

Coleshill Water Mill

Research on the early history By Neil B. Maw



The Victoria County History (VCH) provided the information that there was a Mill at Coleshill before the Norman invasion of 1066. The historians who compiled the VCH had consulted the Domesday survey and deduced that the Mill was shared between the three tenants who held it. The VCH further described that in 1366 the Manor of Coleshill was in the possession of the newly founded priory at Edington in Wiltshire. The Dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII brought it into the possession of the Crown. The Seymour family being closely associated with King probably explains why Edward Seymour, who became Lord Protector of England, held possession of Coleshill Manor after the dissolution, which was passed on to his second wife Anne, the Duchess of Somerset. This is confirmed by one of the leases that make up the collection of 11 documents held in the Berkshire County Archives (BCA) *Ref No: D/EPB/T3/1-11*, where a lease referred to, only became effective after her death.

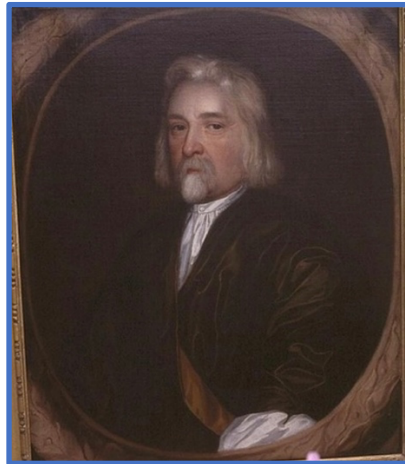
The Indentures begin at the earliest period by quoting Letters Patent issued with the Great Seal of England by Queen Elizabeth I, (Below) dated 17th October 1588. It explained that because a man called Peter Delupo, one of the queen's musicians had petitioned her on behalf of Richard Bell, a lease to him was subsequently granted to three properties: the site of the Manor of Burford in Oxon, the Rectory and Church of Chesham in Bucks, and a Water Mill at Coleshill in Berks. The Mill is more fully

described as a *'Water Mill with a garden and an orchard containing one rood of land being in Coleshill and one close there called Mead Ham containing two acres of meadow, and all fishing there with other parcels of land being near the Washing Place and also one house called the Slate House.'*



Richard Bell was described as of Grayes Inn near London, Gent, meaning that he was a man of substance, had money and did not need to work. So, it was unlikely that he would have operated the mill, but rather, hired in or sub-let it out to a Miller. And earlier leases referred to, also suggest the same, e.g. Edwarde Vaghan & Richard Sutton of London, Gents, in 1571 and John Cocke alias Lancaster, in 1574.

Towards the end of the 16th century Thomas Freke entered the records. (Below) He was a Merchant Adventurer from Iwerne Courtenay in Dorset. At various times he was an MP and High Sheriff of Dorset and was Knighted in 1603. An Indenture dated 2nd February 1594 recorded that he purchased the rights of the Mill from Edward Vaghan and Richard Sutton for £50. A year later another Indenture dated 20th May 1595, recorded that Thomas Freke sold the rights of the Mill and Slate House for £166.13.4. to Francis Parker of Coleshill. He was being offered a lease based on the lives of his son Frances and his daughters Susan and Anne.



A series of three Indentures dated 18th December 1604 recorded a change in the arrangement whereby Francis Parker sold back the rights of the Slate House to Sir Thomas Freke and Richard Swayne, who by this time were possessed of the Manor of Coleshill. It's likely that the Slate House was so named because of its construction and had a roof of stone slate rather than thatch that would have been more common. Another Indenture recorded that as well as the Mill, Francis Parker would have the use of the Meadham meadow, but it was bigger at five acres rather than two described earlier. Another Indenture recorded, *'all that fishing of the water of the Mill Pond & Mill Tail there together with one other parcel of land there being near the Washing place.'* It's not certain what is meant by the name Washing Place. There is an instance of an area along the stream towards Watchfield with a similar name that was used for the purpose of washing sheep. Could this refer to the Mill Pond being used for a similar purpose? (Below).



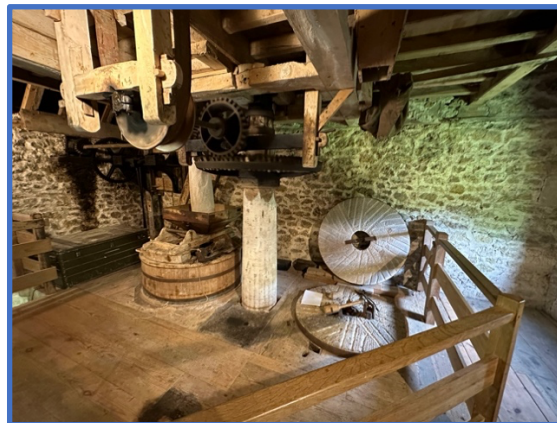
By an Indenture mentioned within an Indenture dated 5th April 1611, we learn that on 23rd June 1607, Frances Parker conveyed all right and title of the Mill and Mill House to John Grove of Balking. But it was a money-lending transaction as he was due to pay back the sum of £140, '*on the 1st September next ensuing at the Mansion House of John Grove of Balking,*' in order to buy back his right and title. However, he didn't pay it and therefore, to recoup some of his money, John Grove made a deal with Sir Thomas Freke and Richard Swayne to buy the property back for £40.

There seems to have been a break of four years before any more exchanges took place but then an Indenture dated 1st April 1611 between the two Lords of the Manor, Freke and Swayne, agree a deal with John Dalbye of Bampton, Oxon, Esq. The term esquire suggests a man of means so it was unlikely that he operated the mill. He was being offered the lease of 99 years based on the lives of his wife Martha, son William and another lady called Martha Forshire. A point of local interest is that the deal stipulated that he must pay £300 as a first payment, to Sir Thomas Freke at the Farmhouse at Coleshill on 3rd May 1611. The second payment of £200 was to be made at the same place and day the following year. Today it's not clear to which farm at Coleshill this referred.

The final Indenture in this collection of documents is dated 3rd November 1614. Once again it involved the two Lords of the Manor of Coleshill. Thomas Freke has been mentioned above, and he had worked with a lawyer called Richard Swayne from Gunville (Today Tarrant Gunville) in Dorset. Swayne was a lawyer and he and Thomas

Freke had carried out many land deals, buying a large amount of it from the Crown in 1590; this included the Manor of Coleshill. Thomas Cox was described as a Yeoman of Coleshill and the lease he was offered was again for 99 years on the lives of his son John and Agnes Shurmer, his widowed daughter. The purchase price was £420, and the description of the property remained the same as above except that the Meadham meadow had grown larger to include eight acres.

These documents provide a fascinating insight as to the evolution of the Mill at Coleshill from the time that it emerged from the dissolution of the monasteries. The buildings that stand there today, including the Mill which is still functional, are clearly from a later period than those being described in the above narrative. It's likely they were of timber framed construction, replaced by rubble stone walls in the 18th century and further altered in the 19th. Although Sir Thomas Freke and Richard Swayne sold the manor of Coleshill sometime near to 1626 to Henry Pratt, it seems they did not sell the Mill and its land. There is a large amount of Radnor Estate documents held in the BCA and only the collection referred to in this article that mention the Mill, suggesting that it was sold into private ownership and remained so from then on.



The names of two more Millers are known from the 17th century, Robert Walbank who died in 1672 and his son John who died in 1690. The research will continue and if you can add to our knowledge of the Mill, please get in touch with us

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