LANDOWNERSHIP: WALTON-LE-SOKEN

INTRODUCTION

In the earlier Middle Ages Walton-on-the-Naze or Walton-le-Soken, together with Kirby-le-Soken and Thorpe-le-Soken, formed part of St. Paul’s great estate or soke of the Naze later known as the lordship or liberty of the Sokens or just ‘the Sokens’. The early place name Edulvesness, meaning Eadwulf’s or Ealdwulf’s promontory, must refer to the Naze or Ness at Walton, and possibly commemorates a former landowner who also gave his name to a nearby mere.¹ It is not known with certainty when the soke passed to the Cathedral, as the surviving charter recording the gift of 30 hides at Edulvesness by King Athelstan (924–39) was fabricated at St. Paul’s in the 11th century.² By the late 11th century the estate comprised 27 hides, the reduction apparently resulting from the creation of a new 3-hide manor in Kirby-le-Soken later known as Birch Hall.³

The three sub-divisions of Walton-, Kirby- and Thorpe-le-Soken were recorded in leases from c. 1150 although none was described as a separate unit until 1222. It is clear, however, that Walton contained the primary demesne or ‘inland’ of the estate.⁴ In the earlier Middle Ages there was also a second, smaller, manor at Walton, the endowment of a prebendal stall in the choir of St. Paul’s Cathedral. Robert Losinga, bishop of Hereford (d. 1095), is the first known prebendary. However, that manor had been completely eroded by the sea, probably before the Conquest, giving rise to the name Consumpta per Mare by 1327; its earlier name remains unknown. Later holders of the prebend therefore had no connection with the parish, and thus the principal manor of Walton-le-Soken or Walton Hall encompassed the whole of the modern day parish of Walton.⁵

The principal manor was granted by the Crown to Lord Darcy of Chiche in 1551. It then descended in the families of the barons Darcy of Chiche and earls of Rochford before being sold at the end of the 18th century to pay the 4th earl’s debts. The new owner, Richard Rigby of Mistley Hall, also

¹ VCH Essex, i. 443; The Place-Names of Essex, ed. P. H. Reaney (EPNS, xii, 1935), 354.
³ Above, Kirby-le-Soken, Landownership (Introduction; Birch Hall).
died in debt and his estate was sold in 1801. It changed hands several times in the early 19th century before passing to Benjamin Chapman of Harwich, solicitor, town clerk and local government official of that town. Both Benjamin and his son Edward, who succeeded him to the manorial rights, acted as both stewards and coroners of the Sokens. They controlled the process of customary land enfranchisement made more complex and lucrative by the value of land in close proximity to the resort. Their successors’ profiles were probably lower, so much so that in 1904 Col. R.P. Davis, a retired Indian Army Officer and High Sheriff of Essex, who held former copyhold estates centred on New House Farm, was mistakenly described as lord of the manor.

The dean and chapter leased the estate of the Naze in the Middle Ages, being careful about whom they favoured with leases, typically selecting canons and archdeacons who would not seek to establish hereditary interests. Later lords such as the barons Darcy of Chiche were also non-resident, although it is possible that Richard Rigby of Mistley Hall used the estate for sport and entertainment in the later 18th century. The lands of Walton Hall were alienated from the manor in 1801, but the manor remained one of the most important units of landownership into the earlier 20th century when they were combined with an important copyhold farm called Walton Ashes.

Few other estates in the parish were of much consequence before 1850. However, the later growth of the town and the resort meant that new property holdings probably became significant in scale and value. They may have included those of the Walton developer P.S. Bruff and the local ironfounder and industrialist Robert Warner in the later 19th century, and Col. Davis in the earlier 20th. The Land Co. was recorded as a principal landowner, 1902–14, and The South Coast Property Investments Co. Ltd. in 1933.

Walton-le-Soken manor, later Walton Hall, part of St. Paul’s great estate of the Naze, was first recorded as a separate unit in 1222. In that year the manor, which covered the whole parish,

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7 ‘Essex Portraits: V. Colonel Davis, High Sheriff’, *ER*, xiii (1904), 34; ERO, D/DBm M544.
9 Below, this parish, Social History.
10 Below, this section, Walton-le-Soken manor; Other Estates (Walton Ashes).
11 *Kelly’s Dir. Essex* (1866–33); *VCH Essex, XI, NE Essex Seaside Resorts*. 
had 750 a. in demesne, c. 466 a. of tenanted land, and extensive marshland pastures. In 1297 the
demesne farm comprised 819 a. with unmeasured marshland, but subsequently much productive
land was lost to coastal erosion, with only 360 a. of land and 1000 a. of salt marsh being recorded in
1676. By 1778 the Walton Hall estate comprised 455 a. and Walton Salts 774 a., and slightly less
of each c. 1820 (421 a. plus 750 a. of saltings). However, the tenants’ lands may have suffered
less from erosion since the 13th century, for c. 1900 Walton manor still exercised manorial rights
over 470 a. of land divided between 30 tenements and 28 copyholders. In 1778 and 1840 the
manorial demesne of Walton Hall formed a single block on the Ness, but it had presumably once
stretched further east and perhaps north into areas subsequently claimed by the sea. In the 18th and
19th centuries the tenants’ lands lay south and west of the demesne between the later resorts of
Walton and Frinton, and inland to Kirby.

As at the other Soken manors of Kirby Hall and Thorpe Hall, neither the lords of the manor nor the
new owners of the landed estate after it had been sold were resident. The great distance of the estate
of the Naze from London meant that none of the Soken manors contributed weekly food renders
(firmae) to St. Paul’s Cathedral. Instead, from the mid 12th century the dean and chapter’s estates
there were leased for a cash rent, either as a whole or in parts, sometimes to laymen but more
usually to canons or other clerics such as Richard, Archdeacon of Essex (c. 1150) and Richard of
Newport, Archdeacon of Middlesex (c. 1300). Presumably this was to avoid the dangers of lay
families establishing a hereditary claim on the land. The policy was continued by Lord Darcy of
Chiche in 1581. The lease of the Walton Hall estate was held by the Honeywood family in 1652,
about the same time that they obtained ownership of Kirby Hall.

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12 Domesday of St. Paul’s, 48.
13 Guildhall, MS. 25516; ERO, D/DAc 374. For erosion see above, this parish, Introduction (or volume
Introduction).
14 ERO, D/DF1 E1; D/DHw E7.
15 Ibid. B5109, sale cat.
16 Ibid. D/DF1 E1; ibid. D/CT 383, 383A; above, this parish, Introduction.
17 Domesday of St. Paul’s, ed. Hale, p. xcii; Boyden, ‘A study in the structure of land-holding and administration
18 Domesday of St. Paul’s, ed. Hale, pp. xli–xliii, xcii, xcvi, xcix, 38, 111, 125–6, 129–32; Button, The World of
Alice Horlefrensche, 40–7.
20 ERO, D/DAc 374; above, Kirby-le-Soken, Landownership.
The curia and range of massive farm buildings existed from c. 1150, maintained by the manorial tenants of Walton and Horlock. A substantial manor house was also recorded from the mid 12th to the mid 15th century, with hall, great and small chambers, chapel, and many ancillary buildings. By 1304 it was clearly under threat as the great stable outside the courtyard was being used as a temporary cowhouse because the latter, as well as the byre and another stable, had been swept away by the advancing sea. A new hall had been built by 1458, and the old one converted to a barn, but it remains uncertain whether either were located at the site now known as Walton Hall. The house was presumably occupied by the estate’s lessees, or more probably their officials. It was recorded by Norden in 1594 because it had a strong brick tower as defence against ‘sea robbers’, but otherwise he described it as ‘of no account’, perhaps because of its destruction and rebuilding on a lesser scale. Two surviving 18th- or 19th-century barns on the site apparently include re-used, possibly medieval, timbers. Richard Rigby may have added the ‘The Tower’, an independent domestic residence on the private road to the Hall and overlooking Walton Backwaters, sometime before 1801 (and possibly before 1777). It is a square, three-storey, rendered brick tower and in 1827 was fitted up as a ‘shooting seat’, possibly its original purpose. After falling derelict it was undergoing restoration in 2002.

Descent

Walton Hall, together with Kirby Hall and Thorpe Hall, and the rectories of all three Soken parishes, was exchanged with the crown in 1544 for other estates in Essex, Hertfordshire and Middlesex. In 1551 the whole estate was granted with other lands, including St. Osyth abbey, to Sir Thomas Darcy, who in that year became Lord Darcy of Chiche (d. 1558). The manors descended with the barony of Darcy, Thomas’s son John (d. 1581) being succeeded by his own son Thomas who was created Viscount Colchester in 1621 and Earl Rivers in 1626. As the earl’s only

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21 Ibid. D/DHw E9; M.J. and A.M. Senter, A Study of the Lords of the Manor of Walton-le-Soken (priv. print., Colchester, 2001: copy in ECL, Colch.), 10; White’s Dir. Essex (1848), 477; Kelly’s Dir. Essex (1878–1937); below, this parish, Economic History.

22 Domesday of St. Paul’s, ed. Hale, 48, 130–1; ERO, D/DHw M1.


24 Ibid. MS. 25516, f. 167.

25 Ibid. MS. 25122/1027; Button, The World of Alice Horlefrensche, 52–3, 57.


27 Dept. of Env., Buildings List; below, this parish, Buildings.

28 Essex Map (1777); ERO, D/DHw E9; Dept. of Env., Buildings List; R. Shackle, ‘Walton Hall, Walton on the Naze, Essex’ (unpublished report, 2000); below, this parish, Buildings.

29 L. & P. Hen. VIII, xix (1), p. 495; Morant, Essex, i. 481.

son and heir died during his own lifetime, in 1613 he had granted a reversion of his estates to the husband of his eldest daughter Elizabeth, Sir Thomas Savage (d. 1635) created Viscount Savage in 1626.

As for the manor of Clacton, a complex series of settlements apparently secured the estates for Elizabeth, Countess Rivers, on the death of her father in 1640. She died in debt in 1651 and was succeeded by her son John, Earl Rivers, Viscount Colchester, Viscount Savage, and Lord Darcy of Chiche. John died in debt in 1654 and was succeeded by his son Thomas Savage, the 3rd earl (d. 1694). Sir John Langham who held courts in 1669, and his executors in 1671, were presumably trustees, for Thomas Savage was ultimately succeeded by his son Richard, the 4th earl (d. 1712). He died without male issue and was succeeded by his illegitimate daughter Elizabeth or Bessey who married Frederick Nassau, 3rd earl of Rochford, in 1714. In that year the manor was held by trustees, Robert Harley, 1st earl of Gloucester (d. 1724) and Charles Talbot, Duke and 12th earl of Shrewsbury (d. 1718), and the Nassaus did not enter the estates until an Act of Parliament confirmed Bessey’s succession in 1721. Frederick died in 1738 when his widow held her first court, but later courts until 1745 were held by her second husband, Revd. Phillip Carter. Bessey died in 1746 and was succeeded by her son William Henry Nassau, 4th earl of Rochford (d. 1781).

The 4th earl’s debts caused him to sell the manorial rights, still covering the entire lordship of the Sokens, to Richard Rigby of Mistley Hall near Manningtree in 1775. Rigby was MP for Castle Rising (Norfolk, 1745), Sudbury (Suffolk, 1747), and Tavistock (Devon, 1754–84) and Paymaster General 1768–84. His entire estate in the Sokens, comprising Walton Hall, Thorpe Park, and other lands in Kirby, Thorpe and Walton, comprised about 1900 a. in 1778. He died unmarried and in debt ten years later and was succeeded by his two sisters, Martha Hale (d. by 1799) and Anne Rigby (d. by 1799), and by his nephew Francis Hale who adopted the name Francis Hale Rigby. When Richard Rigby’s will was proved in 1793 the extent of his debts to the crown proved such that the

31 Complete Peerage, iv. 78–9; ERO, T/P 43; ibid. D/DAc 242; D/DR T108; above, this volume, Clacton, Landownership.
34 Walker, ‘The Nassau family’, 77; ERO, D/DHw T14; D/DBm M239, p. 239.
35 ERO, D/DFl E1; ibid. D/DBm M240, pp. 41, 135.
manors had to be sold by F.H. Rigby to Edward Russell Howe in 1801. The rights then changed hands by sale several times over a short period, passing to Charles Pearson in 1804 and to Revd. Thomas Scott, vicar of Little Oakley and Wix, in 1811. Pearson presumably only purchased the lordship to obtain rights of collection of copperas and materials for cement from Walton’s foreshore, rights that he reserved when disposing of the manor. Scott sold the Sokens manors to the Harwich solicitor and local government official Benjamin Chapman who held his first courts in 1826. He died c. 1835 and was succeeded by trustees for Fanny Chapman, probably his widow, his son Edward Chapman, and Richard Read Barnes, steward since 1826 and Borough Treasurer of Harwich. Chapman died before 1851, and Barnes before 1852, leaving Edward Chapman of Harwich (d. c. 1893), a Walton Improvement Commissioner, as sole trustee and lord. He was succeeded by 1894 by Fanny Fisher Chapman, Charlotte Chapman, the Harwich solicitor Richard Saxty Barnes, and George William Jones of Fannington (Suff.), trustees under his will. Fanny Fisher Chapman was apparently dead by 1897 and Charlotte Chapman by the following year.

R.S. Barnes and G.W. Jones sold the manorial rights in 1901, presumably on behalf of the Chapman family, to Henry E. Paine and Richard Brettall of Chertsey (Surr.), solicitors, who appointed Beaumont and Son of Coggeshall as stewards and administrators. Paine remained lord until c. 1918, and by 1921 the manor had passed to Emma Elizabeth Freeman of Chertsey (Surrey) and Clara Freeman of Canterbury (Kent), presumably his relatives and co-heiresses who still held c. 1927. Descent of title over the mid 20th century is unknown, but J.L. Beaumont apparently continued to act for the heirs until the lordship was sold to Leslie Maddock of Mettingham Castle (Suff.) about 1963.

Unlike the lands of Kirby Hall and Thorpe Hall, alienated in the mid 17th century, the Walton Hall demesne was only divorced from the manor on the sale of Richard Rigby’s estates in 1801. It was then purchased either by William Rowley or by Rigby’s lessee John Barnard. It afterwards passed
to Elizabeth Welch of Walton Hall, who was the principal landowner in the parish in 1839.\textsuperscript{47} In 1848 and 1863 the estate apparently belonged to a Miss Powell.\textsuperscript{48} It had passed to Sir John Henry Johnson, J.P., of St. Osyth abbey by 1878, and after his death was held by trustees to his will from c. 1910 to 1926. By 1929 it seems to have been purchased by the former lessee and occupier of the house J.W. Eagle. He continued to farm the Hall estate and Walton Ashes with F.D. Eagle between 1929 and 1937, and was also an important landowner in Kirby-le-Soken from 1917–37.\textsuperscript{49} It had descended to David Eagle in 2002.\textsuperscript{50}

OTHER ESTATES

\textit{New House farm} on the Kirby Road, just west of the resort town, was the home of Col. R.P. Davis, J.P., and a retired Indian Army Officer. He bought New House farm about 1890 but was the grandson of Henry Blanshard, owner of Horsey Island, Kirby-le-Soken, and he inherited the estates of his uncle Richard Blandshard in 1894. By 1912 New House comprised 347 acres, and Davis had more than 300 additional acres in separately let farms in Walton and neighbouring parishes. He played a central role in the political, social and religious life of Walton in the later 19th and earlier 20th centuries, an improvement commissioner he served as a County Councillor for Walton between 1894 and 1904 and as High Sheriff of Essex 1903–4.\textsuperscript{51} After Col. Davis’s death in 1915 New House passed to his brother Charles (d. 1917) whose executors sold it to Sir. J.S. Blyth, Bt. He was recorded as a principal landowner in the parish in 1937 and was succeeded by his son D.F. Blyth who still owned it in 2003.\textsuperscript{52}

\textit{Walton Ashes}, a copyhold farm on the boundary with Kirby-le-Soken, was one of the more important in the district, comprising about 111 a. in 1830.\textsuperscript{53} It was owned by Phillip Bennett in 1768, and in 1839 and 1848 by another Philip (d. 1853).\textsuperscript{54} In 1912, when in comprised 237 acres, it was owned by Col. R.P. Davis of New House farm, who leased it to J.W. Eagle also tenant of Walton Hall. By 1937 it had apparently been combined with F.W. Eagle’s Walton Hall estate, and

\textsuperscript{47} ERO, D/CT 383A.
\textsuperscript{48} \textit{White’s Dir. Essex} (1848), 477; (1863), 516.
\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Kelly’s Dir. Essex} (1910–1937); above, Kirby-le-Soken, Landownership.
\textsuperscript{50} Information from R. Shackle.
\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Kelly’s Dir. Essex} (1926–37); inf. from P.B. Boyden; below, this parish, Economic History.
\textsuperscript{53} ERO, D/CT 383, 383A.
Eagle had moved to The Ashes, a late medieval timber-framed house, that survived on the site in 2003.  

The Impropriate Rectory of Walton descended with the manor of Walton Hall until the disposal of Richard Rigby’s estates. In 1802 it was sold to John Ambrose of Mistley and John Smith, trustees for Rigby’s heir Francis Hale Rigby. In 1801 the tithes of Walton Hall were said to cover 800 a., although the real extent may have been a little less. The lay impropriator in 1839 was the Hope Life Insurance Co., also owners of Landermere Hall manor and quay, Thorpe-le-Soken, but sometime beforehand the tithes on 1,189 a. belonging to the Walton Hall estate had been merged with that freehold.  

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54 Morant, Essex, i. 484; ERO, D/CT 383, 383A; White’s Dir. Essex (1848), 477; above, Great and Little Clacton, Landownership (Clacton Park).
55 Kelly’s Dir. Essex (1937), 549–50; Dept. of Env., Buildings List; below, this parish, Buildings.
56 L. & P. Hen. VIII, xix (1), 495; Cal. Pat. 1550–53, 136–7; Morant, Essex, i. 481; ERO, D/DU 84–5.
57 ERO, B5511, sale cat., p. 4.
58 Ibid. D/CT 383A; above, Thorpe-le-Soken, Landownership (Landermere Hall).