

Halfcot, 'Halford' and *Oldeforde juxta Stapenhull*: Implications for the chronology of Bells Mill and an early Wordsley-to-Kinver route

by

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There has been some uncertainty surrounding the names Halfcot, 'Halford' and *Oldeforde juxta Stapenhull* which refer to places in the parish of Kinver in south Staffordshire. These names are discussed in two works — Duignan (1902) and Horovitz (2003) — and extracts from these publications are reproduced, with comments, below.

Duignan (1902: 71)

Halford, h., 2 m. NW. of Stourbridge. 1343 *Oldeforde* (juxta *Stapenhull*). This place is near the Stour river, where it is crossed by an ancient road from Shropshire (and Wolverhampton uniting at Himley) to Kidderminster, Worcester, and the South. The form explains the meaning.

Presumably h. in this extract means 'hamlet'. The modern form 'Halford' as quoted here appears to be a mis-spelling; no place named Halford, or similar, is known to exist in the area '2 m. NW. of Stourbridge'. The only place which this entry could represent has been known as Halfcot from the nineteenth century or earlier (see, for example, the Ordnance Survey 1" map of 1834). It is possible that Duignan's apparently erroneous use of a hybrid name, 'Halford', arose from a belief that both Halfcot and *Oldeforde* represent the same place.

Horovitz (2003: 114-26, 344, 356, 474)

Abbreviations

Ch	Cheshire
Duig	Duignan (1902)
OE	Old English
q.v.	<i>Quod vide</i> 'which see'
SHC	<i>Staffordshire Historical Collections</i> (formerly <i>Transactions of the William Salt Archaeological Society</i>)
SRO	Staffordshire Record Office
SRRC	Shropshire Records & Research Centre
WHS	(Not listed)

HALFCOT 2 miles west of Amblecote (SO 8685), and presumably the place which appears as *Halford* in Duignan 1902: 71. *Haffecote* 1332 SHC X 86, *Oldeforde* 1343 Duig (presumably *Le Oldeforde* near Stapenhill, 1342 SHC 1913 90), *Halcote* 1434 SRO D1197/8/1, *Hafecote* 1446 Ch, 1609 SHC 1948-9 118, *Haffcot* 1532 SHC 4th Series 8 16, *Haftcoate* 1656 Sedgley ParReg, *Hafcott* 1669 WHS NS 9 (i) 69, *Hafcot* 1686 Plot. The place is near the river Stour. It is unclear why Duignan 1902: 71 associates *Oldeforde* with this place, but if he is correct it would seem that this place had two names from an early date. The word *old* had two meanings, 'ancient' (implying another, newer, ford nearby), and 'disused'. Both meanings would explain why the name became obsolete. The present name is evidently from OE *halh-cot*, from OE *halh*, here probably meaning 'a piece of low-lying land near a river', and OE *cot* 'a cottage, hut, shelter'. See also *Hastecote*.

HASTECOTE (unlocated, in or near Kinver.) *Hastcote* 1294 SHC VII 9, *Hascote* 1474 SHC NS IV 196, *Hascote* 1578 SRRC 2089/2/3/1, *Hastecote*, *Hascott* 1602 SHC 1935 445, 462, *Hascott* 1602 SHC 1935 462, *Hastecote* 1617 SHC VI (i) NS 42. It seems possible that this is the same place as Halfcot (q.v.).

OLDFORD (unlocated, in Stapenhill.) *Le Oldeforde* 1342 SHC 4th Series VI 91, SHC 1913 90. Probably 'old' in the sense 'former, disused'.

An additional reference to Halfcot occurs on Robert Whitworth's 1774 map of the Stourbridge canal (figure 1). Here, the spelling *Affcot* is used, both for the hamlet itself and for a bridge (*Affcot Bridge*) on the main Kidderminster-to-Wolverhampton road (now the A449) which crosses the river Stour about 300m south of Yewtree Farm near Prestwood.

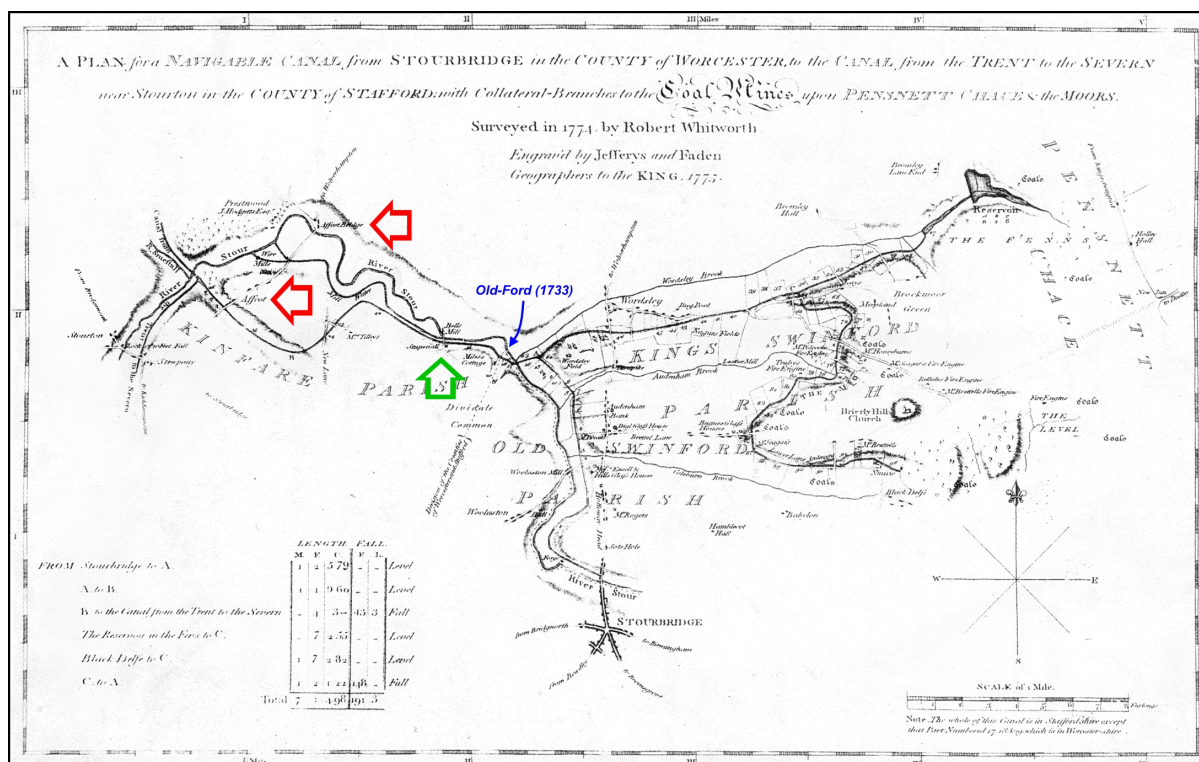


Fig. 1. The locations of Affcot 'Halfcot', Affcot Bridge, and Stapenall as depicted on Robert Whitworth's 1776 plan of Stourbridge Canal. The location of Old-Ford mentioned in the 1733 perambulation is also shown.

Clarification and Implications

The discussion of these place-names, quoted above, is somewhat confusing. It seems unlikely that *Oldeforde*, 'Halford', Halfcot and *Hastecote* would all refer to the same place. Whilst the origin of the latter place-name remains unclear, it is possible to throw some light upon Duignan's apparent conflation of Halfcot, *Oldeforde* and 'Halford'.

Presumably this occurred because of a historical (1342-3) reference to *Oldeforde juxta* ('near') *Stapenhull* which Duignan lists in his entry for 'Halford'.

The place-name Stapenhill can be readily identified in this area. It occurs as 'Stapenhill Farm' on modern maps as well as on the Ordnance Survey 6-inch map of 1903; and the earlier hamlet of *Stapenal* (Brindley 1766) or *Stapenall* (Whitworth 1774; see figure 1) is shown about 600 metres to the east of the farm on engineers' plans of the Stourbridge canal. In both cases the hamlet is depicted at SO 882 858, immediately to the south of the river crossing at Bells Mill and about 1.7 km ENE of Halfcot.¹

The name *Oldeforde* is no longer in use and was, almost certainly, disused in Duignan's time. The 1342-3 reference would have, understandably, led him to believe that *Oldeforde* lay near Stapenhill but, as Halfcot was probably the only place near Stapenhill which was known to Duignan, he may have assumed that *Oldeforde* and Halfcot were one and the same.

Fortunately, a historical reference to *Old-Ford* (which seems to have been unknown to both Duignan and Horovitz) resolves the matter. This place is mentioned in a perambulation of the Oldswinford parish boundary dated 1733. The relevant section of the perambulation is:

... and so along the River Side to the X at Old-Ford at the Bottom of Dividale, where the bounds end against Kingswinford and Begin against Kinfare, and Run up to the X at New Wood Gate, about which there is a dispute between Kinfare and Old-Swinford. Kinfare people say that their Bounds Reach to the Green Path leading to the Corner of the Piece of Ground at Old-Ford, and accordingly make their X by the Green Path; the people of Old-Swinford say the Ditch without the wood is the extremity of Kinfare Bounds and accordingly make their X near the Ditch at the Wood gate...

The location of *Dividale* is known from both Brindley's and Whitworth's canal plans. It was probably so named because the brook there, Dividale Brook, marked the division between the historic counties of Worcestershire and Staffordshire until the brook was culverted in the nineteenth century. Moreover, the reference, in the above quotation, to the bounds of Kingswinford and *Kinfare* 'Kinver' locates *Old-Ford* very precisely indeed; it lay at SO 887 860. Another phrase within the 1733 perambulation, ...*the Corner of the Piece of Ground at Old-Ford*..., implies that *Old-Ford* was, at that date, not just a reference to an old or disused ford, but that it had become the proper name of a recognised place, settlement or area of land: i.e. the 'triangle' of land centred on SO 886 858 and now bounded by a footpath, the river Stour and the county boundary. This area is shaded on Figure 2.

The main point to note is that *Old-Ford* lay only about 550 metres from Stapenhill. This is somewhat closer than the distance from Halfcot to Stapenhill, so it is very likely that *Old-Ford*, rather than Halfcot, was the place meant in the 1342-3 reference to *Oldeforde juxta Stapenhull* quoted by Duignan (1902: 71) and Horivitz (2003: 334).

The road-name Kinver Street, in Wordsley, probably reflects an early route from that village to Kinver; and its alignment with *Old-Ford* suggests that the latter was part of the same route. Indeed, William Fowler's *Plan of Kingswinford Parish* (1839-40) and the 6-inch OS maps of Worcestershire (1884) and Staffordshire (1886) all show evidence of such a track-way, the section south of the Stour coinciding with the 'Green Path' mentioned in the 1733 perambulation. South of the 'Green Path', the route to Kinver may have proceeded west via Stourton or Dunsley.²

Since *Old-Ford* had become a place-name in its own right by 1733, it is likely that a new river crossing had been put in place some considerable time before that date. Indeed, as the name *Oldeforde* was in use in 1342, the ford's replacement likely existed by that earlier date. The local road pattern suggests that it was sited at SO 887 859, near the modern footbridge at the southern end of Bells Lane (formerly Tack Lane); and it is conceivable that this new crossing point arose in conjunction with water-management works (leats, weirs, pools) which served Bells Mill. If this is an accurate assessment, the foregoing attribution of the place-name *Oldeforde* (1342) to *Old-Ford* (1733) might help in any future attempts to establish a chronology for the mill's development.

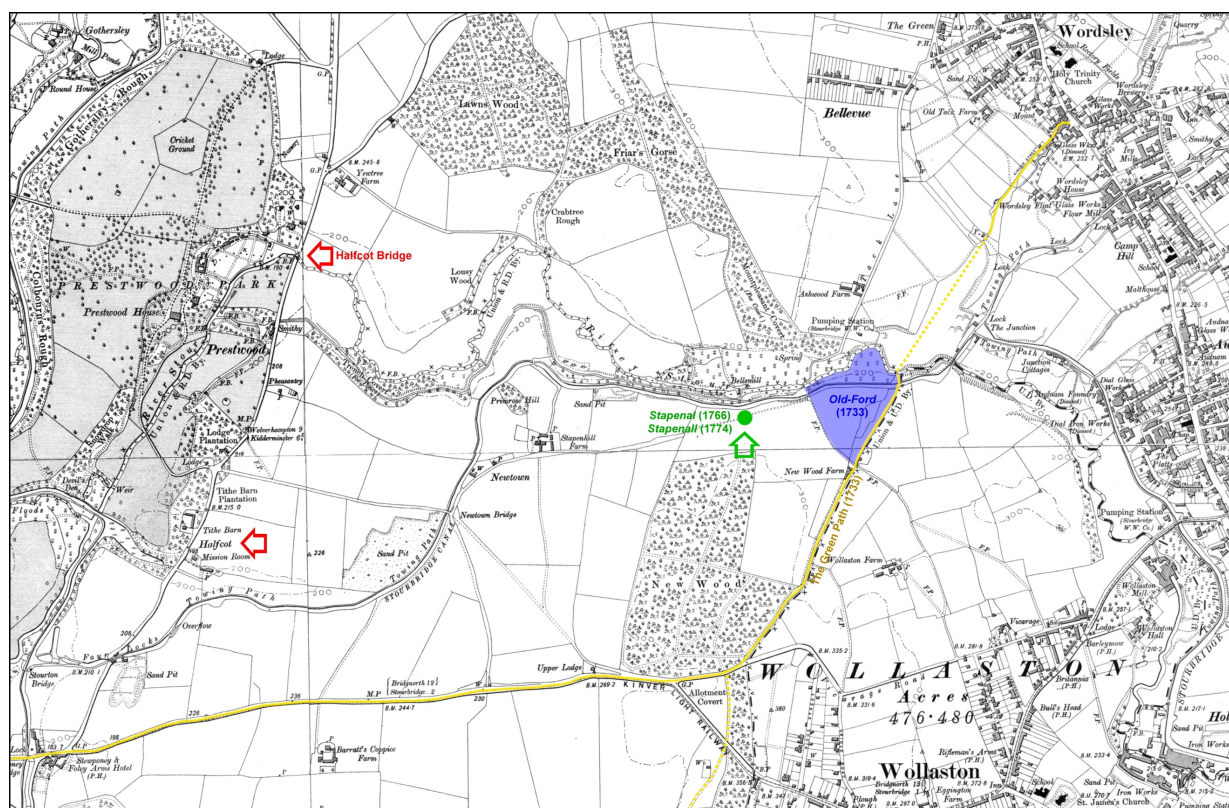


Fig. 2. Locations of Halfcot, the early hamlet of Stapenhill (*Stapenal*, 1766; *Stapenall*, 1776) and *Old-Ford* re-plotted on a composite of Ordnance Survey 6-inch base maps dated 1903.

Notes

1. Stapenhill lay on the steep northern flank of the hill upon which New Wood now stands. This location was probably responsible for the settlement's name, which seems to derive from OE *stēapan hylle* 'steep hill' (Horovitz 203: 564).
2. An alternative route might have originally run south along (or alongside) Wollaston Ridge to Round Hill and then south-west to cross the Stour near Whittington. It is not known whether the Whittington Horse Bridge existed in 1342; Horse Bridge Lane itself is not mentioned in historical sources until 1598 (Greenslade, 1984: 121). However, it is likely there was a ford a little further south: the western section of Windsor Holloway — which seems to have connected Cookley Lane at Kinver to a crossing point on the Stour — existed by c. 1200 (James, 2020).

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