

North Farm Farmstead, Shropham Road, Great Hockham, Norfolk

A summary of the publicly available documentation by Chris Garrod

Few old maps for Hockham survive, though an estate map from 1830¹ and the inclosure map of 1798² both show buildings in the exact position of North Farm, as does Faden's map, which whilst published in 1797 was surveyed in 1790-1794. There are unfortunately no older publicly available maps.

It is well documented that at inclosure in 1798, Great Hockham was effectively split in two, the southern half being run by the Dover family and the northern half being in the control of Edward Drosier. The key piece of land which shows North Farm and the Barn, is in this case Number 2 and is of 19 acres 3 roods and 6 perches bordered by the 2nd road in the west and 3rd road in the south. At inclosure the Farmstead was in the tenancy of one John Oliver³. Immediately to the north of North Farm is the last house in the village that at inclosure was owned by Mary Ryley Taylor who lived at Breckles Hall. The 2nd road was called Newport Street at inclosure and the 3rd Cokestole Lane⁴. These names had survived for many years. Most descriptions use Newport Street as an aide to explaining where the Farmstead was. The phrase "abut to Newport Street" is commonly used to explain the Farmstead's location. A village survey from 1599⁵ even gives us a name for a tenement called Scrapes, or Sharpes in Newport Street and as this east side had few properties at the time this appears to be a reference to the Farm House at North Farm. What seems to be the same building has a similar name Scrapes in 1476/77⁶.

The Hockham Manor Court books⁷ clearly describe North Farm and its buildings, though the actual name North Farm is of course relatively modern, the Farmstead being usually called by the incumbent tenants name. There are a number of references to a Malthouse in the same complex, which has since disappeared.

Edward Drosier (see inclosure) was the devisee of Benoni Mallett who died in 1783 and the records point to Mallett being the man who invested heavily in Hockham's farming community.

Mallett is proclaimed as "an opulent farmer from Dunton near Fakenham"⁸ who owned a number of Norfolk Estates and in addition was a significant tenant of Thomas Coke of Holkham.

Mallett is described by Arthur Young⁹, in the most famous Norfolk agricultural book of its day, "as one of the leaders of agricultural improvements in Norfolk," a fact backed up in modern times by Susanna Wade Martins¹⁰, a modern expert in the agricultural history of Norfolk. It seems likely that Mallett was a huge influence in Thomas Coke's eventual rise to agricultural fame. Locally Benoni Mallet is attributed to have drained Hockham Mere¹¹ (this large land reclamation shows the lengths he would invest to) and began developing the Hockham Estate for its farming potential. He was a man to whom the phrase "improvement" was highly apt.

We believe that it was Benoni Mallet who brought in the skills to develop the Farmstead and build the shuttered earth Barn that still survives at North Farm.

Mallett bought the Hockham Estate in the 1760's from Philip Kemsey Ryley, a lieutenant in the 42nd foot soldiers, who had inherited it from three generations of Ryley's beginning with Sir Philip Ryley who died in 1733¹². Sir Philip also invested heavily in the estate and built the Queen Anne style hall and park that still exist today shortly after acquiring the estate in 1702.

The available documentation does not prove the date when the North Farm Farmstead was built and had the Barn added to its portfolio, however having been through all the relevant publicly available information, it does build a picture to totally support the dating evidence Dr Longcroft gives in his report. As Dr Longcroft has suggested, dendrochronology may be the only solution to definitively date the Farmstead.

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- ¹ Norfolk Records Office PC 99
 - ² Norfolk Records Office C/Sca 2/157
 - ³ Norfolk Records Office C/Sca 2/157
 - ⁴ A Davison 1991, "Hockham a village which has moved".Norfolk Archaeology Vol XLI page145-161
 - ⁵ Norfolk Records Office NRS 18713 34x6
 - ⁶ Norfolk Records Office MSS 13489 16F6
 - ⁷ Norfolk Records Office TL 143 & TL 146
 - ⁸ Bryant's Norfolk Churches, Shropham Hundred, 1913, Hockham, page 221-235
 - ⁹ Arthur Young, General View Of The Agriculture Of The County Of Norfolk. 1804. Page 32
 - ¹⁰ Susanna Wade Martins 2002, Norfolk Origins 8. Changing Agriculture in Georgian and Victorian Norfolk, Poppyland Publishing.
 - ¹¹ J Mosby 1935, Hockham Mere. Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists Society Transactions Vol XIV Part 1 page 61-67
 - ¹² Norfolk Records Office MC 618/30