

LANDOWNERSHIP

In 1086 the tenants-in-chief were Hugh d'Avranches (earl of Chester) and Countess Judith. Hugh's holding was 2 carucates, 7 a. of meadow and a mill,¹ and Countess Judith had 6 bovates and 4 acres of meadow.² In the Leicestershire Survey of 1124–9, the two holdings were 5 carucates and one carucate respectively, giving a total of c.720 a.³

The Villiers family were lords of the manor from the 13th century, for five centuries. After the death without issue of Sir William Villiers in 1711, almost the whole parish was owned by Sir Nathan Wright and his descendants until the late 19th century, then successively by Ernest Chaplin and Joseph Grout Williams. The estate was broken up from 1904. It was reunited in stages in the hands of Leicestershire and Rutland County Councils from 1945, and became the Brooksby component of Brooksby Melton College from 2000.

Overlordship

The Estate of the Earl of Chester

Before the Norman Conquest the larger of the two Brooksby manors was one of the appendages of Barrow-on-Soar, held by King Harold.⁴ The geographical arrangement of these appendages in 1086 suggests that they had been split from the pre-Conquest Royal estate of Rothley.⁵ By 1086 they had become part of the honour of Chester.⁶ The earls of Chester and their descendants held their Brooksby estate until 1241, when it was one of many southern manors and estates taken from William de Forz by King Henry III in return for lands elsewhere.⁷ The heir apparent to the throne,

¹ P. Morgan (ed.), *Domesday Book* (1979), 237a 43, 1, p. 648.

² P. Morgan (ed.), *Domesday Book* (1979), 236c 40, 36, p. 647.

³ *VCH Leics*, I, 348.

⁴ P. Morgan (ed.), *Domesday Book* (1979), 237a 43, 1, p. 648.

⁵ P. Liddle and R. Knox, *The Brooksby Archaeological Survey; an Interim Report* (Leicester 1991).

⁶ P. Morgan (ed.), *Domesday Book* (1979), 237a 43, 1, p. 648.

⁷ *ODNB*, s.v. 'Forz [Fortibus] William de, Count of Aumale (b. before 1216, d. 1260)' (accessed 12 Jan 2020).

Edward Plantagenet (later King Edward I) was granted the lordship of the honour and earldom of Chester in 1254.⁸

The Estate of Countess Judith

The smaller estate at Brooksby formed part of Countess Judith's honour of Huntingdon. Her daughter Maud inherited, and the manor eventually passed to Maud's second husband, who became King David I of Scotland.⁹ The inheritors and descendants of Maud and King David included other Scottish kings, including Robert I (Robert the Bruce) who died in 1329. It would then have passed to the English crown with the Bruce share of the honour.¹⁰

Brooksby Manor¹¹

Alexander de Villiers 'of Kinoulton' paid one mark in 1235 for half a knight's fee in Brooksby which he held of the earl of Chester.¹² He was buried in Kinoulton (Notts.),¹³ but his son Sir Richard (d. 1268) is believed to have lived in Brooksby.¹⁴ He went on the Crusades with King Edward I.¹⁵

The Villiers family acquired the lordship of Brooksby manor through marriage of Ceciley de Seis to Alexander de Villiers c.1220.¹⁶ The de Seis family held the manor of the earl of Chester.¹⁷ In 1296, during the lordship of Sir John Villiers (d. 1324), Richard de Seis sold the manor to Gilbert de Hoby. Sir Geoffrey Villiers (d. 1356?), was a Knight of the Shire in Parliament. William Villiers Esq. (d. 1480) was both lord of the manor and rector. After the death without male issue of Anthony Hoby in 1422

⁸ *ODNB*, s.v. 'Edward I (1239–1307), king of England and lord of Ireland, and duke of Aquitaine' (accessed 15 Mar. 2020).

⁹ *ODNB*, s.v. 'David I (c.1085–1153) King of Scots' (accessed 3 Dec. 2018).

¹⁰ M. F. Moore, *The Lands of the Scottish Kings in England* (1915), xi, 12.

¹¹ J. Nichols, *History and Antiquities of Leicestershire*, 3 (1795), 198, citing Harl. MSS 7178 and p. 219 for Wright genealogy; J. R. Hubbard, *Brooksby* (1977), 17; Sir E. Brydges, ed., *Collins' Peerage of England*, vol. III (1812), 762–795.

¹² *Book of Fees*, part 1, 1198–1242 (1920), 517.

¹³ J. Nichols, *History and Antiquities of County of Leicester*, 2 (1795), 155.

¹⁴ J. Nichols, *History and Antiquities of County of Leicester*, 3 (1800), 189.

¹⁵ J. Nichols, *History and Antiquities of County of Leicester*, 3 (1800), 189, citing De Banco Trin. 14 Edw I Rot. 57.

¹⁶ E. Brydges, ed., *Collins' Peerage of England*, III (1812), 763.

¹⁷ G. F. Farnham, *Leics. Medieval Village Notes*, VI (Leicester, 1929), 248.

the marriage of his niece to this William meant that the Villiers family were tenants-in-chief as described in a later document in 1507.¹⁸ The next two lords of the manor, Sir John Villiers (d. 1506), grandson of the previous lord, and his son also called Sir John (d. 1544) were sheriffs of Leicestershire and Warwickshire. It was during the first Sir John's lordship that 24 people left the parish due to enclosure.

At the time of the death of Sir George Villiers (d. 1606) the Villiers estates amounted to at least 1700 a. in Brooksby, Hoby, Goadby Marwood and Goadby Grange.¹⁹ Sir William Villiers (d. 1629), his son, was a sheriff of Leicestershire and created baronet in 1619. The lordship of the manor and baronetage continued with his son Sir George (d. 1682 or 1685) and finally his grandson Sir William (d. 1711), a Member of Parliament, on whose death without issue the baronetage became extinct.²⁰

George Villiers, the first duke of Buckingham, born at Brooksby on 28 August 1592, was the second son of the second marriage of lord of the manor Sir George (d. 1606), to Mary Beaumont. From the age of ten he attended Billesdon School. George's father died when the younger George was 13, and he went to live with his mother at Goadby Marwood, and later spent some time in France. In his early twenties he entered royal court circles and soon became a favourite of James I, and in 1616 he was created duke of Buckingham. In 1620 he married Catherine Manners, only daughter of the duke of Rutland. He died in 1628 as a result of a knife attack.²¹

The estate was sold by Sir William Villiers (d. 1711),²² to Sir Nathan Wright for £14,782 in 1708.²³ Sir William and his wife Lady Ann were allowed to stay for the rest of their lives.²⁴ In the church there is a marble monument to Sir William and his wife.

¹⁸ *Cal. Pat.* 1494-1509, 566.

¹⁹ G. F. Farnham, *Leics. Medieval Village Notes*, VI (1929), 262, citing TNA, C 142/293/74.

²⁰ E. Brydges, ed., *Collins' Peerage of England*, III (1812), 771.

²¹ *ODNB*, s,v, 'Villiers, George, first Duke of Buckingham (1592-1628), royal favourite' (accessed 4 Feb. 2020).

²² *Hist. Parl. Commons 1645-1711*, 'Sir William Villiers 1645-1711', History of Parliament online (accessed 2 Feb. 2020).

²³ ROLLR, 7D 39, 116

²⁴ ROLLR, 7D 39, 131.

The Manor from 1708

Sir Nathan Wright, lawyer and former Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, lived on his main estate at Caldecote (Warws.), where he was buried in 1721.²⁵ The ownership of Brooksby remained with Wright's descendants until 1878, passing in turn to Nathan's son George I (d. 1725), whose principal estate was at Gayhurst (Bucks.), George I's son George II (d. 1766), George II's son George III (d. 1804) and George III's daughter Anne Barbara Wright who died without issue. After Anne's death the manor and lands passed to George Thomas Wyndham (d. 1830) of Cromer, Norfolk, a great-great-grandson of George Wright (I).²⁶ He married Maria Augusta Windham (unrelated), the daughter of the late Vice-Admiral Windham of Felbrigg Hall. The inheritance then went to George Thomas's son George Thomas Wright Wyndham (d. 1837). He died aged 9 in Madeira,²⁷ so the manor passed to his two sisters as co-heirs, Maria Anne Wyndham, who in 1845 married Godfrey, Lord Macdonald of Slate, and Cecilia, the wife of Lord Alfred Paget.²⁸ The ownership of the Brooksby estate was held in trust during their minorities by their mother, who had married the earl of Listowel.²⁹ Cecilia Lady Paget or her husband are named as owners until the estate was sold to Ernest Chaplin in 1878.³⁰

Chaplin had been a tenant at the Hall since 1865.³¹ In 1890, the estate, including 'three high class farms', was sold to Joseph Grout Williams of Tring, Hertfordshire.³²

²⁵ ODNB, s.v. 'Wright, Sir Nathan (1654-1721), lawyer' (accessed 9 Apr. 2019); *VCH Warws.* IV, within 40–42.

²⁶ J. Burke, *A genealogical and Heraldic History of Commoners in Great Britain and Ireland*, 2 (1835), pp. 244, 246; J. Curtis, *A Topographical History of the County of Leicester* (1831), 32; *VCH Bucks.* IV, within 343–7.

²⁷ Plaque in Cromer church.

²⁸ *VCH Bucks.* IV, within 343–7.

²⁹ E. Lodge, ed., *The Peerage of the British Empire to which is added the Baronetage* (1848), 346.

³⁰ W. White, *Hist., Gaz. and Dir. of Leics. and Rutl.* (Sheffield, 1846), 430–1; E.S. Drake & Co., *Commercial Dir. of Leics.* (Leeds, 1861), 128; Brooksby Hall Archives, indenture of 12 March 1878.

³¹ rugbyremembers.wordpress.com/2017/04/10/chaplin-aubrey-fletcher-died-10th-apr-1917/ (accessed 6 Feb 2020)

³² ROLLR, DE 5099/160; *Leic. Chronicle*, 11 Jan. 1890, 18 Jan. 1890.

The whole Brooksby estate was put up for sale in seven lots in 1904,³³ but sales went very slowly.

J.G. Williams was still named as lord of the manor and principal land owner in 1916.³⁴ In 1910

Williams was owner of the whole parish, except for the church, railway and the premises of William Brooks.³⁵ The Hall, mill and 62 a. of land was leased to David Beatty; Edward Brett Bailey occupied Hives Cottage and 62 a.; Edwin James had 206a. (probably Spinney Farm) and premises with 121 a.; Thomas Marshall rented Brooksby Lodge (later called Grange Farm) with 332 a.

David Beatty (later, admiral and 1st Earl Beatty, both from 1919), tenant of the Hall and Home (Hall) Farm from 1906,³⁶ bought the same in 1911.³⁷ H. Booth bought Ives Barn (later Hives Farm) for £2,000 and J. T. Marshall acquired Brooksby Grange Farm for £5,000, both by 1912.³⁸ Spinney Farm (including Brooksby Spinney) of 206 a. was still for sale in 1920.³⁹ Grange Farm, c.309 a., was sold again in 1927,⁴⁰ and once more in 1948, to Mr Venn of Coventry,⁴¹ the owner of a coach firm, for £33,000.⁴²

In 1935 Brooksby Hall, owned by Admiral Beatty, was put up for sale with Hall Farm (186 a.).⁴³ Earl Beatty died in 1936.⁴⁴ The sale did not go ahead so the Hall and farm were inherited by his son David, second earl Beatty.⁴⁵

The Agricultural College

³³ ROLLR, DE 688/30.

³⁴ *Kelly's Dir. of Leics. and Rutl.* (1916), 48.

³⁵ ROLLR, DE 2072/110, duties on land values 1910.

³⁶ ROLLR, DE 1826/1.

³⁷ ROLLR, DE 1826/21.

³⁸ ROLLR, DE 1826/21,

³⁹ ROLLR, L 333.

⁴⁰ ROLLR, DE 688/31.

⁴¹ ROLLR, DE 4674/1940.

⁴² ROLLR, DE 4674/1940.

⁴³ ROLLR, DE 4674/2346.

⁴⁴ ODNB, s.v. 'Beatty, David, first Earl Beatty' (accessed 30 Mar. 2020).

⁴⁵ <http://www.cracroftspeerage.co.uk/online/content/beatty1919.htm> (accessed 10 Feb. 2020); J. R Hubbard, *Brooksby* (1977), 59.

David, second earl Beatty, sold Brooksby Hall to Leicestershire and Rutland County Councils for £20,000 in 1945.⁴⁶ The building initially became a training centre in farming for ex-servicemen, overseen by the Leicestershire Agricultural Executive Committee,⁴⁷ then Brooksby Hall Farm Institute in 1950,⁴⁸ and an agricultural college in 1967.⁴⁹ In 1950 the two county councils bought the rest of the Hall estate including Hall Farm,⁵⁰ and Spinney Farm.⁵¹ The purchase of Spinney Farm in 1950 was from a Mr Crosher of Melton Mowbray. The county councils purchased the former railway station in 1966,⁵² Ives Barn, which was renamed Hives Farm, with its 125 a. for £43,750 in 1968,⁵³ and Grange farm with its 345 a. for £272,000 in 1976.⁵⁴

Since 2010 some of the buildings but not the farm land have been sold by the College, including the former railway station, Spinney Farm cottages, Brooksby Hall Farm farmhouse (since rebuilt), Brooksby Grange farmhouse and barn yard.⁵⁵ From 2006 the College leased land to Lafarge (which became Tarmac Ltd) for the creation of Brooksby Quarry.⁵⁶

Brooksby Hall

There was presumably a medieval manor house, although no documentary records survive. This became Brooksby Hall (grade II listed), visually of the late 16th century with later additions, which may be built around a medieval core. The walls are of coursed squared ironstone with limestone dressings. The roof is of Swithland slate. It was altered in the early 18th and early 19th centuries and the east wing was added in 1890–1. Sir Edward Lutyens made some minor alterations for Lord

⁴⁶ ODNB, s.v. 'Beatty, David, first Earl Beatty' (accessed 30 Mar. 2020); J.R. Hubbard, *Brooksby* (1977), 59.

⁴⁷ J.R. Hubbard, *Brooksby* (1977), 59.

⁴⁸ J.R. Hubbard, *Brooksby* (1977), 75.

⁴⁹ J.R. Hubbard, *Brooksby* (1977), 81.

⁵⁰ J.R. Hubbard, *Brooksby* (1977), 75.

⁵¹ J.R. Hubbard, *Brooksby* (1977), 75.

⁵² J.R. Hubbard, *Brooksby* (1977), 83, 86.

⁵³ J.R. Hubbard, *Brooksby* (1977), 86.

⁵⁴ J.R. Hubbard, *Brooksby* (1977), 86; oral testimony of James Fryer of the College and Malcolm Britton ex-lecturer at the College.

⁵⁵ Oral testimony of James Fryer of the College and Malcolm Britton ex-lecturer at the College.

⁵⁶ Below, Economic History, Quarrying.

Beatty c.1912.⁵⁷ In 1945, when the Hall was for sale, the basement had nine cellars; the ground floor had a kitchen, surgery, library, billiard room, museum, dining room, the Green Room and domestic quarters. On the first floor there were 11 bedrooms and 6 bathrooms, one for servants. There were a further 6 bedrooms and one bathroom on the second floor.⁵⁸ Since 1950 the agricultural college has added teaching and accommodation buildings in the grounds.⁵⁹



Brooksby Hall, south elevation

⁵⁷ Leics. County Council, HER, MLE 12391; listed building entry no. 1075040.

⁵⁸ ROLLR, DE 5395/15D.

⁵⁹ See Social History chapter.