

VCH Nottinghamshire
On-line Texts in Progress
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VICTORIA
COUNTY
HISTORY 

Nottinghamshire

WEST LEAKE

ECONOMIC HISTORY

FARMING

In 1086 no distinction was made between East and West Leake. It is possible that the outlier of two carucates, mentioned in Henry Ferrers' holdings, was in West Leake.¹

In 1725 there were three fields, named Moor, Waddow and Ash fields, in West Leake. There was also an area of meadow.² An Act for making perpetual an agreement for the exchange of lands between the lord of the manor, Evelyn Chadwick, and the rector, Granville Wheeler, was passed in 1743.³ It included the right for Chadwick to enclose and divide all the common fields, commons and waste. In 1754 a similar Act was passed for the exchange of lands between Francis, 2nd Lord Middleton and Robert Bird.⁴ This followed the sale of the estate to Middleton in 1752 when the Bird family retained the freehold of his land. It was sold twice before 1832 when the 6th Lord Middleton finally purchased the freehold.⁵ In 1752 there was one farm of 300 a., six over 100 a. and five less than 100 a. on this estate.⁶

Between 1752 and 1785 all the farm buildings were rebuilt on standard lines. The last was Foxhills in 1785, for which materials from East Leake Hall are reputed to have been used. In 1820 there was a new addition to the front of 'the one freehold farm' which later became Town End Farm. Manor Farm was built between 1870 and 1882 when West Leake Farm became West Leake House.⁷

¹ VCH Notts. I, 283.

² Notts. Archives, DR 1/3/2/1/201/3.

³ Notts. Archives, DDBK/1/138; Act 16 Geo. II.

⁴ Tate, *Enclosures*, 23; Notts. Archives, DDBK/1/139; Act 28, Geo. II.

⁵ East Leake & District Local History Society, *The Manor of West Leake 1750-1900: Farms, Families and Land Holdings* (1999), 3.

⁶ UNMASC, Mi 3/99/1.

⁷ *Manor of West Leake*, 1.

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In 1851 there were 11 farmers, two of whom were cottagers with less than 30 a. There were four outlying farms each with a holding of around 200 a.⁸ The other farms were in the village.

In 1867, when the Middleton estate was sold, the land was described as rich loam on which was grown malting barley, turnips and grass. A small trout stream ran through the village. The largest farm had 370 a. of arable and pasture and an osier bed. Three other farms were over 200 a. and four were less than 30 a. The eleven tenants all had houses and there was also a pound and some waste land. A total of 1,570 a. in West Leake, together with two small pieces of land in East Leake and Sutton Bonington were purchased by Lord Belper for £85,500.⁹ Changes followed quickly and the following year the tenants at Town End Farm and White Hills Farm were ejected. When two farmers died their sons were not allowed to take over the tenancies and another farmer died without a son to take over.¹⁰

In 1870 there were 14 holdings in West Leake. Of these five were over 100 a. and one between 50 and 100 a. The rest were less than 50 a. The corn crops were 296 a. of wheat, 134 a. of barley and just 12 a. of oats. There were 37 a. of beans and 64¾ a. of peas. The root crops grown were 92 a. of turnips, 30 a. of mangolds and just 2 a. of potatoes. There were 22 a. of vetches. Of the 170 a. of clover and other grasses 72 a. were for hay that year. There were 431 a. of permanent grass, of which 69 a. were for that year's hay crop. There were 50 working horses. Livestock consisted of 211 cows and other cattle, 892 sheep and lambs and 37 pigs.¹¹

By 1900 there were 11 holdings. Much less wheat (94 a.) was grown but more barley (156 a.) and oats (69 a.). Far less peas were grown. Of the root crops more potatoes (13 a.) were grown but far less turnips (39 a.) The grassland covered 740 a. and there were 5 a. of orchard. The livestock consisted of more cattle (319) but far fewer sheep (324). There were 31 pigs of which 8 were breeding sows. There were 62 horses in use. None of the land was owned, all 1,226 a. in use were rented.¹²

In 1925 there were still 11 holdings of which six were between 150 and 300 a. and four less than 50 a. Working on the land were 23 men and two women full-time and nine men and one woman part-time. Wheat (145 a.) was back as the main corn crop with less barley (86 a.) and more oats (91 a.) There were fewer beans and no peas. The root crops consisted of 18 a. of potatoes, 31 a.

⁸ TNA, HO 107/2086/65-70.

⁹ Notts. Archives, DD/BK/1/160/1.

¹⁰ *Manor of West Leake*, 11.

¹¹ TNA, MAF 68/254.

¹² TNA, MAF 68/1850.

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of mangolds and just 29 a. of turnips. The grassland comprised 779 a. Although there were still just over 300 cattle, the sheep flock had fallen to 153. A total of 1,262 a. was used for crops and there were 127 orchard trees.¹³

By 1960 there were 13 holdings, four of which were under 30 a. and five were between 150 and 300 a. They were farmed by 16 men and two women full-time with four part-time workers. Barley (174 a.) was the main corn crop, together with some wheat (158 a.) and oats (146 a.). The root crops were 22 a. of potatoes, 13 a. mangolds and 9 a. of sugar beet, with just ½ a. of turnips. There were 20 a. of kale. Grassland comprised 839 a. The total number of cattle and calves was 477, with 489 sheep and lambs, 14 pigs and 3,187 fowls.¹⁴

In 1976 Village Farm was converted in to housing. Ten years later the last farm sale in West Leake was held at Alsop's Farm (Town End Farm). The buildings were converted into housing.¹⁵ By 2010 the only farmer in the village was at Manor Farm, where he kept a milking herd of Friesian cows.¹⁶ In the early 21st century the land was worked by an agricultural company.

BASKET-MAKING

From the mid 18th century osier beds were used for basket making by members of the Mills family. While a few of the family continued to work in West Leake, others moved to East Leake, Sutton Bonington and neighbouring villages where it was easier to rent accommodation. In the early 1830s William Mills lived in premises on the village street which was in three parts – at the back an alehouse, 'The Basket', in the middle the basket-making workshop and at the front the village bread oven. In 1867 3 a. in West Leake was used as osier beds. By 1901 there were 6 a., bordered by the Kingston Brook, Pit House Lane and Brick Lane. Many of the baskets made were sold in London, including an order for 'In and Out' stationery baskets for Parliament. By the early 20th century the basket makers in the family had died and their descendants had moved to other locations where the trade continued until the early 1960s.¹⁷

¹³ TNA, MAF 68/3254.

¹⁴ TNA, MAF 68/4693.

¹⁵ D. E. Clark, *West Leake Past and Present* (2000), not paginated.

¹⁶ D. E. Clark, *West Leake Past and Present Part Two – Ten Years On* (2010), not paginated.

¹⁷ M. Hurst, 'Basket making in Ratcliffe on Soar and West Leake', *200 years of Basket making in Ratcliffe on Soar, West Leake and East Leake, Nottinghamshire* (2001), 8-13; R. Cousins, 'A Basketful' (2007), 83-6.

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CORN MILLING

There were said to have been two mills, granted by King John in 1200. One was a water mill and the other a windmill.¹⁸ No later records have been found.

TEXTILES

In 1851 two people in West Leake were enumerated as framework knitters. They were probably out-workers for a hosier in East Leake.¹⁹

SERVICES

During the late 19th century the villager had a blacksmith, butcher, joiner and stone mason.²⁰ In 1891 a sub-post office was opened in West Leake. The sub-postmistress resigned in 1892 and the office was closed until 1896 when a new sub-postmaster was employed. From 1910 to 1977, when it closed, just three sub- postmistresses ran the office.²¹

As well as The Basket, which closed in the early 19th century, there was a second public house, the Star Inn, in the former Leake Pit House. Although just within Sutton Bonington parish it was always known as the Star at West Leake. It continued in business in 2014.

¹⁸ Notts. Federation of Women's Institutes, *The Nottinghamshire Village Book* (1989), 177-8.

¹⁹ TNA, HO 107/2086/65-70.

²⁰ TNA, RG 12/2518/88-90.

²¹ D. Humphreys, 'West Leake Post Office', *Leake Historian*, No. 11 (2009), 37.