INTRODUCTION by Allan Frost

In 2013, Lanyon Bowdler Solicitors closed their office in Church Street, Wellington. The firm, the final version of various partnerships over the decades, had served the town since Victorian times. This photograph shows The Villa (as the building was known) in 1952.

In recent years, I was given the opportunity to examine these maps and take photographs of sections to assist research into Wellington’s past.

The more I explored, the more I could see their value to everyone likely to research aspects of the town’s history.

When Wellington History Group discovered that the firm was due to close its Wellington office, I approached Lanyon Bowdler (whose main office is at Shrewsbury) and asked if they would consider selling the maps to the Group so that they could be examined by anyone and everyone in the community and beyond to encourage greater interest in the history of the town and its former inhabitants.

Senior partner Peter Flint generously agreed to donate the maps to the Group. A special event was held on 30th January 2014 to unveil them for public examination in Wellington library.

BACKGROUND

Maps are invaluable tools to anyone researching the history of a town, district, county or country. Although much depends on the accuracy achieved by their creators, we have to accept the information which is presented to us unless or until additional, more reliable, information comes to light.

I first took an interest in the history of Wellington, Shropshire, more than fifty years ago, triggered by a headstone in the burial ground surrounding All Saints parish church together with a barely decipherable white-and-black (i.e. negative) copy of the late 1830s street map, a wonderful coloured version of which forms part of this special collection detailed below.

Looking back over the last five decades, information depicted in maps has given countless opportunities to confirm, expand and correct aspects of Wellington’s history, particularly when it has been possible to precisely pinpoint properties and allocate specific detail (owners, occupiers, trades, etc.) to those properties ... and trace changes over periods of time with further help from town and trade directories, newspapers, census and other official returns ... the list of collaborative sources is endless.

I have also learned over the last five decades not to take anything for granted just because it appears in print or someone has ‘reliably informed’ us that something is right. Memory plays tricks with the passing of Time, and interpretations and conjectures made by others without having proof to support their ideas have a tendency to be made ‘fact’ by observing the common beliefs that facts shouldn’t get in the way of a good story, and repeating fallacies eventually makes them become fact. I believe the public deserves better. History speaks for itself and doesn’t need embellishing.

Not every English town or settlement is blessed with maps such as the three presented to us by Lanyon Bowdler Solicitors. Each one is unique, and each one presents information of use to anyone engaged in the history of Wellington ... researchers whose interests include town, cultural, social, economic and political development as well as, increasingly, family historians.

The maps are held in rooms at Wellington library and can be viewed by arrangement with staff.

PLEASE SUPPORT OUR BENEFACORS

Three businesses have shown Wellington History Group extreme generosity in helping us present these maps to a wider audience.

The first is Lanyon Bowdler Solicitors with branch offices in major Shropshire towns and Hereford. Visit www.lblaw.co.uk for details or telephone the head office at Shrewsbury on 01743 280280.

The second is Ironbridge Fine Arts & Framing, 9 Merrythought Village, Ironbridge, TF8 7NJ, telephone 01952 434033.

The third firm made the plaques for the map frames: Timpson Ltd., 18 Market Square, Wellington, telephone 01952 257441.

Please bear these firms in mind should you require any of the services they offer.
THE c.1850s
WELLINGTON PARISH PLAN

Of the three maps, the Plan of the Parish of Wellington, Salop and Subdivided into Townships is, at first glance, the least detailed. Obvious as it may seem, its value to town and family historians is indicated by the title. Part of the Plan is shown aside.

The overall size of the Plan measures about 75cm square. The map is printed in colour, with different colours representing township boundaries, roads and railway lines. Although undated and its cartographer unnamed, there are two distinctive aspects which provide an indication of when the Plan was created.

The first is that Christ Church, together with its church yard, is included. The erection of this church on the (then) outskirts of the town was intended as a chapel of ease to All Saints parish church in the centre of Wellington; construction work began in 1837 and ended when the service of dedication took place in July 1839.

Since Christ Church was awarded its own parish, carved out of the wider Wellington parish, in 1857, and the fact that the newly-created parish is not shown on this Plan, we can be fairly certain that the plan itself was drawn between those two dates.

The second is the inclusion of two particular railway lines; the first from Shrewsbury to Birmingham via Wellington, the second from Wellington to Stafford. It is safe to assume the map was created not long after these lines were opened for passenger traffic since later branch lines, initially used for goods traffic (e.g. to Ketley and Horsehay opened 1857) and Coalport (opened 1860) are not mentioned.

The line from Shrewsbury to Wellington and thence to Stafford opened in June 1849. However, problems with completing the line from Wellington to Birmingham were not surmounted until later that year, with services eventually beginning in November.

Therefore, we may comfortably conclude that the Plan dates to between late 1849 and 1852.

Having determined the date, it seems appropriate to ascertain the purpose of its content. The fact that little detail is shown for Wellington itself and the townships implies that their relative sizes to each other wasn’t important. What was important is the fact that they – Apley, Arleston(e), Dothill, Hadley, Ketley, Lawley, Leegomery and Watling Street – were all shown as being part of the Wellington parish. In short, Wellington parish covered a far greater area than it does today.

And therein lies the Plan’s value and importance to town and family researchers. Armed with the knowledge that a reference to ‘Wellington Parish’ may not, in fact, relate to Wellington township but rather one of the settlements included in the parish at and before this time, researchers can use this plan to confirm that some of the information they seek (e.g. for Hadley) may actually be held in records relating to Wellington. The same applies to the other townships mentioned as falling within Wellington parish.

However, it should always be borne in mind that the search for records pertaining to post-1850 periods may, and almost certainly will, be subject to the possibility that the creation of new parishes and subsequent alterations to their boundaries will have a bearing on the location of those records. For example, documents concerning Watling Street may be found in Wellington Parish as well as within archives stored under Christ Church parish ... and, of course, in documents falling under ‘Wellington’ as a town.

Some of the most detailed generic sources of property location, ownership, occupancy and usage are Tithe maps. Wellington’s Tithe map of the town dates to 1840; it is the second of the three maps donated to Wellington History Group and described elsewhere in this Special Report.

Tithe maps were created with a corresponding Tithe Apportionment (whose details are discussed later) and were regarded as a single, albeit combined, document.

There are some 16 Tithe maps covering the whole of Wellington Parish, an impressive achievement of early Victorian cartography. They cover the same townships as are included in this summary Plan and list information for each township in separate sections within the Apportionment itself.

Researchers should note that documentary evidences may be stored in a wide range of other repositories.

As population concentrations increased so did the interference of government (both local and national) in everyday lives; and major private estates, businesses and other bodies created their own archives.

Records falling within the realm of local authority responsibilities (Town Commissioners, Guardians of the Poor Law Unions, Urban and Rural District Councils, schools, etc.) may be found in county archives and accessed by reference to the settlement to which they relate. So might records pertaining to other large scale enterprises, like the Lilleshall Company.

This Plan is just one of the documentary weapons in the researcher’s armoury.

www.wellingtonhistorygroup.wordpress.com
The original Plan of the Township of Wellington in the Parish of Wellington in the County of Salop was printed by Standing & Co., Lithographers, 77 Cornhill, London, in 1840. This company was authorised to produce a limited number of copies of each parish and township Plan after all information had been gathered for each corresponding Apportionment list.

The company was also required to print additional maps at a later date (of which ours is one) under strict control by Parliament – more specifically, the Chairman of Ways & Means, the committee responsible for administering the terms and conditions of the 1836 Tithe Commutation Act.

Practical matters concerning the implementation of the Act were handled by tithe commissioners who divided England and Wales into 12,275 districts, many of which were identical to land within parish boundaries. The commissioners appointed officers to carry out the survey and to negotiate, collect and collate the necessary data.

The reasons for introducing the 1836 Act are complex, although the ultimate objective was simple: to replace the traditional system of payment-in-kind (based on 10% (a tenth, or tithe) of annual household, business or other income) with a monetary value. The crux was that assessment and collection of tithes harked back to before Medieval times when the economy and social structure were more clearly defined. Amounts due to the tithe entitlement, whether by church or land owner, gave rise to disputes and accusations of unfair treatment. A poor harvest could mean that a farmer had less produce upon which the tax was due to be assessed, but his landlord would expect at least the same payment as he had received the previous year when harvests may have been more plentiful.

It was a situation in which, at a time of increasing industrialisation, urbanisation, property development and ownership, the system of tithe management was recognised as grossly inefficient, open to abuse and utterly outdated. The answer seemed to be to replace (‘commute’) tithes with monetary rents. Money was more readily collectible and far easier to count than payment-in-kind animals and vegetables, eggs, fruit, etc. And it didn’t perish or have a limiting ‘best before/use-by’ date.

The reading of the Parliamentary Bill before its enactment was fairly straightforward, assisted by a general willingness between various factions to compromise.

Tithe commissioners set about their work. It was a mammoth task, surveying all property, ascertaining plot sizes and negotiating with owners, tenants and others with vested interests to reach agreed annual rental values. It soon became obvious that absolute precision in all aspects of the exercise would be impossible to achieve.

Consequently, areas of disagreement were often settled by compromise with the result that, it is believed, only about one-sixth of all maps deposited with the commissioners can be regarded as accurate. No one can say what fraction of the information contained in each Apportionment can be regarded as reliable.

Nevertheless, the Tithe Maps and Apportionments of the 1830s and 1840s provide us with the most reliable sources of social and economic detail ever recorded up to that time.

The commutation of tithes into rent values did not end here; it was a process which continued with further Acts of Parliament, most notably in 1891, 1925 and 1936, to take account of changing circumstances.

The 1836 Tithe Commutation Act brought about major reforms and ultimately settled countless disputes. And provided historians with an invaluable source of information.

* * * * *

The district tithe map of Wellington shows the boundary of every piece of property, whether a field or building plot. Each property is allocated a unique number. Streets and important buildings are also named.

The apportionment listing accompanying the map contains this basic information:

- Unique number for each Plot (and separate ones for the garden to each house);
- Landowner’s name;
- Occupier’s last and first name;
- Description of the plot.

Additional information in the original Apportionment includes the size of each plot in terms of acres, rods and perches.

Our version of the map shows the inhabited town (bordered by a thick red line) surrounded by fields, each individually numbered.
Our particular version of the Tithe Map is an authorised copy of the original 1840 print, endorsed on 28th March 1854 and authenticated by the signature (top) of Liberal politician the Hon. Edward Pleydell-Bouverie PC, FRS (above, as seen in an 1872 Vanity Fair sketch 119 in a series of Statesmen), Chairman of Ways and Means Committee of the House of Commons.

Pleydell-Bouverie, 1818-1889, was a Whig Member of Parliament representing the constituency of Kilmarnock Burghs from 1844 until his retirement in 1874. Although never a member of the cabinet and later holding opposing views to those of Prime Minister Ewart Gladstone, he held a range of government posts (including Paymaster General, President of the Poor Law Board and Ecclesiastical Commissioners) and took the position of chairman on various Committees. In short, his political career was long and distinguished.

It took fourteen years for this copy of the map to be supplied; it can’t be a coincidence that the year is the same as that in which the Wellington (Salop) Improvement Act was passed on 2nd June. The Act authorised the appointment ‘of 15 commissioners (thereafter to be elected by the ratepayers) with extensive powers within the improvement district, including those previously exercised by the highway board and the parish lighting inspectors. For most purposes the improvement district comprised the eastern part of Wellington township, with small adjacent parts of Watling Street and Arleston townships.

‘In 1856 the commissioners’ office was in New Street but by 1870 was in Walker Street, where brick-built offices, including a board room, opened in 1883.

[Commissioners are believed to have first met in Edgbaston House which then became known as the Parish Office, and only moved to their new premises over the road in 1883.]

Wellington urban district council, which in 1894 replaced the commissioners (the urban sanitary authority under the Act of 1872), inherited the improvement commissioners’ offices and met there (except 1955-9) until the urban district was abolished in 1974 and merged in Wrekin district.’ [These quotes are from Victoria County History of Shropshire, volume XI.]

POINTERs

The most apparent use of our map, taken in conjunction with its Apportionment is the ability to determine the precise location of each property, who owned it and who occupied it together with details on what actually constituted the plot, e.g. house, croft, yard, stables, offices, outbuildings, warehouses ... even pleasure grounds.

The nature of commercial concerns may also be identified by the descriptive detail, e.g. malthouse, public house (sometimes with the pub’s name), pawnbroker’s shop, dispensary, etc. Furthermore, a throwback feature reflecting an aspect of ancient farming is the inclusion of names given to fields, such as wicket piece, red hill, lady croft, barn field ...

All this detail is enhanced by the greater detail relating to the names and occupations Wellington’s inhabitants which becomes apparent when the map and Apportionment are examined in conjunction with the 1841 Census.

Furthermore, other useful information can be gleaned from county and town trade directories from this general period, although reliance on their accuracy is not necessarily recommended unless entries can be confirmed by reference to other sources. Information in these directories can sometimes be out of date, prone to typing errors or simply wrong.

Of course, not everyone listed in 1840 might be living at the same address in 1840, but by far the greater majority are, which is good news for anyone researching their ancestry or other aspects of the town’s history.

DEVELOPMENT CLUES

Our map contains numerous clues which confirm its intended purpose as a tool for town governance. A selection is shown in the map extract at the top of the next page.

Perhaps the most obvious are the lines drawn to signify the course of the cutting which now contains the railway line.

As train services did not exist before 1849, it follows that features
relating to the railway (track, passenger station, goods yard, and even Station Approach (now called Station Road)) would not have been included in the original map but would be necessary additions to indicate changes in land use.

Because the line of the railway cutting shows ‘L.N.W. and G.W.Ry’, (originally Shropshire Union and operated by the London & North Western Railway, and that Shrewsbury & Birmingham Railway amalgamated with the GWR on 1 September 1854, it suggests that this particular version of the map (or at least this particular addition) was post September 1854.

Other features give clues confirming the purpose of the map. The outline of new roads, such as Queen Street and Charlton Street, suggest strongly that the map was used by the Town Improvement Commissioners in connection with urban and commercial development schemes throughout the mid to late nineteenth century.

The problem here is trying to ascertain (firstly) whether all the proposed changes to town layout indicated on the map actually took place and (secondly), if so, when were they acted upon.

Unfortunately, Wellington Journal & Shrewsbury News seldom reports on such developments, although clues may be found by scouring pages for advertisements concerning the sale of building land or the sale or lease of buildings and businesses: they could contain the named of newly-created streets.

Other aspects added, some in pencil as opposed to cartographer’s ink, include Goods Warehouses, the Shropshire Works, and prospective circular gas holders together with service roads. Having said that, it’s not always possible to tell if items have been added at the time our version of the map was created, or added by the Town Commissioners after they had received it.

There are other curious additions to our version of the tithe map (extract at bottom of previous page) when compared to the 1840 original (below left) including, for example, the circle in the former garden numbered 1225 and the iron foundry which subsequently occupied much of the adjacent garden at 1226. It eventually specialised in the manufacture of mechanised bread making equipment from which it became known as ‘panification works.’

Interestingly, the access road leading westwards off Tan Bank to the foundry is unnamed although, according to the 1838 Wellington street map, it was called New Hall Street. It was renamed Foundry Lane/Road between then and the time of the 1851 Census, which suggests that very little, even nothing, had been done to update our 1854 version of the tithe map when it was being produced for Wellington Town Improvement Commissioners.

William Edwards’s circular gasholder tanks behind his property at 1204 in Tan Bank are also added features. In view of the fact that he first manufactured gas in 1823 and supplied gas lighting in the town from about 1835, it’s perhaps surprising that circular gas tanks are not shown on either the original tithe map or 1838 street plan ... unless gas tanks were of a different shape in those early years.

Doubtless there are more added features awaiting identification which could shed further light on the development of the town and its economy.
The three donated by Lanyons Solicitors, the map with the most visual appeal is undoubtedly the 1830s Plan of Wellington. Not only is it believed to be the only coloured street map of the town in Victorian times but it’s also the earliest map with clearly readable detail.

The closest contender to it is probably a cloth map dated 1806 held by Shropshire Archives, but it’s in very poor, almost illegible condition.

The 1806 map shows features which disappeared between then and the time our coloured map was created, perhaps most notably a three-pronged pool in an area on the southern side of Market Street which is now the site of Market Building. It proves that ‘Market Place’ extended northwards from what we now call Market Square to the right-bend corner which then marked the beginning of Church Street, as can be seen in the extract below.

When the coloured map came into our possession, it was damaged all the way down its left hand side where backing material had cracked. Furthermore, a patch in the map surface on the centre left showed that, for some reason, it had been rubbed away.

Time-consuming experimentation with graphics software on a computer enabled sufficient repairs to be made to the main areas of concern, without detracting too much from the actual condition of the original. It is the repaired version which has been made widely available by Wellington History Group for a most modest price.

The precise date of the map itself raises several questions. The wording reads, ‘To his grace the Duke of Sutherland, this Plan of Wellington is respectfully inscribed By his obliged and obedient servant, John Wood.’ So far, so good.

However, monochrome versions of the map are available which show the addition of ‘1832’ ornately engraved beneath the engraver’s name. In fact, a previous owner of our particular map has taken the misguided liberty of adding this date in pencil.

This date is a problem for several reasons. To begin with, the First Duke of Sutherland was George Leveson-Gower, 2nd Marquess of Stafford, who didn’t become a duke until 1833 ... and promptly died in July of that year, hardly sufficient time to engage John Wood’s services or appreciate the result.

So, to which Duke of Sutherland is the map dedicated? To make an informed judgement, it’s necessary to examine some of the map’s content.

One pointer may be the existence of the ‘Wesleyan Chapel’ in New Street. It replaced the earlier...
Wellington had been prepared for him in 1793, needed a quick graphic way of identifying property ownership. Consequently, our late 1830s map shows the names of those people who owned land and buildings in and immediately around Wellington.

The most notable were St. Chiverton Charlton of Apley Castle, Thomas Eyton Esq. of Eyton Hall, Lord Forester and John Anslow, the latter a wealthy publican and farmer. Other property owners came from a wide range of occupations, including lawyers (like William Nock), manufacturers (gas producer William Edwards, below, who introduced gas lighting to the centre of town and whose gasworks were on Tan Bank) and many others.

Comparing this map with the original 1840 Tithe map tends to confirm that the coloured street map dates fairly precisely to 1838 ... which means it was dedicated to the Second Duke of Sutherland, George Granville Sutherland-Leveson-Gower (above).

Having ascertained the sponsor of the map, it raises another question: why would the Duke of Sutherland want or need a detailed map of Wellington?

There may be a combination of reasons but perhaps the most feasible is that, as a major landowner, the Duke had an interest in who owned which other pieces of land and property, particularly in a main town which served the district in which he was actively involved in extensive industrial enterprises.

Bearing in mind that the Tithe Apportionment had yet to be compiled and published, the Duke, as had the Lord Forester when a map of Wellington.
The practical uses of these three maps are infinite and depend on the specific (or simply general) interests of those wishing (or willing) to spend time perusing (and scrutinising) them.

There's an enormous wealth of information here but, as with all printed documents and original source material, care needs to be exercised at all times.

Given that the maps may tell us part of a story, other information is available which can cast doubt or give a new slant on common beliefs.

The Tithe Apportionment listing must be regarded as being as accurate as you might hope such a massive collection of detail to be, and comparisons between it and, for example, the 1841 Census will undoubtedly expose inconsistencies.

Everyone makes mistakes, however diligent they may be, and map makers, information gatherers and geographical and historical interpreters are no exception. Often, anomalies between documents of a similar period can be attributed to errors when transferring detail from notes, usually handwritten, to master or final documents. Further copying, for example from original documents to computer spreadsheets, may compound the problem.

The same could be said of detail contained in trade directories for the period. For Wellington, we have trade directories of Shropshire compiled and published by Robson (1840) and Pigot & Co. (1841).

Directories can be very useful tools, particularly as they often group businesses under type (bakers, grocers, inns, etc.). However, they are also apt to contain inaccurate, incorrect, incomplete and potentially misleading information.

Inaccurate: names of people, places and even streets can be wrong. Incorrect: detail may have been typed incorrectly.

Incomplete: traders may have several businesses operating from the same premises, such as publicans who are also be tailors or plumbers but the latter are omitted.

Misleading: Early directories may include places and businesses not within the boundaries of either Wellington town or its originally more extensive parish. It pays to check to avoid misinterpretation.

The above extracts for Wellington from Robson’s Directory of Shropshire, 1840 include entries relating to Allscott, Ketley, Lawley, Walcot, Eyton, Wappenshall, Lightmoor and Wombridge, as well as those located in streets within the town.

Having advised caution, information contained in directories must be regarded as accurate until proven otherwise by comparison with other original source documentation.

CONCLUSION
The three early Victorian maps have a range of uses, restricted only by the confines of imagination.

There is something for everyone, from professional historians to family researchers, as well as anyone who happens to have a passing interest in what Wellington was like in times long past.

When the maps are studied in conjunction with other documents, such as Census returns, trade directories and, of course, the Tithe Apportionment, the possibilities for study and enjoyment are endless.

The absence of any detailed street and property plan of the town between 1840 and the publication of the Ordnance Survey map in 1882 gives them even greater significance, and a great deal of information relating to urban development can be discovered when comparisons are drawn.

Wellington History Group, researchers and the wider public are most grateful for Lanyon Bowdler Solicitors generously donating these remarkable maps which will enlighten and give much enjoyment for many years to come.

Official handing over of the Lanyon Bowdler maps on Thursday, 30th January 2014.
Looking at the 1840 Tithe Map in one of the meeting rooms at Wellington library are (from left to right): Peter Flint (Senior Partner, Lanyon Bowdler), Graham Riley (Mayor, Wellington Town Council (‘WTC’)), Wendy Palin (treasurer, Wellington History Group (‘WHG’)), Allan Frost (magazine editor, WHG), Cllr. Pat Fairclough (WTC and WHG), Lisa Grimmett (Lanyon Bowdler) and Geoff Harrison (WHG).