; map of Stonehouse manor c1730, surveyed by Stephen Jefferys, copy GA PC/365; manorial estate accounts 1740-1754, GA D445/E5, and deed 1731, D445/T13; sale of waste 1831, GA D1347/acc 1347/1/13 Sheppard; Stonehouse tithe map and award 1839, GA maps.

Street: manor court books 1586, 1676, 1689, 1723, GA D4289/M1, D445/M5, M8, M9; Cox, C. *The Development and Decline of the Turnpike System in the Stroudwater Area, 1725-1875* (unpublished PhD thesis, London School of Economics, 1987), in GA.