

TONY BOSTOCK'S LOCAL HISTORY NOTES: DARNHALL

TUDOR DARNHALL

In 1537/8, on the eve of Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries, Lord Cromwell wrote to the Abbot of Vale Royal requesting, or perhaps demanding, that he have the 'farm of Darhall' with its demesne lands. It seems that the abbot was somewhat reluctant and Cromwell had to write again pointing out that the abbot had the manors or granges of Knights, Bradford Hefferston, and 'Connersley' (Whitegate), along with the tithes of Over and other assets with which to provide for the monastery. Whereupon the abbot replied that he had leased the granges out to various tenants and that the tithes of Over were only in his hands on a lease from the Prioress of Chester. Further the grounds around the abbey were of a sandy nature and therefore not good enough to grow wheat upon so he had to rely on the lands at Darnhall for that crop. He went on to say that if his lordship were to insist then he might have the manor except for the woodland, waters and the barn in which he stored the tithes of grain from Over. The compromise was rejected and on 7 September 1538 a deed of surrender was completed which purported to have been signed by the abbot. In March the following year Lord Cromwell travelled up to Cheshire and presided at a court held at Vale Royal during the last week of the month to hear various spurious charges against the abbot. At the dissolution of the abbey, Darnhall was valued at £4 6s 8d.

A valuation of Darnhall and other properties in 1544/5 showed that the lease of the demesne lands were then worth £26 a year, rents of property in the manor accounted for a further £4, profits of the woodland and waters were worth £13 and pannage brought in a further £1.¹

A number of local gentlemen had interests in the manor or grange of Darnhall about the time of the dissolution. Sir William Venables had a grant from the abbot of the tithes of corn and grain in the manor of Darnhall and lands and tenements in Swanlow, Over, Knights and Bradford for sixty-one years from 1 July 1538 in consideration of a payment of £40 and a rent of £4 a year.²

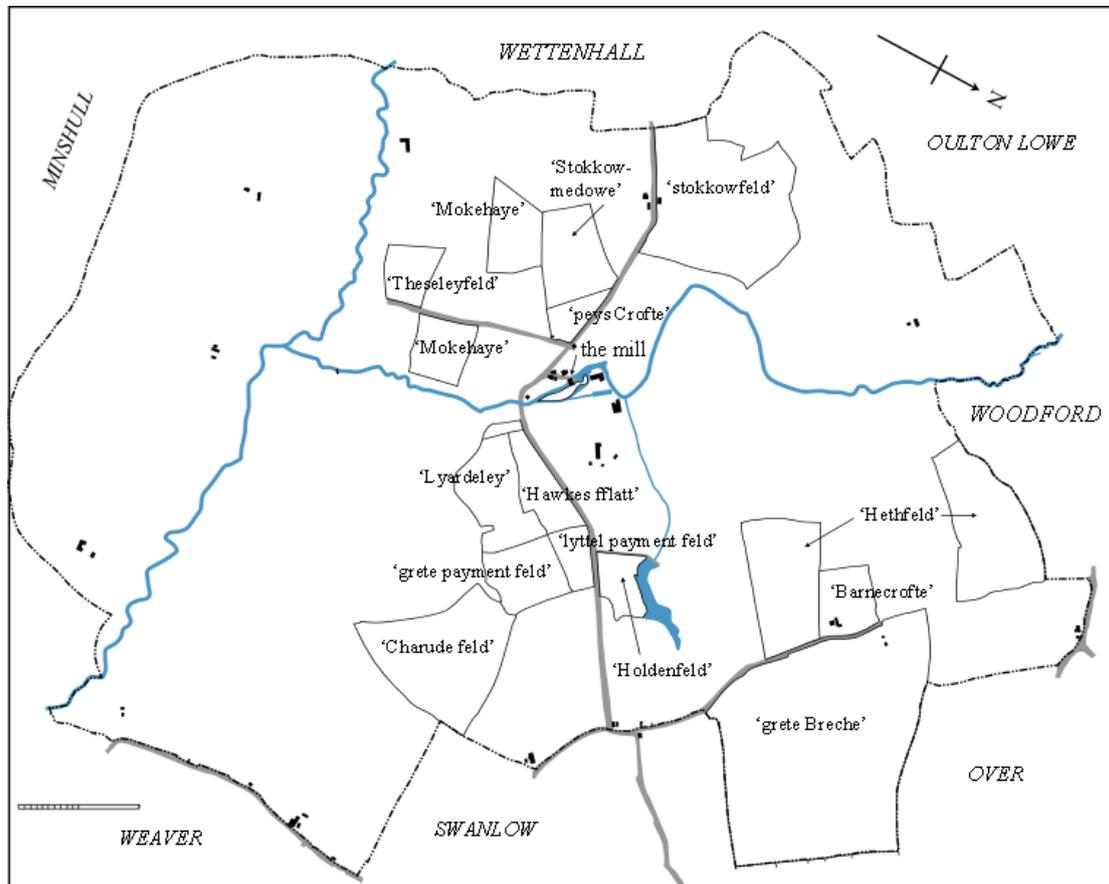
In 1540 in a list of the lands of the dissolved house of Vale Royal we find '...the fishing of Darnehallepole, underwood and "lopp" of trees in Darnehallewode....' which had been leased by the abbot to Richard Grosvenor for seven years from October 1535 at a peppercorn rent. These were in addition to the manor or grange of 'Dernehall'.³

A description of Darnhall Manor or Grange given in document which refers to a lease of certain fields in the manor dated April 1538 suggesting that Cromwell was in possession and had got his way as regards the manor.⁴ The parcel of lands was worth £22 a year in rent for: 'Stokkowefeld', pastures called 'Mokehaye', and 'stokkowfeld'; a croft called 'Sond Crofte' and a croft of land, lately known as 'Warr[en]' in the holding of Thomas Burstowe; closes known as 'Theseleyfeld' and 'Mysefeld'; a pasture called 'Stokkowmedowe', land called 'peys Crofte', pastures called 'grete payment feld' and 'lyttel payment feld', 'Holdenfeld'; a croft called 'Charude feld'; parcels of land called 'Lyardeley', 'Hawkes fflatt', 'Barnecrofte', 'grete Breche', 'grete Stonefeld', 'polefeld' and 'Hethfeld'; and a mill with a meadow in the holding of Thomas Burstowe. Many of these fields may be identified with similar names in the description of the estate given in 1860, and are still a feature of the modern landscape (*see map*).

On 3 May 1541 Sir Rowland Hill, a mercer of the City of London, on payment of £682, received a grant of the manor of Darnhall from the Court of Augmentation; this included Darnhall Grange, Darnhall Park, Darnhall Barn and Darnhall Pool.⁵ He was required to pay an annual rent of £3 8s 4d to the Court.⁶ Robert Mainwaring of London received the tithes of the manor of Darnhall, along with those of Swanlow, Over, Knights and Bradford, on 14 May

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1541. He was required to surrender two earlier leases issued by the abbot: that to Sir William Venables mentioned above, and the other to himself dated March 1538. On 10 February 1542, Robert Mainwaring had a lease of 'all woods, underwoods, loppes, toppes, and croppes of trees and hedgerows in Darnhall Park, except timber trees', on surrender of an 80 years' lease dated 13 July 1538 to Roger Harwar, of Nantwich, by Vale Royal Abbey.⁷



Tudor Field Names superimposed on 1860 estate plan

Hill was a prominent member of the Mercers' Company and the first Protestant Lord Mayor of London. On 2 December 1560 he commenced a suit to secure the title to the estate. It was declared that the manor would be to the use of himself for life, with a remainder to Alice Needham, a cousin, a further remainder to Reginald Corbet and his wife Alice in special tail, with final remainder to Alice (qy. Needham or Corbet). Hill's sister Jane married a John Gratwood whose daughter and co-heir, Alice (d. 1603) married Sir Reginald Corbet. This Sir Reginald was appointed as a Justice of Common Pleas on 16 October 1559. He left a will dated 26 August 1565. His handsome alabaster tomb is in St :Peter's church, Stoke upon Tern, near Market Drayton, Salop; his son was Richard Corbet, esquire, who married Anne daughter of Lord Chancellor Thomas Bromley (d. 1587) who presided over the trial of Mary, Queen of Scots in 1587.⁸ Peter Corbet eventually sold the manor to Robert Bamfield who then sold it on to Thomas Lee, son of Henry Lee of Lee Hall, Wybunbury, who remained in possession for a number of generations.

It is difficult to record who lived in the Darnhall area during the Tudor period. One of the normal methods is to use the Tudor Muster Rolls which listed those men available for military service. Whilst we have lists for Over and Swanlow there is no list for Darnhall; it may be that men from Darnhall were included in the neighbouring township lists. At Chester Record

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Office there are two extant wills from the time: those of Richard Roe, yeoman, dated 1591 and Joyce Dutton, widow, dated 1598.

Roe's will was written on 12 July 1591. To those who rang the bells at his funeral he gave 2s 8d. Some of his property went to his daughter Susan and her husband John Syme as had been agreed in a settlement dated 23 January 1586 – probably a marriage settlement. His illegitimate son William was to have £2 'yf he ever Come to Claym yt'. Brothers Richard and Thomas were to have the debts owed to him by John Massie and a John Lapington though it seems the prospect of recovery was not going to be easy and the brothers would have to pay the costs involved. Brother-in-law Henry Wilkenson a whipsaw, an iron chisel, his best clot and 'upper hose of the same cloth' and sister Margaret Wilkenson had a green cloak. Another son Hugh had a black hat, a black cloak and a pair of buckskin hose. John Syme also had some clothes – 'medley hose and either a black hat or a blue one. Once all his debts and funeral expenses had been paid half of the remainder of his estate was left to his wife Alice and the other half to Hugh who was appointed as one of two executors – the other being Thomas Crewe of Burland. Of the debts owed to him he forgave a total of £7 18s 8d owed by several people including the lord of the manor of Over – Edmond Pershall. But fifteen others were not excused a total of £28 16s 5d, of which Robert Wilkenson owed just over £10: interestingly the list does not include the debts of Massie and Lapington.

Within two weeks of the will being written Richard Roe had died for an inventory of his possessions was made on 29 July by Robert and Raffe Kelsall and Richard Darlington. The total value came to £81 3s 3d of which £41 5s 1d were debts which is more than listed in the will, so presumably the difference was made up by the Massie and Lapington amounts. His goods are a modest lot and included six cows, a hog, a sow and five 'pigges'; a hen and seven chickens; some items of husbandry; pewter and brass; three beds; some bacon, butter, hemp and cheese.

Joyce Dutton, the widow of Richard Dutton, made her will on 22 November 1598. Charity was the first thing on her mind so she gave 3s 4d to the poor and her clothes to those her executors might think needed them. To Richard son of Robert Hankie, her son-in-law, she gave a mare. To Robert's children – Richard, Robert, John and Dorothy – she gave the remainder of her estate. The will records she owed Randle Darlington 23s 6d. The witnesses were: Hugh Roe, Randle Darlington and Raffe Kettle, the parish clerk.

Although not a Tudor period will, it is worth mentioning Robert Hankie as he was Joyce Dutton's son-in-law and was related to the Wilkinsons and therefore the other testator Richard Roe. His will is dated 24 September 1610.

After requesting burial at Over church he ordered that his son John receive £80 he owed him, to be paid over by Edward Wilkinson on such dates and times as had been agreed. Elizabeth Sudlow, his servant had £10 and son Richard had the unthreshed corn and grain saving a third for the widow, and also a bushel of barley. Sons Robert and John were to have one cow each but all the rest of the cattle were to be sold to pay off his debts. Robert was to have his carts, ploughs and other items of husbandry as well as items in the house, and both Robert and John were to have 12d each as their 'child's part' of the remainder of the estate. Anything remaining after funeral expenses and debts had been discharged was to go to son Robert except for two beds, the bedsteads and 'all things belonging' which went to Robert and John – presumably the beds they lay in. In all he owed £32 10s to a total of twelve men and was owed £18 10s 10d by eight people including 'Richard the Chapman'. He appointed his son Richard and Thomas Pott as his executors and Edward Wilkinson, his brother-in-law as overseer.

By the 1 October Robert Hankie had died as his inventory was written out on that day. The list is incomplete but the total comes to at least £116 which suggests that Robert was perhaps

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reasonably well off in comparison to his neighbours. In livestock he had four oxen, two bulls, seven cows, a bull calf, three calves, a nag, two mares, a colt and two hogs. He also had hens, chickens, and capons. In grain he had twenty thraves of wheat, 140 thraves of barley, along with ninety-two thrives of oats.⁹ As expected he had a number of items of husbandry such as carts and ploughs. Cooking and eating utensils consisted of pots, pans, kettles a large amount of pewter ware and iron ware about the hearth. In the house he had tables, forms, chairs, stools, a cupboard, four feather beds, four flock beds and a 'woll' bed, with pillows and bolsters. Linen included bed coverings, coverlets, blankets, a variety of different sheets, table napkins and pillow cases.

Whilst Robert was primarily a husbandman making a living by growing crops he also produced cheese and butter for market as he had fifty cheeses and four gallons of butter. But that was not his only source of income as the number of sheets of cloth he held suggests that he may have been involved in cloth making especially since he had two spinning wheels.

¹ Ormerod, ii, p. 172

² Cheshire Record Office: EDA 3/1 (84)

³ Public Record Office: S.C.6/Hen VIII/7384, ms.76, 79

⁴ CRO: DCH/J/238

⁵ *Letters and Papers of the reign of Hen VIII*, vol. 16, p.420

⁶ Ormerod, G. *History of the County Palatine of Chester*, ii, p.180

⁷ L&P Hen VIII, vol. 16, 1540-1541 (1898), pp

⁸ Ormerod, ii, p. 181

⁹ A 'thrave' is a measure of grain crop and consists of two stooks of twelve sheaves