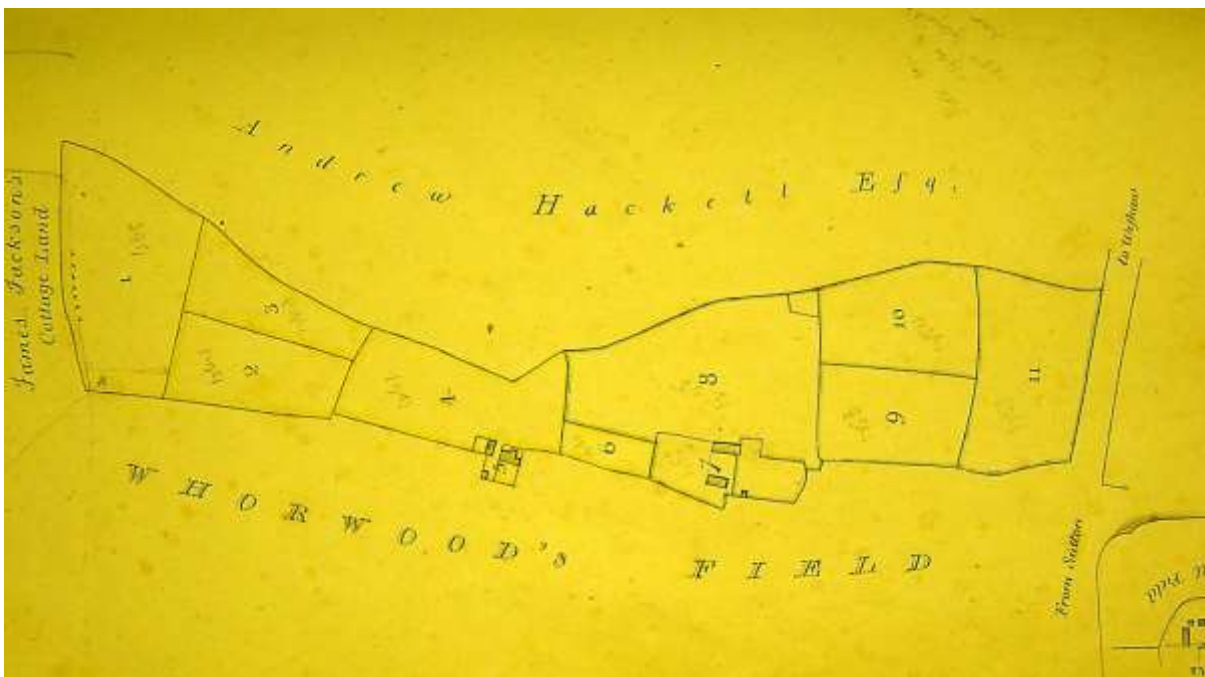


The Whorwoods

By Jim Whorwood

Research carried out by Bob Whorwood

We have a copy of the will of ten times great-grandfather William dated 1574, and of his widow Margaret dated 1586, both of Wishaw Parish. Their son John moved into Sutton Parish and left a will dated 1623. There is a continuous proven line of descent of the family within Sutton to the present day. Until the Victorian period the family home was in the Walmley/Langley area, where for some two centuries they lived in a small farm near Springfield Road. The adjacent common land was marked on maps as “Whorwood’s Field”, and that name was still in use as the address of people living in the area as late as the 1871 census, long after the Whorwoods had moved to the centre of Sutton.



From the Survey of Corporation Lands of 1811 – Thomas Whorwood was the tenant of property no. 7 on the map.

In the Victorian period there were Whorwoods living in Church Hill (now the site of Vesey Memorial Gardens). There were three generations of cordwainers (pronounced *cordner*) in the shoe-making trade. My grandfather had a shoe-makers shop on Mill Street where he made “medical” shoes; he died in 1902 aged 49. His eldest son George became the shoemaker, but the shop was abandoned and the business carried on in a small house in the centre of the town long since demolished, After George returned from France in 1918 he gave up the shoemaking business and was a postman in Sutton for most of his life.

My father was William, George’s youngest brother. He was apprenticed in 1905 to Mr. Claydon the woodworker with premises near the Parish Church in Rectory Road, and he learned his trade as a cabinet maker in two main ways. He maintained all the fine ancient woodwork in the Church, and worked on many of the houses being built on the land of the then recently demolished Four Oaks Hall. Mr. Claydon was a puritanical woodworker who

would not allow any glass paper to be used, so all my father's wood was finished as cut by the blade.

Shakeshaft was the maiden name of my father's mother. John Shakeshaft had a share in a pew in Sutton Parish Church in the 1600s. His son Robert, a carpenter, was married in Sutton and then migrated to nearby Middleton. Most of his working life was spent in the employ of Lord Middleton at Middleton Hall. The next generation provided the person of greater interest. Thomas Shakeshaft was a fine woodcarver and furniture maker, and some of his work still survives. He wrote a notebook which contains many insights into his life as a young man, covering the period from age 21 to 33. Few manual workers made such records, and my brother Bob has reproduced the notebook with supporting background material, depositing copies at Sutton Library, Birmingham Archives, Middleton Hall, and Warwickshire County Record Office.

Thomas Shakeshaft gave an account of his journey to London in 1755. In London he spent some time working in the workshops of furniture-makers, perhaps even in the workshop of Thomas Chippendale. Some of his work has been described as "very Chippendale-like"; whether or not he worked with Chippendale, it is clear that he went to London to improve himself. His granddaughter was my grandmother.

There was a notable family of Whorwoods who held many estates including Kinver and Enville and part of Perry Barr. They held Sandwell Hall and Stourton Castle for the King during the Civil War. William Whorwood had been Attorney General to Henry VIII; one of his daughters, Anne, married Ambrose Dudley, Earl of Warwick, and another daughter, Margaret, married Thomas Throckmorton of Coughton Court. Much of the Whorwood wealth went in fines for recusancy, and money was also lost by gambling and general bad management. There were no wealthy Whorwoods left by 1800.

During the Industrial Revolution there was much migration into Birmingham, including other Whorwoods. Spellings included Worwood, Warwood and even Worrod. Whorwoods also emigrated, and relatives have been traced in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the U.S.A.

In our studies of the family we have been rigorous in our insistence on proof. We have no evidence for any connection with the more famous and wealthy family of the same name, but there are hints in the notebook of Thomas the Middleton furniture-maker that I could even be descended from William the Attorney General. At the more humble local level there is ample evidence for the various connections and relationships. Most of it would I feel quite sure stand up in court.