

# Whilton Local History Society

At the Gardeners Association in October, the speaker, Andrew Sankey, talked about the symbolism of some of our cottage plants. Among them was the holly.

From ancient times the holly was seen as a protective tree, guarding against the evil eye and wicked fairies. Christians made use of its different facets, using the sharp prickly leaves to represent the crown of thorns, the red berries signifying Jesus' blood and the white flowers the purity of Mary. The Christmas carol, "The holly and the ivy" has very ancient, possibly medieval, roots and may originate in pre-Christian times.

Because of its positive associations, it was common to plant a holly tree in cottage gardens, or to include one in your hedge. Our speaker commented how many villages have a Holly Cottage.

Whilton has both a Holly Cottage and a Holly House, but in Whilton's case neither name has ancient roots.

For most of its life Holly Cottage had no name, but when houses in the village began to acquire names in the early 20th century, it was called "End Cottage", being self-explanatory. Later, the Watsons who had spent some time in west Africa, renamed it Kunda Cottage (kunda meaning cottage). In this century it has become Holly Cottage.

Holly House, which is opposite, is one of the few houses in the village which has had a name for centuries, but sometime in the mid 19th century its original name was abandoned or forgotten.

When Elisha Redgrave and his wife lived there in late Victorian times, they re-named it "Holly House", probably because of the holly tree in the garden.

The Redgraves were new to the village and would not have known its history. Perhaps they thought the older name no longer applied. Perhaps no one remembered it by then. However, recently I have discovered that the old name of this house was the "White Hall". The name dates from before the new taller extension was added, and so this suggests the lower end of Holly House was once white. Maybe it was originally whitewashed cob.

The large field behind Holly House and Brington Lane was once known as Hall Field, and so may have been an enclosure attached to this house or the main manor house in the middle ages. By differentiating it as the "white" hall the name suggests there were once two "halls" in Whilton. We understand that the original manor house or hall stood in Wadd Close beside the church, and so the White Hall must have been an additional lesser hall. The term has many meanings, but here it probably means a significant house within the village, not necessarily very large.

Most of the village houses had an enclosure in medieval times. Here villagers kept a pig, poultry and sometimes a cow, besides growing vegetables. The householders were allotted strips in the open fields, which were farmed under communal, manorial rules. In this area the strips were called lands. Some strips were not straight, but ended in a distinctive curve, known as a hook. The hooks were made over many years, when the plough was pulled by a team of several oxen, which created the curves as they turned. In later years, when mainly horses pulled the plough, the hooks became less pronounced.



After the Black Death in the mid 14th century, when it is estimated at least half the population died, there were not enough labourers to farm as before, and often a group of lands was amalgamated under one manorial tenant.

There are records from the 1600s and 1700s of a group of hooks known as Whittle Hooks or Whit Hull Hooks. This name had puzzled me for years, but these must surely be the hooks belonging to White Hall or "White Hal" as written in 1500.

We cannot be sure where they were, but a snowy photograph taken in about 2000 may give us a clue.

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