

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES:

BUDWORTH MILLS

There were two mills in Budworth – a corn mill, with a small mill pond, alongside the manor house, and a ‘walk-mill’ sited alongside the road at the east end of the larger Budworth Mere. The earliest reference we have to a mill in Little Budworth is in the first decade of the fourteenth century which refers to the ‘walk mill’, when a strip of land is said to have extended to *Walkemulnepoul* (the ‘walk-mill pool’). Another early reference is in 1369 when the lord of the manor granted James the Taylor all mills and mill ponds within the manor, fishing rights in the ponds, and the right to have timber and earth for embanking.

The Corn Mill

In 1789 this mill and its associated farm lands amounting to nearly ninety-four acres was in the hands of John Houlbrooke, perhaps the wealthiest resident of Little Budworth who resided at Budworth Hall, who also possessed a thirty-five acres farm at the west end of the Budworth, and another farm of nineteen acres on the main road. Houlbooke will have probably resided at the Hall and sub-let the other properties and land.

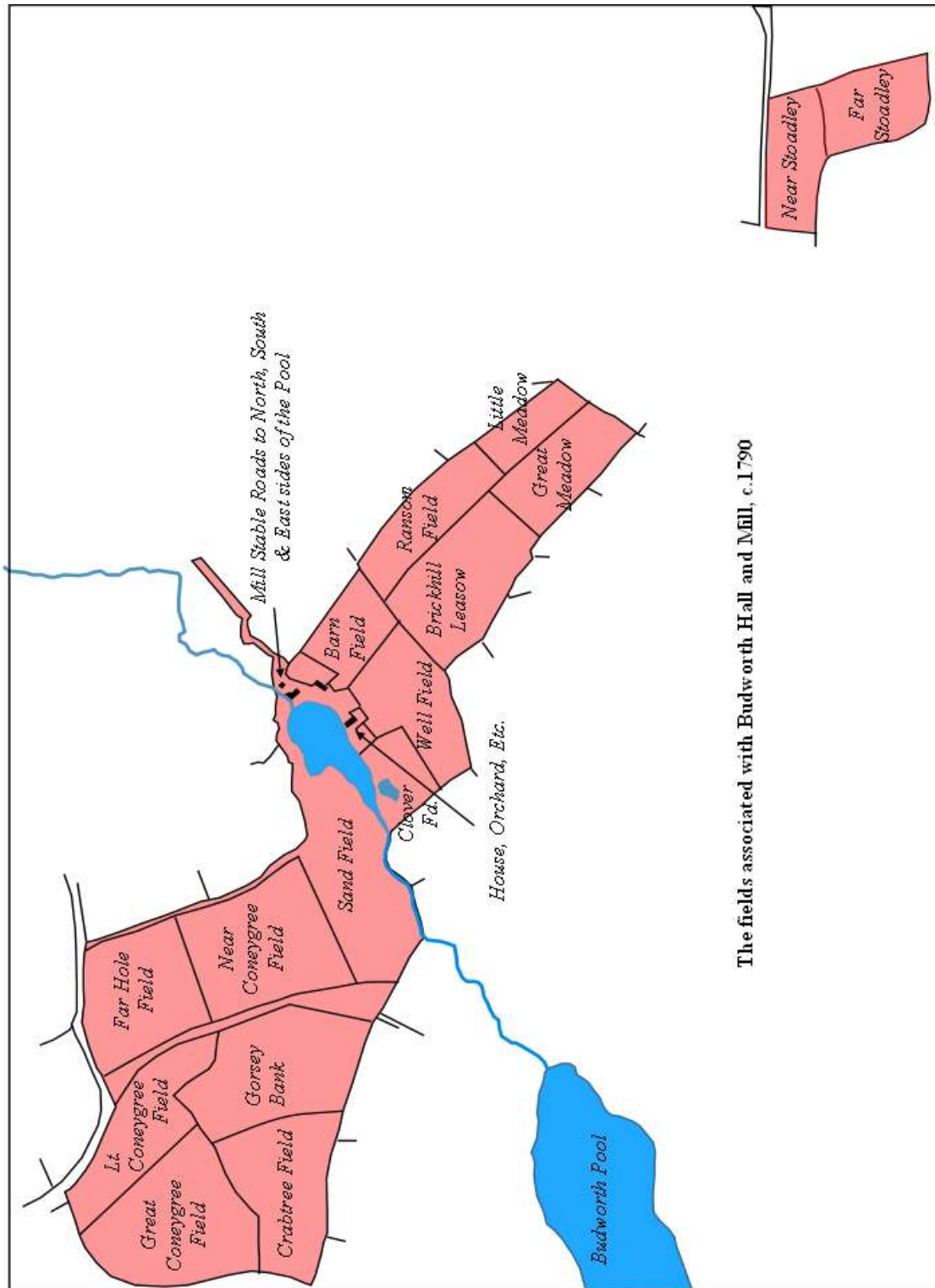
The Houlbrooke family had been in possession of Budworth Hall and the Corn Mill since the 17th century. In 1664 John Houlbrooke paid tax on a three-hearth house in Little Budworth which was probably the hall, and then on 10 May 1686 he or a son of the same name had a lease from the Earl of Shrewsbury for the hall covering the lives of himself and his brother Thomas. This was renewed in November 1724 when the names were changed to include Thomas’ son John aged twenty-nine: John the leaseholder being then sixty and his brother Thomas five years younger. This new lease cost a down payment, or ‘fine’, of £14 10s, a rent of £26 a year and a heriot payment of £3 10s.ⁱ Strangely, in December 1720 there was a lease for the hall, mill and the ninety-four acres to John Houlbrooke, said to then be aged sixty-two years, and his sons John, aged thirty, and twenty-six years old Joseph. This lease cost him a down payment of £48 and annual rent of £26 and a heriot of £3 10s.

On 5 January 1784 another lease was taken out for the lives of John Houlbrooke, then aged forty-eight, his son John aged sixteen, and five years old Joseph.

In 1835, according to land tax returns and at the time of the first census in 1841 Thomas Acton, a man in his sixties, was the farmer residing at Budworth Hall. He was married to Martha and they had three male and three female servants.

By the 1860s and 1870s George Bevin was the occupier of the hall and mill with fields that now covered 103 acres. But by 1871 the two properties seem to have been split as in that year the farmer of the ‘Manor House’ was sixty-six years old Richard Goulborn, who lived here with his wife and their daughters, one of whom, Annie, was married to Thomas Rutter: together they only farmed fourteen acres according to the census. The mill was occupied by George Bevin who farmed the ninety-eight acres from here: he and his wife had eight children whose ages then ranged from fourteen years down to one month.

In 1883 George Robinson had a lease of what was known as Mill Farm at a rent of £240 a year. By 1892 George Robinson was farming at the ‘Old Hall’, but by 1914 the hall, was occupied by Mrs. Ann Rutter and the mill by Mrs. Alice Robinson. Three years later John Robinson bought the Old Hall Farm along with its one hundred and forty four acres, from the Shrewsbury Estate, for £5200. In the sale catalogue it said that in the garden of the Old Hall was ‘an old ill used as a store and granary’.ⁱⁱ



The Walk Mill

A 'walk mill' was used for fulling woollen cloth which involved scouring, milling (thickening), and then stretching the material on great frames known as *tenters* and held onto those frames by tenterhooks. The name of the mill came from the original process of pounding the cloth with the fuller's feet and hence the description of them as 'walkers'.

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Interestingly there were a few families named Walker who lived in the parish and who, no doubt, descended from these early medieval fullers. From the medieval period the process of fulling was often carried out in mills which used water powered to drive heavy hammers that pounded the cloth, and by this time, fuller's earth a soft clay-like substance had been introduced. Fullers kneaded a mixture of fuller's earth and water into the woollen cloth to absorb lanolin, oils, and other greasy impurities as part of the cloth finishing process and so that the dying process could begin.

The area where the tenters were erected may have been in the field on the opposite side of the road from the mill we see today which was commonly known as 'Tenter's Croft'. Just to the south of the mill there was another field associated with cloth production named 'Dyehouse Croft' which seems to have been named due to its location near the mill rather than being associated with it.

In March 1588 Hugh Briscoe who worked at the mill as a 'tucker' (another name for a fuller or a finisher of cloth) left a will. He mentions his wife, Katherine, and sons Hugh John, Peter, Thomas and Raffe, then aged eight years old, and daughters Anne, Margaret, and Elizabeth who was aged ten years. Not surprisingly among the many bequests he made there are items of cloth. Raffe was bequeathed a yard of russet coloured 'carsye'ⁱⁱⁱ. Peter had half a yard of 'gladden' and Thomas a piece of 'gladden' stocking. His wife Katherine was given four yards of plain white cloth, and daughter Anne was given three yards of the same with the rest of the white cloth going to the other daughters. The inventory of his goods and chattels, which had a total value of £103 7s, was made on 5 March 1593. It lists 'tooe cards', wool cards, 'walker's earth', tassels, 'tooe', linen yarn, woollen cloth, and a linen loom^{iv}. In addition Hugh had a number of items of husbandry along with cattle and sheep, corn and hay, butter and cheese and bacon. He seems to have rented three parcels of land from Thomas Billington, Widow Holland and Raffe Holland, of which the largest parcel included fields known as 'Pismore Field' and 'the Great Pismore Field' held of Billington.

Hugh's descendant, John Briscall held the 'Walkemill' in 1686 with a total of just over thirty-seven acres of land. He had a three live lease (the others being his brothers Hugh and James) for which he paid an initial sum £50, an annual rent of £16 and a heriot on the death of £2 10s. He may have been a son of James Briscall who paid tax on a two-hearth house in Little Budworth in 1664

In 1704 and 1707 a John and Richard Briscall (Briscoe) are listed as paying land taxes, the former presumably being the man who had this mill.

In 1729 Edward Briscall, a dyer, was the tenant of the mill for the lifetimes of his brothers Hugh and James Briscall and a nephew Ralph Parsons. He paid £10 to take over the lease on the same terms as before. He left a will that was proved in 1738.

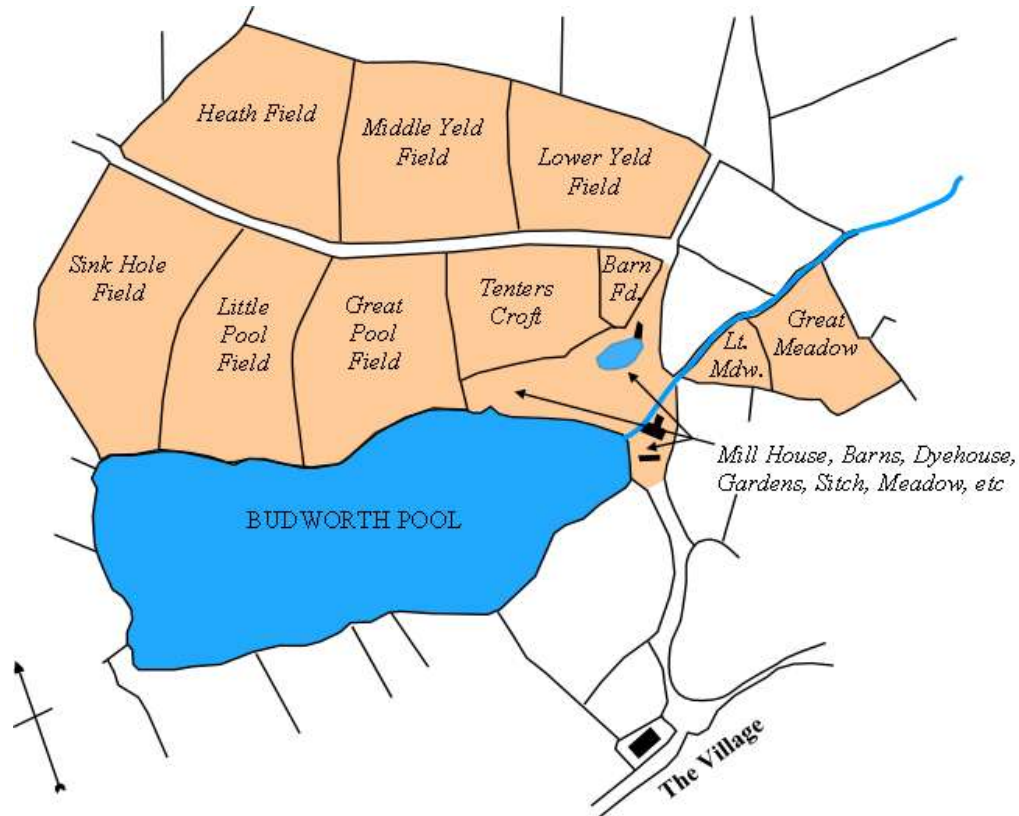
In 1737 Ralph Briscall had the lease for a payment of £30, this time for the lives of John Knight and John Houlbrooke. Seven years later this last named person had the lease for a payment of £12, this time for the lives of John Knight aged fourteen years, his own son John aged seven and Frances Houlbrooke aged four. The annual rent was £16 and the heriot £2 10s. Ralph Bricall, dyer, left a will that was proved in 1743.

In 1770 the premises were advertised for letting as a fustian mill "well sited for the pulling of cloh and the stretching of waste".^v

In 1784 Francis Ashley of Whitehall, Little Budworth, had the mill with its forty-eight acres of land. His lease of the mill, dated 5 January that year, was for the lives of John Knight aged fifty-five, Elizabeth Buchanan aged thirty-eight, and Francis Ashley, aged thirty-one. The down payment was £50, the annual rent was £16 and the heriot £2 10s.

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According to the 1835 land tax returns the occupant of the mill was Thomas Cookson. In the mid-nineteenth century and until at least 1871 this mill was leased by Thomas Booth, when the associated lands had been extended to amount to seventy-three acres.



The fields associated with the Walk Mill, Little Budworth, c.1790

Note: Little Meadow and Great Meadow are likely to be the site of the Tudor fields 'Pismore' and 'Great Pismore'

By the nineteenth century the fulling mill was no longer operating as such. The part on the northern side of the brook became 'Walk Mill Farm', which by 1917 were in the hands of Robert William Booth, along with twenty-two acres of land, and the main mill buildings were converted into a corn mill in the occupation of Mrs Worsley of the Red Lion Inn.^{vi}

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ⁱ A 'heriot' is the render of the best beast or item of chattel of a deceased tenant due to the lord of the manor, or its monetary equivalent.

ⁱⁱ Cheshire and Chester Records Office (CRO): DSH 299/27

ⁱⁱⁱ 'Kersey' - a long narrow woollen cloth; 'gladden' another form of woollen cloth.

^{iv} 'Cards' are implements used for parting and combing out and setting in order the fibres of hemp or wool before spinning. 'Tooe' refers to towe which is a name for hemp or flax before being spun.

Walker's earth' refers to fuller's earth.

^v Lynch, C.J., *Colin Lynch's NORTHWICH*, (2004) p.127

^{vi} CRO: DSS 299/27