

HISTORY OF FORDHALL TO 1914

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FORDHALL IN THE MIDDLE AGES

The earliest period for which there is definite information on the history of Fordhall is the 12th century. During that century, it is likely that the castle – the remains of which can still be seen on the farm – was built and, by 1200, it is likely that a large farm had been established in the area around the castle.

Neither Fordhall nor the nearest village, Longford, appears in Domesday Book - the great land survey started in 1086 by William the Conqueror. Longford was a big village in the Middle Ages by local standards, with at least twenty households, and it is likely that there was already at least a small hamlet there in the 11th century. Longford township – the later local government unit that included Fordhall – was part of the manor of Hodnet until 1712, making it likely that information about Longford was included in the entry for Hodnet, the chief village in the manor, as happened elsewhere in Domesday Book.

Longford and Fordhall's parish church was also at Hodnet until the 19th century, although the area served by the chapel at Moreton Say formed a separate unit (including Longford and Fordhall) within the parish of Hodnet and was functioning as a parish in all but name by the 16th century. In the Middle Ages, Longford also had a small chapel of its own, dedicated to St Michael.

Domesday Book shows that this area of northwest Shropshire, on the borders of Cheshire and Staffordshire, was very thinly populated in the early Middle Ages. Outside the small, widely scattered, hamlets there were large areas of wood, heath and moss and it is likely that the area now covered by Fordhall Farm was a mixture of uncultivated woodland and heath before the 12th century.

The Mediaeval Castle at Fordhall

The remains of a mediaeval ringwork stand on a promontory overlooking the river Tern on the south-eastern side of the farm. A ringwork was a circular earthwork, probably fortified with a wooden stockade. It seems to have had a second enclosure – a bailey – attached to it on the northern side. The ringwork itself would have housed and sheltered the human occupants; the bailey would have safeguarded animals.

Small castles were common in the landscape of Shropshire at this time, although a ringwork was among the less usual forms, a motte (mound) and bailey being more common. There were castles three miles to the south on either side of the Tern at Hodnet and Stoke on Tern, the most important local places at the time – the town of Market Drayton was not started until the mid-13th century. There was a castle at Tyrley, two miles up the Tern, and there is some suggestion that there may have been a castle at Bletchley, less than two miles to the west of Fordhall.

Small castles were often built in this period by land-owners to protect themselves, their dependents and their farm-animals just as, a century or two later in this area, big farmhouses were often surrounded by

rectangular moats. The times were uncertain and sometimes lawless in this part of the country and, if you had property, you needed to protect it.

In such times, a castle like that at Fordhall may also have had a wider, strategic purpose. From the name of the place, it may have protected a ford - a river-crossing - at this point on the Tern, just as Tyrley Castle was built at the next major crossing to the north, near Drayton. Both Longford and Sutton were among the larger villages in the area in the Middle Ages and Fordhall with its possible river-crossing is on the direct route between them (via Buntingsdale).

Fordhall and its castle were also close to more important routes in the Middle Ages. The A53 follows the line of a route along the north bank of the river Tern that was significant in this period. At Ternhill, a mile to the west of Fordhall, the A53 crosses the A41, which follows in this area the line of the Roman road – the Longford – from the Midlands to Chester. Where Ternhill bridge is now, the Longford crossed the Tern in the 12th century by the next ford along the river south from Fordhall, called the Stratford – the “(Roman) street ford”. The lord of Hodnet had military responsibilities in the Middle Ages – he was seneschal (steward) of Montgomery Castle – so may well have wanted to keep an eye on any movements of armed men along these routes from a vantage point at Fordhall.

The Mediaeval Farm at Fordhall

The only written record of a land-holding at Fordhall in the Middle Ages is a charter of 1283, now in the Shropshire Archives, recording that Richard, son of Robert de la Fourde, had granted two meadows near Fourde - Paynes Meadow and Ruffe Meadow - to his sister, Sibil, and her husband, Ralph de Longeford. The meadows were described as situated between a wood belonging to Richard called “le Scawe” (the Shaw) and the bank of the river Tern, and the charter also granted free access to them through Richard de Fourde’s land and wood.

Paynes Meadow still had the same name in the 19th century and was on the western edge of the existing farm. Later field-names show that the Shaw was a large area of woodland between Fordhall and Ternhill. The charter therefore strongly suggests that the de Ford - “of Ford” - family held much the same area of land as Fordhall farm covers today, although the reference to woodland may indicate that not all of it was fully cultivated at the time. Similarly, the charter refers to moors – uncultivated wetland – lying next to the meadows, which were to supply wood for fencing, and Ruffe Meadow itself, as the name suggests, probably consisted of rough grass. Altogether, the charter gives a picture of a farm that was pushing the boundaries of cultivation forward in the later 13th century, although the 18th century farm still had areas of moor and the mid-19th century farm a Rough Piece next to the river, just one meadow away from Paynes Meadow.

Richard de Fourde also held land in the three open or common fields of the nearby village of Longford. In 1290, he granted nine “acres” – open field strips - at Longford to his sister and brother-in-law and, in 1292, held five out of the thirty acres in the open field towards Longslow. A land-holding in the fields of Longford brought with it rights to graze cattle and sheep over the open fields, when they were lying fallow and unsown, and also to graze and take hay from meadows to the north of the village, as well as access to the wetland of Smythemoor, providing common summer grazing to the communities of Longford, Moreton Say and Bletchley.

Some thirty years earlier, Robert de Forde had made a similar grant of land in Longford to his daughter and son-in-law and had property interests at Longslow. Records of a local land-holding family called de Ford go back further, to Robert de Forde in the 1230s and to Peter de la Forde and his son, Hugh, around 1200. They usually appear as witnesses to land-transactions in surrounding villages and in Market Drayton, along with other local lords of the manor and prominent land-holders, suggesting that the de Ford family had wealth and high local status.

All this evidence suggests that a land-holding of a similar size to the present farm – around 150 acres (60 hectares) - may have existed at Fordhall from before 1200, when we first hear of the de Ford family. By the standards of the time, when the usual village farm was around 15 acres (6 hectares), this was a very large land-holding. It was, however, typical of the sort of large isolated farm established outside villages on previously uncultivated land – often woodland – in this part of Shropshire in the 12th and 13th centuries. Some – usually called granges - were established by local monasteries; Combermere Abbey owned a series along the river Tern south of Fordhall - Cliff Grange, just across the river, then Stoke Grange and Helshaw Grange. Others were established by secular land-holders as a way of improving their estates and increasing their incomes; Styche Hall and other large farms around Newstreet Lane to the north of Moreton Say started this way.

In 1333, a Hugh Cabot of Forde was recorded, who may have been the same person as a Hugh de Furde recorded in 1314; the Cabots were the main land-holders at Buntingsdale in this period. In 1349, Richard del Forde was listed with neighbouring land-holders as a juror at the inquisition on the property of Robert de Say, lord of Moreton, who had died at the height of the Black Death. A Richard de la Forde was recorded locally in 1379. The last record of a de Ford family at Fordhall is in the Poll Tax of 1381, when Alice de Forde and her son Lewk were listed, along with Edith othe (at) Forde and her son Nicholas.

The last Richard de Ford apparently left no male heir and his daughter and heiress married Sir John Holgrave of Tarporley in Cheshire, possibly around 1400. Their daughter, Jane, married Philip Hill of Ightfield. Their son, also Philip, was described as “de Foord”, which suggests that he was living at Fordhall in the second half of the 15th century. He was the father of the Roger Hill who lived at Fordhall from the 1520s and died in 1560. In his will of 1560, Roger Hill requested burial in Moreton Say church, “whereas my elders have been accustomed to be laid”.

Sources

There is a description of the castle and much background information in Michael Fradley, “Monastic enterprise in town and countryside: two case studies from north-east Shropshire” in Landscape History, 28 (2006), pp.5-20.

The main source for the de Ford family is R.W.Eyton, The Antiquities of Shropshire, Vol.9 (1859), pp.216-7 & 337-9. Other references are in N. & S.V.Rowley, A Transcript of Original Documents ...concerning ...Market Drayton (1967), pp.7, 12, 23, 39. 1381 poll tax - Carolyn C.Fenwick (ed.), The Poll Taxes of 1377, 1379 and 1381, Part 2 (2001), p.387. The charters of 1283 and 1290 are in the Shavington estate records at Shropshire Archives: SA 946/A/119 & 120.

The family tree showing the succession from Richard de Ford to the Hill family is on page 246 of George Grazebrook & John Paul Rylands (eds.), The Visitation of Shropshire ... 1623, (1889), Volume 1.

FORDHALL IN THE 16th CENTURY

The Hill family at Fordhall

In the 16th century, Fordhall was owned and farmed by members of a family called Hill (sometimes spelt Hyll). It was usually called “Ford House” (spelt various ways) during this period, the earliest record of the name occurring in 1547. The earliest known mention in official records of a Hill family here is in the 1525 Lay Subsidy – a national tax – when Roger Hill made the second highest payment in Moreton Say parish, only exceeded by that of the Bostock family at Moreton Hall. He was in the same position in the 1544/5 Lay Subsidy returns, where he was called “de Ford”.

The head of the Hill family at Fordhall was usually described as a “gentleman” in legal documents and members of the family married into other gentry families. A gentleman could be defined at the time as someone who was wealthy enough not to have to work with his hands; he would have had enough property – lands and houses – to provide a sufficient income from rents to maintain the living standards expected of a gentleman. The Hills were probably at the lower end of the scale of gentry. They held property in Market Drayton, where they were leading members of the community, as well as Fordhall but did not live on a very lavish scale or build themselves a very large house. They preferred to farm their land at Fordhall rather than to rent it to tenant farmers and live on the proceeds.

Most of our information on the Hill family comes from the wills made by three members of the family – Roger Hill (died 1563), James Hill (Roger’s son, died 1598) and James’s widow, Anne Hill (died 1600) - and the probate inventories of their possessions made after their deaths. In the 16th century (and up to the 19th century) in order to administer the estate of a person who had died, probate had to be granted by the church through the local bishop. If the person lived in north Shropshire, their will and (up to the mid-18th century) a detailed list and valuation of their possessions had to be sent to Lichfield, where many still survive in the archives.

Because inventories listed all the possessions of people who had recently died (except land and houses), we can find out about the crops they grew and the animals they kept on their farms as well as the contents of their houses and, of course, the overall value of their possessions. Roger Hill’s farm and household possessions were worth £54 14s 10d in 1563 and James Hill’s £98 2s 8d in 1598. As a widow, Anne Hill left a smaller amount, £34 9s 8d, in 1600. These values put the Hills among the wealthiest local farmers at the time.

It is difficult to compare the value of money in this period with that of today, although a farm labourer earned around 6d (2.5p) a day then, perhaps around £7-£8 a year, and some sense of changes in values can be obtained by comparing the value of livestock in the inventories with contemporary values.

The wills, too, give intimate details of the Hill family’s prized possessions. In the 16th century, clothes were made to last and were relatively valuable compared with today. In 1563, Roger Hill left his servant, Laurence Hill, “my second coat, doublet and a pair of hose”. He also left James, his son and heir, his “best jack” and “best sallet” – a padded tunic and a helmet – the basic body-armour that higher-ranking members of mid-16th century society were expected to possess.

In 1600, Anne Hill left her “best gown” to her daughter Margaret, her “black cloth gown” to her daughter Marie and her saddle with its furniture to her daughter-in-law Katherine. Her daughter Dorothy received “a petticoat cloth”, probably the “one piece of white cloth for a petticoat” listed in the inventory.

Apart from clothes, the most common bequest in the wills was livestock: all three members of the Hill family left cows or sheep - sometimes specific ones - to relations and servants. In 1600, for instance, Anne Hill left a heifer calf to a grandson, “the bull calf” to a godson, “the red heifer” to a daughter and a yearling lamb to each servant.

The 16th century farm at Fordhall

Fordhall farm was probably similar in size – around 150 acres or 60 hectares - to the present farm. This made it one of the largest farms in the parish of Moreton Say at the time – certainly larger than any of the farms at Longford. The Hills may have farmed additional land at times – in Longford or around Market Drayton, also possibly outlying pastures around Newstreet Lane in the north of Moreton Say parish. The inventory taken after Roger Hill’s death in 1563 certainly lists more farming equipment than was needed for just one farm the size of Fordhall.

In the 16th century, nearly all farms were “mixed” farms, and Fordhall was no exception. Various crops were grown – in north Shropshire usually rye, barley and oats - and cattle, sheep, pigs and poultry were all kept. This enabled larger farms to be self-sufficient, producing all their own bread, beer, meat, milk and cheese.

By this time, farms were also beginning to specialize in producing products to sell in the market – often the products most suited to local soils. In this part of north Shropshire, some larger farms started to specialize in dairy products – particularly cheese – because that suited local conditions best but Fordhall was on lighter soil than many of its neighbours and instead chose to specialize in growing crops to sell on the local markets, probably mostly at Drayton. The inventories suggest that these crops were mainly rye, to make the bread eaten by most people except the well-off, and barley, to make the beer drunk by everyone in the 16th century. Fordhall farm had a kiln in order to roast barley as part of the malting process to make beer.

The way in which probate inventories described crops depended on the time of year, on the point in the farming year when the farmer died. (In the following sections, all spelling has been modernised.)

In July 1563, Roger Hill’s inventory listed the “corn growing on the ground” – in the fields – as:
rye, worth £3 6s 8d;
barley, worth £1;
oats, worth 6s 8d.

In 16th century Shropshire, ploughing was usually done using oxen to draw the plough; horse-drawn ploughs only began to become common in the next century. Roger Hill’s inventory records as many as three yokes of oxen, the main one consisting of six oxen, when most farms managed with just one yoke of four oxen.

In September 1598, just after harvest, James Hill's inventory listed:

- 50 sheaves of rye, worth £16;
- 20 sheaves of barley, worth £1 6s 8d;
- 5 loads of hay, worth £1 13s 4d.

James Hill had just one yoke of four oxen to plough the farm, with “wains, ploughs, yokes, chains and other implements of husbandry” and 5s worth of “dung or muck” waiting to be spread on the land as fertilizer. He also had a hand-mill to grind small amounts of grain. The hand-mill was one of the valuable pieces of farming equipment that James Hill specifically left in his will to his cousin, also called James Hill, who was taking over the farm after his death, along with a haircloth (used as a sieve in the brewing process) and other brewing equipment in the “kiln house”, which contained the kiln used to roast the barley for brewing. He also left careful instructions in his will for the disposal among the family of two carts – important equipment for an arable farmer – “my cart bound with iron and one other cart not bound with iron”.

In February 1600, late in the winter, Anne Hill's inventory listed:

- 8 strike of barley and “other eight strike in the making”, i.e., in the course of being ground, kept in the main room in the house together with some oats, all worth £1 6s 8d together [a strike was a measure probably equivalent here to a bushel];
- rye and hay in the barn, worth £1 6s 8d;
- rye “upon the ground” – rye sown in the fields in the autumn – worth £1 10s.

Anne Hill's inventory goes into greater detail than the others on household and farming equipment, listing “husbandry tools, ploughs, harrows, yokes, chains, axle-trees, one iron wedge, one framing saw, one hand saw and other husbandry stuff”. Specific equipment for brewing was listed as “a brewing compe [tub], one trough and two little tables”.

The amount and type of livestock recorded in inventories also depended on the time of year that the inventory was made.

In July 1563, Roger Hill's livestock – in addition to the oxen for ploughing - were listed as:

- 8 kine [full-grown cows] and a bull, worth £6 5s;
- 3 heifers of two years, worth £2 11s;
- 3 yearling calves, worth £1 8s 4d;
- 7 weaning calves, worth £1 10s;
- 52 sheep, worth £6 10s;
- 8 big swine, worth £1;
- 6 geese, worth 2s 6d.

By the standards of the time and the area, a flock of 52 sheep was a large one. It was quite likely that they were being grazed off the farm, at least part of the time. Since Roger Hill rented land in Drayton, he would have the right to graze sheep on the open common land of Little Drayton Heath, which was less than a mile from the farm. He would also have had grazing rights in the summer on the unenclosed wetland at Smythemoor, shared between Longford, Bletchley and Moreton Say.

In September 1598, James Hill's livestock were listed as:

- 6 kine [full-grown cows], worth £13;
- 6 two-year old beasts [heifers], worth £7;
- 2 calves, worth £1;
- 11 sheep, worth £2 6s 8d;
- 14 swine, worth £3 6s 8d;
- poultry, worth 3s;
- 1 mare and 2 colts, worth £4;
- 1 little nag [horse], worth £2.

James Hill had a much smaller flock of sheep than Roger Hill but a similarly-sized dairy herd. Much of the milk, butter and cheese produced by the herd would have been consumed within the household since cheeses being kept to sell are not mentioned in the inventories, although some butter and cheese may have been sold at Market Drayton. Anne Hill's inventory has a detailed list of dairying equipment: "a churn, one butter basin, one milk pail, a half strike [for measuring], one hoop measure, one little stand, one basket, sieves, one knead trough & one little board". Her inventory ends with 3 flitches of bacon, worth 6s 8d, a reminder of the use to which some of the swine were put in the winter.

The house at Fordhall in the 16th century

Unfortunately, none of the Fordhall inventories completely lists the rooms in the house, as do many other 16th century inventories. However, the inventory of Anne Hill's possessions at her death in 1600 does mention the "house", which was the same as the mediaeval hall (the main room where the whole household ate), the parlour, which was the main living and sleeping room of the head of the household - it had two beds in it - and the buttery, where food was stored and served.

This list of the main ground-floor rooms is consistent with the 1672 Hearth Tax, which records three hearths in the house at Fordhall - one each for the hall, parlour and kitchen? - and may well describe the main rooms in the half-timbered building incorporated in the present farm-house. In the 17th century, most local houses had only one or two hearths, so three mark out Fordhall as among the larger farmhouses at the time.

A house this size would have accommodated quite a large household. James and Anne Hill had six surviving children when they died and several servants would have lived in the house as well, working on the farm as well as around the house. James Hill mentions four servants by name in his will in 1598, leaving a sheep each to Joan Bulkeley, Anne Poole, Richard Warren and Thomas Dowler.

The most important furnishings of the house in the eyes of the family were listed by Roger and James Hill their wills. In 1563, Roger left to James, his son and heir, "one great pan and a great pot, a broche [a portable spit for roasting meat] and my best bed with all things belonging to the same, and two great coffers, the one standing at my bedside empty and the other is bound with iron, bonds and evidences within, and all bedcases, tables, chairs to remain still at and in the house for heirlooms, as they be at this present, to him and his heirs for ever".

Anne Hill's inventory in 1600 gives the fullest list of the other contents of the house. To go on the best bedsteads there were "two feather beds, two bolsters, one pillow, three coverlets and three blankets". For other beds there were "two flock beds, two bolsters, two twill sheets". Household linen was listed as "eight pairs of hemp and flaxen sheets, ten napkins, two towels, four table cloths, a diaper cupboard cloth and one pillow beer [case]".

In 1598 the house was also furnished with painted cloths [to hang on the wall, like tapestries], carpets [used at the time as decorative covers for tables], curtains and cushions. Other furnishings were listed as "tables, forms, chairs, cupboards and presses [the equivalent of wardrobes]". Tables in 1600 were furnished with "eight pieces of pewter, one pewter can, one salt [cellar], four pottage dishes, three saucers and one candlestick". The half a dozen or so silver spoons that appear in all three inventories were probably more in the way of heirlooms than for everyday use. In the kitchen in 1600, Anne Hill had "two little pots, one dripping pan, one pair of cobbards [stands to hold a spit], one kettle, one spit, one frying pan, a little pair of lawn irons [for ironing fabric]".

Sources

The main sources for the Hill family are the wills and inventories at Lichfield Record Office (Ref B/C/11), Roger Hyll (1563); James Hill (1598/9); Anne Hill (1600). The families of Roger and James Hill are recorded on page 246 of George Grazebrook & John Paul Rylands (eds.), The Visitation of Shropshire ... 1623, (1889), Volume 1.

Tax records: 1525 subsidy – M.A.Faraday (ed.), The Lay Subsidy for Shropshire, 1524-7 (1999); 1544/5 subsidies – PRO E179/166/157 & 167; 1594 subsidy – PRO E179/167/87; 1599 subsidy – PRO E179/167/116.

The Hills were prominent jurors on Drayton manor court around 1560, see N.Rowley, Drayton Court Leet: Introduction to the bye-laws, 1545-1727 (1982). The 1547 reference to Roger Hill of Ford House is in F.R.Twemlow, The Manor of Tyrley (1948), p.119; Twemlow thought that the Hills held property in Tyrley but that is not completely certain. In 1541/2, a Roger Hill was renting land in Woodlands (Newstreet Lane) from the Corbets (SA 2919/1/65).

FORDHALL IN THE 17th CENTURY

When James Hill died in 1598, the ownership of Fordhall passed to his “cosen and heire apparent”, also called James Hill, although his widow, Anne, continued to live and farm at Fordhall until her death in 1600. At this time, “cousin” was a general term for a relative and the relationship between the two James Hills is not certain. James Hill, the heir, came from a Hill family that owned the neighbouring farm at Ternhill and must have been related to the Fordhall family. It is possible that James was the great-nephew of the elderly James Hill, grandson of James’s brother Philip - a Philip Hill was living at Ternhill in the 1560s - and son of the Roger Hill who farmed at Ternhill from 1598.

James Hill the younger was apparently succeeded at Fordhall by his brother William. William Hill succeeded his father, Roger, at Ternhill when he died in 1634 and Fordhall passed to William’s daughter, Anne, and her husband, Thomas Lochard (they had married in 1622). The Lochards were the major land-owning family at Wollerton, two miles down the road in Hodnet parish, and the fortunes of Fordhall were linked with those of the Wollerton estate for the rest of the century.

Anne Lochard lived until 1679 and Thomas until 1684. They seem to have lived at Fordhall in the earlier part of their married life but, in the early 1660s, their daughter, Anne, and her husband, John Dodd, were tenants there. The Dodds headed the 1661 Poll Tax return for Longford township, with their three servants: Thomas Stirrop, Elizabeth Boulton and Mary Jones. By the early 1670s, however, the Dodds had moved to live at Longford Old Hall, also owned by the Lochards in this period, where Anne Dodd lived until her death in 1694. Between 1683 and 1692, Fordhall was occupied by a tenant farmer, Thomas Eaton.

Tax records from the 1670s give some idea of the local status of the farm. In the 1672 Hearth Tax return, Mr Thomas Lochard headed the list of payments for Longford township. He paid tax on three hearths; there were only two other houses with three hearths in the township, six with two hearths and twelve with one hearth (excluding some poor households that did not pay tax). The earliest surviving Church Lewn (church rate) schedule for Moreton Say parish, from 1674, again has Thomas Lochard, gent., at the top of the list for Longford. His lewn payment was by far the largest in the township and only exceeded in the whole parish by the payments for the two big houses and their home farms at Moreton Hall and Styche Hall. The amount of lewn paid indicates that the property covered around 160 acres at the time.

There appears to have been a dispute in this period as to Fordhall’s place in the local government system, possibly as to whether it lay in the parish of Hodnet or Moreton Say for administrative purposes. In 1661, John Dodd was discharged from serving as constable for Longford township. In 1663, “by the consent of the inhabitants of Longford and Mr Thomas Lochard”, it was ordered by the Shropshire Quarter Sessions that “the farm of Fourde in Longford and the other tenement of Mr Lochard’s do serve their turns for the office of Constable severally or together, as the homage shall present, and pay their taxes with Longford.”

When Thomas Lochard, senior, died in 1684, he left most of his estate, including Fordhall, to a younger son, Thomas, bypassing his eldest son, William, “by reason of his extravagancy”; “he being a person of weak understanding was thought by his father incapable of managing the whole estate”. However, when Thomas, who died in April 1687, made his will he decided the estate should pass to William after all. William Lochard died two months after his brother and left much of the estate away from his

family, to David Atkins, curate at Hodnet – who received Fordhall - and Atkins' son-in-law Thomas Burrowes. According to the deprived members of the Lochard family, William “was in the time of his sickness by direct means wrought upon to alien the said estate ... from all his relations, to ... meer strangers and of no kin or alliance to any of his family”.

Members of the Lochard family, led by two of William's sisters, Mrs Magdalen Johnson and Mrs Anne Dodd of Longford, fought the will all the way to the House of Lords. After various conflicting court decisions, the will was eventually upheld and Fordhall remained in the possession of the Atkins family. It was, at times, a bitter dispute. In 1690, a court order of the House of Lords was served on Mrs Elizabeth Atkins at “her dwelling house at Fordehall” by “shewing her ye originall through a glasse window & leaving a copy thereof in the porch ... she refuseing to open the doore or to receive it in her hands”. Mrs Anne Dodd – in the presence of several people - then demanded possession of the house “of the said Mrs Atkins who did then refuse to open the doore or to deliver possession thereof to the said Mrs Dodd”.

David Atkins had died in 1688 and his widow, Elizabeth, and three daughters, Penelope, Elizabeth and Susanna, lived at Fordhall in the 1690s. Penelope married Thomas Whittingham in 1694 and Elizabeth married Samuel Dicken in 1698. Susanna did not marry and died in 1702. By 1707, ownership of Fordhall was shared by the two surviving sisters and their husbands, and Thomas and Penelope Whittingham lived there around 1703-07. They were followed by two tenant farmers, Samuel Platt (1708-12) and Thomas Woollams (1713-17). Thomas Whittingham died in 1718 and ownership eventually passed entirely to Samuel Dicken and Elizabeth, who were recorded as living at Fordhall from around 1718.

Sources

Ann, daughter of William Hill of Fordhouse, married Thomas Lochard – SA 6001/4360 and Hodnet Parish Register (printed by Shropshire Parish Register Society, 1910). Will of William Hill - Lichfield Record Office (Ref B/C/11), 1651 (probate 1665). Hills of Tern Hill – SA 189/1; SA 731/2/3657; SA 6000/1119-20.

Tax records: 1642 subsidy – PRO E179/167/207; 1661 poll tax – PRO E179/255/21; 1665 subsidy – PRO E179/255/26; 1672 hearth tax – W.Watkins-Pitchford (ed.), The Shropshire Hearth-Tax Roll of 1672 (1949). 1661-3 dispute – Shropshire County Council, Abstract of Orders of Shropshire Quarter Sessions, Vol.1.

Dodds - A document of 1710 refers to a deed of 1665 involving John Dodd of Fordhall (SA 327/2/4/2/212). Will of Anne Dodd - Lichfield Record Office (Ref B/C/11), 1694.

Moreton Say Churchwardens' Accounts (including parish lewns for 1674 and 1692) - SA 4257/ChW/1 – for references to residents at Fordhall; also Moreton Say Parish Register (printed by Shropshire Parish Register Society, 1907). Hodnet chief rent – SA 731/Box 117 and SA 112/2799-2815.

Lochard wills – Thomas Lochard, 1683/4, Lichfield Record Office (Ref B/C/11); Thomas Lochard, 1687, PRO Prob/11/389; William Lochard, 1687, Lichfield Record Office (Ref B/C/11).

A printed summary of The Case of Anne Dodd, etc. is at SA 327/4/9. The case can be followed in volumes 14 & 15 of the House of Lords Journal (available online through www.british-history.ac.uk). Documents in the House of Lords case are at Dod v Burrows, HL/PO/JO/10/1/418/192. There are very few specific references to Fordhall in the documentation. See also SA 6000/5091 for 1692 reference to Thomas Eaton as tenant.

The 1707 mortgage is at SA/6000/5335. There is information on Thomas Whittingham (including date of death) in Cheshire Archives (CA/DDX 109/1-4).

FORDHALL IN THE 18th CENTURY

Documents from the first half of the 18th century give some glimpses of the farm and house at Fordhall in this period. The most important is the marriage settlement drawn up when Samuel Dicken, junior, married Elizabeth Fernihaugh in 1725. Samuel was the son of Samuel Dicken, the owner of Fordhall from around 1718 to his death in 1738. Both father and son also had houses in Market Drayton, where they were in the tanning trade and had other business interests, becoming wealthy enough to be called “gentleman” in later life.

The main purposes of the 1725 marriage settlement were to secure Elizabeth’s rights should she be left a widow and also to make clear what should happen to the property if Samuel (junior) died without surviving children. In the course of setting out the agreement, the document described Fordhall and the other property of Samuel Dicken involved in the settlement as: 3 messuages, 2 barns, 4 gardens, 2 orchards, 80 acres land, 40 acres meadow, 40 acres pasture, 10 acres furze & heath, 10 acres moor. [Two of the messuages (houses with outbuildings), two of the gardens and probably one of the barns were all in Drayton.]

The description of the 180 acres of land is a rounded summary for legal purposes - the actual area was approximately 160 acres - but it may represent the general distribution of different types of land at Fordhall reasonably accurately: around 45% arable, 22% meadow, 22% pasture, 5% furze & heath and 5% moor. This is close to the distribution of land in the mid-19th century, when it was 50% arable, 16% meadow and 31% pasture. The figures suggest little change in the land-use at Fordhall between the early 18th century and the mid-19th century. It was a typical mixed farm of the time, with a rough balance in its land-use between growing crops and animal husbandry, the main use of the fields being determined by the underlying nature of the soil and its drainage.

In 1725, the fields at Fordhall were listed as:

The Bigger Shaw	The Gorsty Field
The Lesser Shaw	Gollins Field
The Barn Field	The Bigger Calves Croft
The Crossway	The Lesser Calves Croft
The Further Moor	The Castle Hill
The Big Meadow	The Old Orchard
The Little Meadow	The Nearer Moor
The Shaw Meadow	The Higher Meadow, alias Gollins Meadow
The New Orchard adjoining the Big Meadow	The Castle Hill Meadow

The fields in the right-hand column were first listed in 1707, so the names here go back to at least the beginning of the 18th century.

Many of these field-names had changed by the 19th century but it is possible to learn something of Fordhall’s history from them, as well as gain some indications of farming practices. The “Shaw” names recall the woodland to the west of the farm in the Middle Ages – the name comes from the Anglo-Saxon for a copse. The Crossway was probably near where the roads to Longford and Drayton crossed. Gollins was the name of a prominent local farming family, who were tenants of the Lochards in Longford in the 17th century and probably rented this land from them as well. Castle Hill shows that the castle was remembered in the early 18th century.

The Gorsty Field was one of the fields to the east of the farm, on sandy, naturally infertile, soil; it was less than a mile from the edge of Little Drayton Heath, which remained uncultivated common land until 1840. The Calves Crofts are a reminder that cattle-rearing – perhaps linked to the tanning trade – was an important element in the 18th century farm economy, as were the two Orchards in providing for the farm table. The two Moors – rough wetland - suggest that part of the land along the river had never been properly drained and transformed into meadow.

The marriage settlement described the part of the house that Elizabeth was to have as a widow: “... the little parlour towards the west end of the said Fordhall house and the store cupboard adjoining to it and the room or chamber over the cellar to live in during her life, and free liberty of ingress egress and regress into out of and from the same, liberty to brew and bake for her use in the brewhouse and bakehouse and oven there and to have and take water there for her use, and liberty to the little house or house of easement there, and also to have and enjoy the garden there on the north side of the said house leading from the hall door there to the north of the said garden and to the way there leading to the said house at the west.” In 1707, half of the house consisted of the kitchen, the hall, the buttery adjoining the kitchen and all the rooms in chambers and garrets over the hall, kitchen and buttery.

Unfortunately, no probate inventory survives for this period but Samuel Dicken’s will of 1738 does give some glimpses of life in the house at Fordhall: “And I give devise and bequeath to my said daughter Mary the bed and bedsteads she usually lyes on with the blankets to the same; the bed and bedsteads in the room over the buttery with the blankets to the same together with two pairs of sheets to each bed; I also give unto my daughter Mary one chest of drawers standing in the best room and one chest in the room I lye in together with six pewter dishes marked :MD: and one dozen of pewter plates with the same marke.” MD probably stands for Market Drayton and indicates pewter usually kept at the family’s Drayton house.

Together, these details can be used to draw up a possible plan of the house at this time, with the old hall in the centre, the best room or parlour and kitchen and buttery to its north and the little parlour and store to its south (called west in 1725), with access to a room over the cellar. Outside the house, as well as the brewhouse and bakehouse, farm buildings in this period included a malt-house with kiln, a large barn, a stable, a cow-house and more than one sheep-cote (shelter). The malt-house and kiln show that, as in the 16th century, growing and malting barley for the commercial brewing of beer had a significant role on the farm at Fordhall.

Samuel Dicken, senior, died at Fordhall in 1738; his wife, Elizabeth (nee Atkins), had died ten years before. After his father’s death, Samuel Dicken, junior, continued to live at Drayton and Fordhall was worked by tenant farmers, by Benjamin Barnett in the 1740s and by John Garratt for about thirty years from the early 1750s.

Samuel Dicken, junior, died in 1766; his wife, Elizabeth (nee Fernihaugh), had died in 1753. They did not have any surviving children and Fordhall passed to his niece, Elizabeth, son of his brother, Thomas, and to her husband, William Grinsell, another Drayton tanner and businessman.

In 1765, when he was 64, Samuel Dicken had married again, to Damaris Challenor, a widow of 38 from Stoke on Tern. She owned a considerable amount of property and another marriage settlement had been drawn up. Samuel also needed to change his will, made in 1764, but – after eleven months of marriage – he died suddenly over the weekend before he was due to sign the new will. Samuel Dicken's death in 1766 threw the affairs of his widow, Damaris, and of his heirs at Fordhall - William and Elizabeth Grinsell - into confusion and conflict. Damaris claimed Fordhall under the conditions of the 1725 marriage settlement but the Grinsells took over property elsewhere which had belonged to Damaris before her marriage and which she continued to claim as her own, contrary to the provisions of the new marriage settlement. The dispute ended up in court where judgement was given against Damaris and her new husband, the Revd. St John Haynes, Rector of Stoke on Tern.

The dispute was eventually settled, as far as Fordhall was concerned, when Damaris Haynes handed the farm over to the Grinsells in 1774. In this period, the Grinsell family seem to have lived mainly in Drayton, with Fordhall let to tenant farmers in the 1770s and 1780s, although the Grinsells may have lived there at times and taken some part in parish affairs – William Grinsell was churchwarden at Moreton Say in 1796. In the late 1790s and the 1800s the house and probably some of the land was let to a local clergyman, the Revd. William Judgson; around 1812-1822, the house and some 20 acres were let to the Revd. Robert Crockett. The house at Fordhall seems to have had an attraction for local clergy in this period. In 1822, the fiancée of the curate of MS wrote: "... and if we can get Fordhall to live at, we shall do pretty well." In 1823-1824, the house was let to a Miss Sinclair.

William Grinsell was in financial difficulties by the early 19th century and he sold Fordhall to William Tayleur of Buntingsdale Hall in 1808. However, he then rented the farm back from the Buntingsdale estate until his death in 1811, when he was described as of Wem and Fordhall. His son, William, succeeded to the farm tenancy and still held it in 1820, when he owed rent to the estate. The farm may have become somewhat run down in this period. Certainly, Joseph Sillitoe, the tenant who succeeded William Grinsell, received a rent allowance in 1826 "towards expenses of new building for support for the old building".

Sources

Moreton Say Churchwardens' Accounts (including parish lewys) - SA 4257/ChW/1 – for references to residents at Fordhall; also Moreton Say Parish Register (printed by Shropshire Parish Register Society, 1907); 1789 Moreton Say Poor Rate Assessment Survey - SA 4257/ChW/2.

The 1707 mortgage is at SA 6000/5335. The 1725 marriage settlement is at SA 6000/4261. The will of Samuel Dicken senior (1739) is at Lichfield Record Office (B/C/11) and a copy of that of Samuel Dicken junior (1764) is at SA P210/J/2/6.

The main document (from 1770) describing the Damaris Haynes dispute is at SA 5168/1/2.

There is information on the Grinsells in F.R.Twemlow, The Manor of Tyrley (1948), p.268. 1820 rent for Fordhall, see SA Tayleur Docs Box 6259.

Revd. William Judgson - address given as Fordhall in 1798 and up to 1807 (SA 327/5/3/1/152 & 327/2/2/27/8). Revd. Robert Crockett - notice of death of wife (1812) in European Magazine, p.72; held around 20 acres as tenant of Tayleur in 1822 Land Tax Assessment (SA 6000/1883). 1822 reference - R.H.Cholmondeley, The Heber Letters, 1783-1832 (1950), p.295. Miss Sinclair & Joseph Sillitoe arrival – Tayleur rental 1823-7 (SA 6001/6854).

Sale of Fordhall, 1808 – SA 6000/4288; abstract of title, 1725-1807 – SA 6000/4294.

FORDHALL FROM 1820 TO 1870

In the early 1820s, Joseph Sillitoe became the Buntingsdale estate tenant at Fordhall. He was then aged around 45. He remained tenant at Fordhall for some 45 years, dying in 1866 at the age of 91. In 1823, he paid an annual rent of £270 for the farm; he was still paying the same rent in 1856. A good idea of the farm while Joseph Sillitoe was tenant can be obtained from various official documents, particularly the detailed census returns available from 1841 onward and the Tithe Apportionment Survey of 1840, as well as from an estate survey of 1857. By this time, with its 159 acres, Fordhall farm was an average-sized farm for the area. It had remained the same size throughout the 18th century while, around it, many smaller farms had been amalgamated, taking the average size of farms in Moreton Say parish from less than 100 acres in 1700 to around 150 acres in 1800.

As well as providing the first detailed map of the farm, the tithe survey of 1840 tells us about land-use in broad terms, listing each field as arable, pasture or meadow. Of the 159 acres at Fordhall (65 hectares), 79 acres were described as arable, 50 acres pasture, 26 acres meadow and 2 acres rough. The farm had 50% of its land arable, 31% pasture and 16% meadow. The 47% grassland at Fordhall in 1840 was a typical proportion for Shropshire as a whole at the time but, locally, Fordhall's proportion of grassland was greater than the 40% on the farms around the hamlets of Longford, Bletchley and Moreton Say. The proportion of grassland was 53% on the dairy farms in the northern part of the parish, around Styche and Newstreet Lane. Altogether, the figures for land-use suggest that Fordhall was a typical North Shropshire dairy farm of the time, with perhaps a little more arable land than some.

The fields in Fordhall Farm were described in the 1857 Buntingsdale Estate survey as:

Field	Use	Area (acres, rods, perches)	Comments
Far Shay	Arable	08.1.25	
Big Shay	Arable	10.2.30	
Middle Shay	Arable	10.3.05	Part wants draining
Pool & Rough		00.2.30	
Near Shay	Arable	06.2.39	
Stackyard Field	Arable	07.2.28	
Ford Hall Farm		02.1.22	
Stackyard Field	Arable	15.3.25	
Drayton Field	Arable	12.2.30	
Meadow	Meadow	05.2.18	
Big Field	Pasture	17.1.23	
Meadow	Meadow	01.2.10	Wants draining
Rough		01.3.21	
Castle Hill	Arable	08.0.26	
Castle Hill Meadow	Meadow	09.0.26	
Broad Meadow	Pasture	02.0.39	Wants draining & levelling
Broad Meadow	Pasture	10.3.06	
Calves Croft	Meadow	02.0.23	
The Bank	Pasture	04.0.03	Wants draining and in bad condition
Rough Piece	Pasture	03.1.26	Wants draining and in bad condition
Worralls Meadow	Meadow	07.0.21	
Pool Croft	Pasture	04.3.24	
Swinchatts Meadow	Pasture	06.3.32	Wants draining
Far Shay	Arable	08.1.25	Wants draining

The 1857 estate survey showed an almost unchanged pattern of land-use from 1840. It is interesting that around a fifth of the area of the farm at this date was in need of improved drainage; some of the fields mentioned here were low-lying, close to the river, but others were in much higher parts of the farm, to the west where the land was heaviest. The mid-19th century field names were substantially different from those of the early 18th century (and mostly differ again from those used today). “Shay” was a version of “Shaw”, the name used in the 18th century for fields in the north-west part of the farm. Swinchatt was the name of the neighbouring farmers at Ternhill in the 18th century who may have rented some Fordhall land. Worrall was the name of the family that owned the neighbouring Paynes Meadow in the 16th century.

The census tells us a great deal about the staffing of the farm. Like many other farms in this area in the first half of the 19th century, Fordhall was still mainly run by “indoor” servants living in the farmhouse. This was obviously a great benefit to the working of a farm which had large numbers of animals to be looked after right through the day, although local custom and also the relative costs of outdoor versus indoor labour played their part in the survival of traditional living-in arrangements that had disappeared elsewhere in England, particularly in the south and east.

A farm like this needed to be run by both a farmer and his wife, who took charge of the dairying side of the business. Joseph Sillitoe was unmarried but relied on relatives to provide the female side of the management. One unmarried sister, Mary, was living at the farm in 1841 and 1851 (she died at Fordhall in 1856) and a widowed sister, Elizabeth Topham, in 1861. In 1861, the elderly Joseph also had his nephew, Benjamin Sillitoe, living at Fordhall as his “assistant”.

In 1841 and 1851, there were four male living-in servants at Fordhall and three in 1861. Most indoor servants were typically young and unmarried, the ages of the men at Fordhall ranging from 12 to 27 in the 1851 and 1861 censuses, but the farm also had one older living-in male servant on its staff at all three censuses: Robert Plowman in 1841 and 1851 (aged 75) and the widowed Thomas Lloyd (aged 66) in 1861. Plowman was described vaguely as an agricultural labourer but Lloyd was a carter. It is likely that the main job of both men was to look after and work the farm’s horses. Then, in both 1851 and 1861, the farm also had a cowman in his twenties living in the farmhouse and another general farm-worker of similar age. The male indoor staff was completed by a farm-boy or carter’s boy – typically a younger teenager learning the trade and acting as a general dogsbody on the farm and in the house.

At this time, a farm the size of Fordhall also employed outdoor staff, particularly for seasonal work. They were usually older family men, living in nearby villages such as Longford or in the many small cottages at Little Drayton. The 1861 census records a regular out-door staff of two at Fordhall, giving the farm an overall male staff of five or six in the mid 19th century, although this would be supplemented at harvest and hay-making times by casual labour.

On the female side, Fordhall employed three living-in servants in this period, all aged between 18 and 27 in 1851 and 1861. The 1861 census details their roles as house-maid, dairy-maid and [dairy] vessel cleaner. The two full-time dairy workers, managed by Joseph Sillitoe’s sister, would have processed the milk, butter and cheese from perhaps a dozen milking cows.

Sources

Joseph Sillitoe, tenant - Tayleur rental 1823-7 - SA 6001/6854; 1856 – SA 6001/6853.

Tithe Apportionment Survey 1840 – Shropshire Archives. A Field Name map, based on the 1838 map attached to the survey, is available from Shropshire Archives.

1857 Survey of the Estate of William Tayleur Esq. – SA 6001/2514.

Censuses:

1841 – HO 107/900/2; Moreton Say District 9

1851 – HO 107/1996; Moreton Say District 1b

1861 – RG 9/1892 Moreton Say District 2

FORDHALL FROM 1870 TO 1914: FAMILY AND FARM

The Clutton family

After Joseph Sillitoe's death in 1866, there was a succession of relatively short-term tenant farmers at Fordhall until Mary Grocott - the ancestor of the Hollins family - took over the farm, probably in the autumn of 1880, and married John Clutton the next year. When Mary Helen Grocott took over the tenancy of Fordhall, she was a widow aged 36, with two daughters aged ten and seven. She had previously farmed in Cheshire, at Moorsbarrow Hall, near Middlewich, where Stephen Grocott, her husband – whom she had married in 1869 – had died in 1874 at the age of 30.

In moving to north Shropshire, Mary Grocott was returning home. She had been born at Hodnet in 1844, where her father - Robert Cartwright - was a butcher, living in Drayton Street in 1841, and where her mother, Martha, had been born in 1805, daughter of Joshua Hughes, the parish clerk, and his wife Sarah.

Mary's father, Robert Cartwright, died at the age of 46 in 1848 and, by 1851, her widowed mother, Martha, was the tenant of the 120-acre Royal Oak Farm at Bletchley. For most of her childhood, therefore, Mary lived about two miles from Fordhall. Royal Oak Farm remained in Mary's family into the 20th century. When she moved to Fordhall in 1880, her mother had been dead for a year and the Bletchley farm was in the hands of her older brother, John. By that time, too, her younger brother, Robert, had become tenant of a 140-acre farm at Longford, a mile from Fordhall.

Mary's brother, John Cartwright of Bletchley, had married Jane Clutton in 1877. Jane was the daughter of William and Mary Clutton, who had held a 100 acre farm at Moreton Wood, a mile or two north of Bletchley, since the 1850s; they had previously farmed at Ash Magna, towards Whitchurch. William Clutton had died in 1868 but his widow, Mary, continued to farm at Moreton Wood with her two sons, William and John. It was this John Clutton, her brother-in-law, whom Mary Grocott married in 1881.

When John and Mary Clutton set up housekeeping at Fordhall late in 1881, they were therefore both members of closely-knit families which played a major part in farming and parish activities in Moreton Say, with three close members of their families farming within two or three miles. Their own family already contained Mary's two daughters, Agnes Mary and Elizabeth Helen, and two more daughters were born at Fordhall, Edith in 1883 and Lillian in 1884. Agnes died at the age of 16 in 1886 but Elizabeth continued to live and work at Fordhall until she married Thomas Ravenshaw in 1911. Lillian married Alfred Hollins in 1914.

Mary Clutton died in 1909 at the age of 65 and John in 1913 at the age of 71. They are both buried in the old churchyard at Moreton Say.

Farming at Fordhall, 1871-1914

At the 1871 census, when John Pickering was tenant, the overall number of men employed on the farm remained – at six - similar to that under Joseph Sillitoe. However, only one – the 39-year-old cowman – now lived in the farmhouse. Two of the other workers and the 15-year-old farm-boy lived in the two cottages recently built near the farm. This change at Fordhall is typical of the change taking place generally in north Shropshire in this period, which was when many local farm-workers' cottages were being built.

There were two female servants living in the house in 1871, one described as a house-maid and the other as a kitchen-maid. This may suggest a reduction in the amount of dairy-work in the house or it may be that the farmer's wife, Alice Pickering, at the age of 21, was doing more of the work herself.

The big change in male farm-staff at Fordhall came after 1871. At the 1881 census, Mary Grocott employed one living-in cowman (aged 18), two outdoor workers - probably two out of the four farm-labourers living at the two Fordhall cottages at the time – and a boy, a total fulltime male staff of four. The 1891 census does not give information on outdoor labourers, but Fordhall had two living in male “general servants”, aged 19 and 22, who were presumably doing most of the work of the farm. Oddly, there were no farm-workers living in the two cottages at the time. There was also one female “general servant” living in the farmhouse in both 1881 and 1891.

Only in 1901 do we reach the situation familiar to us from Arthur Hollins' autobiography. His grandparents, John and Mary Clutton, and their daughters were the only people living in the farmhouse, the female members of the family probably doing all or most of the dairy-work – all the daughters were described as doing dairy-work in the 1911 census. Living in the two farm cottages in 1901 were the farm's two fulltime workers, Richard Evans, the waggoner, mainly looking after the horses, and George Hope, the labourer and stockman, mainly looking after the cows. In 1911, George Hope was still the cowman, while James Chidlow, in the other cottage, was the waggoner.

What had changed in the staffing of the farm since 1871 was not the core staff – the man to look after the horses and the man to look after the cows – but a reduction in more general workers. This was mainly because the area of arable on the farm had decreased, reducing the need for men to plough and weed the growing crops. And the farm-boy had gone missing!

The farm at the beginning of the 20th century was well-described by Arthur Hollins. “Just before the Kaiser's war, Fordhall had been a typical Welsh Marches' mixed dairy farm. Much of the land was in permanent pasture to provide winter hay and summer grazing for a dozen cows, a small flock of sheep, some young stock and the few bullocks which were fattened for beef. The lowland by the river could only be used for grazing and some haymaking in summer, when it had dried out sufficiently to carry the stock.”

“Most of the higher land was also devoted to meadows, but, from time to time, it was ploughed and sown in a rotation of crops – barley (for the cows), oats (for the horses), turnips (for the cows in winter) – in succeeding years, before being sown in grass again. Potatoes grow well in light sandy soils and occasionally a few acres of the highland were planted with this crop.”

“In good seasons, more oats and barley were produced than were required to feed the stock and they were sold to supplement income. The principal earner was the cheese made by my mother in the dairy. Exquisite mellow, tangy, fifty-six pound barrels of Cheshire cheese, when matured at Fordhall, found a good market in the nearby town of Market Drayton. A few breeding sows in the sties thrived on whey and skimmed milk from the dairy.”

Sources

Tenants 1866-1881 – Moreton Say Church Rate book (SA 4257/ChF/1); Slater’s Directory for 1868 and 1880.

Censuses:

1871 – RG 10/2799; Longford District 2

1881 – RG 11/2673; Moreton Say District 2

1891 – RG 12/2127; Moreton Say District 2

1901 – RG 13/2558; Moreton Say District 2

1911 – RG 14PN16271 RG78PN1007 RD354 SD1 ED21

Family history – from family records, census and online genealogical sources.

The quotation from Arthur Hollins is from p.7 of The Farmer, the Plough and the Devil (1984), slightly rearranged.