

A HODGSON FAMILY: YEOMAN FARMERS OF TEESDALE

Around the middle of the seventeenth century, a Ralph HODGSON moved - probably from Auckland St Andrew - to farm at Marwood Park Wall just outside Barnard Castle. Over the next two centuries, his descendants spread widely to occupy many farms in south Durham and north Yorkshire, in particular along the Tees between Barnard Castle and Gainford.

Ralph of Marwood Park Wall

When Ralph died in 1691, his will (made in 1685) referred to a house plus a small area of land in the town of Barnard Castle and five acres, probably in strips, within the Middle Field, common land of the town. He was probably also the tenant of Marwood Park Wall, the farm where he was living which was owned by the Raby Estate. Hearth tax was paid on only one hearth in 1666, which suggests a fairly small house. In his will, Ralph mentioned his wife Elizabeth (who died in 1692) and four sons - Hugh, Ralph, George and William. He was buried as Ralph HODGSON senior of Marwood, which suggests that his son Ralph was also living there then.

Ralph junior of Marwood Park

Ralph junior was probably not the eldest son but may have taken over the tenancy of the farm, perhaps with his brothers George and William. Ralph was described as a yeoman of Marwood Park when he died in 1719. By his first wife Elizabeth, who died in 1704, he had six daughters and a son baptised at Barnard Castle between 1676 and 1690. Four daughters and the son were still alive, and the daughters all married, in 1719. Ralph had remarried, in 1705, Jane SIMPSON, and he left to her all his rights and interest in the farm.

George of Marwood

Ralph senior's son George was also a yeoman of Marwood when he died in 1725. His will referred to property in Galgate, in the town of Barnard Castle, and to a farm in Marwood. He too had been widowed and had remarried, to Catherine GIBBON. Catherine died in 1736, and was then living at the farm of Westholme in the village of Winston, with her husband's nephew Ralph HODGSON. Two of her stepchildren were living nearby - Ralph, who had purchased the estate of Alwent in the next village of Gainford, and Mary who had married John WALKER and was living at Walker Hall in Winston. George's eldest daughter Jane had married Humphrey HOPPER of the Black Hedley estate at Shotley in Northumberland.

The HODGSONs of Alwent

Ralph HODGSON, the son of George of Marwood, was a yeoman of White Kirtley House in Weardale when he bought Alwent in two parts between 1716 and 1728; he was certainly living at Alwent by 1719. He had married Elizabeth the daughter of Thomas MIDDLETON, gent, of Cleatlam in the parish of Staindrop. Ralph's daughter Jane married into the family of Robert SURTEES the historian, and her grandson Thomas SHERWOOD lived at Snow Hall in Gainford from 1815 to 1830. In 1753 Ralph and his son George sold part of Alwent to George BOWES of Streatlam Castle, but they presumably kept enough for George in turn to become "esq of Alwent" when Ralph died in 1756. After George died in 1778, Alwent passed to his son Ralph. But the only child of the second Ralph of Alwent was a daughter, and following Ralph's death in the 1820s the estate was advertised for sale in 1836, occupied by a tenant. Later HODGSONs who farmed at Alwent appear to have been tenants with no relation to the earlier owners.

Walker Hall

Mary HODGSON, the daughter of George of Marwood, married John WALKER in 1713 and they settled at Walker Hall in Winston, which they owned. Presumably the estate took its name from John WALKER, although the house built in 1776 is said to have replaced an earlier one dating from 1650. Certainly the holding was not of great antiquity like the other estates in Winston, and may have been fairly small, about 50 acres. Three of John and Mary WALKER's five daughters (they had no sons) died within a few days of each other, aged between 3 and 8. A fourth daughter Mary married John BOURN, and they inherited Walker Hall. The BOURN family lived at Walker Hall for many years and were considered to be minor gentry; the third John BOURN became Deputy Lieutenant of the county. It is unlikely that they farmed the land themselves, and by 1891 Walker Hall was occupied by a tenant farmer. The family still owned and rented out the property in 1926.

Between 1741 and 1769 there are references to a William HODGSON of Walker Hall. This is likely to be the son of the first Ralph HODGSON of Westholme. It is possible that William farmed the land at Walker Hall on behalf of John WALKER, or perhaps occupied it at a time when he was absent.

The HODGSONs of Westholme

Little is known about William HODGSON the son of Ralph of Marwood Park Wall, but two of his sons are of interest - Ralph and Charles. Ralph married John WALKER's sister Ann at a double wedding with his cousin Mary in 1713, and Ralph and Ann also settled in Winston. Westholme, a substantial farming estate with a fine house built in 1607, had been owned by the DOUTHWAITE family but was mortgaged to John BACON of Staward in Northumberland who foreclosed. John BACON finally took complete ownership in 1717, and he and his descendants remained absentee landlords. Ralph and Ann HODGSON were certainly farming as tenants at Westholme by 1717; they had still been in Barnard Castle in 1716. Ralph's will in 1738 shows a close bond with his brother-in-law and neighbour John WALKER and includes the following passage indicative of his character: "*...the bay mair which is fower years old which was out of the black mair which I give in exchange betwixt me and my son William the gelding which is unckell John Walker gave him.*" Ralph was succeeded at Westholme by his son and grandson of the same name until about 1810 when the family left. A fourth Ralph is said to have become a shopkeeper in Guisborough, Yorks, while two of his sisters married and emigrated to Canada.

Charles of Park Wall

Charles HODGSON married in Winston in 1707 and then seems to have lived in the adjacent village of Whorlton, but returned to Marwood Park Wall in the early 1720s. Both Charles and his only surviving son William were outlived by Charles' widow Sarah, who died at Marwood Park in 1775. Her will referred to the farm in her possession and to her stock of cattle and crop of corn, so she was still actively farming, presumably at Park Wall. One of the executors of her will was William HODGSON yeoman of Walker Hall - her nephew if the theory above is correct. It is also possible that Mary, one of the daughters of Charles and Sarah, was the first wife of the second Ralph HODGSON of Westholme; but they would have been first cousins.

Two other HODGSON farmers died at Park Wall at about this time - John in 1772 and his only surviving son William in 1777. It is not clear if or how they were related to Charles, Sarah and William.

Hugh of Grafts

The remaining son of the first Ralph HODGSON of Marwood Park Wall - and possibly the eldest son - was Hugh. Married to Julian (an early form of Gillian), daughter of John COCKFIELD who farmed in Whorlton, he lived for a time in Westwick before settling at the farm of Grafts in the parish of Whorlton, close to the boundary with Winston. In fact he appears in the records of both villages, and it is possible that he farmed land in both. Hugh described himself as a yeoman when he made his will in 1717, shortly before his death, and referred to his oxen, cows, sheep and horses. Hugh left three sons - John, Ralph, and Hugh. The latter was a maltster in Barnard Castle where he had a malt kiln. He died a gentleman in Barnard Castle in 1730, owning property there and in Whorlton, but left only daughters.

John of Grafts

Hugh senior was succeeded at Grafts by his eldest son John, whose will in 1740 makes clear that the family owned the farm. John also describes himself as a gentleman, and - helpfully, in terms of establishing the relationships between the different HODGSONs - he specifically referred to his cousin Ralph of Alwent and his nephew Hugh of Winston.

Notes by the Vicar of Whorlton

The parish records of Whorlton include notes made by the vicar in the early 1800s about each of the families named in the enclosure award of 1677, one of which was Hugh HODGSON of Grafts. The notes say: "*Grafts belonged to the Hodgson family - within memory that place was sold to a Mr Wilkinson of Thorp & now belongs to Sheldon Cradock Esq.*

1716 Ap 29th. John Hodgson and Margt. Westmerland were married

...

1717 Hugh son of John Hodgson

1720 Julian daughter of John Hodgson

1722 Elizabeth daughter of John Hodgson

1725 Ralph son of John Hodgson [these are baptisms]

The late John Hodgson of Denton who died in the year 1784 I am told, was another son of the aforesaid John Hodgson. Hugh mentioned above became the coachman of the renowned William Duke of Cumberland and left two sons - William one of whom became an undertaker in London & dying 1809 left by will about £10,000 to his brother George Hodgson a glazier now living at Staindrop. Ralph Hodgson mentioned above became the coachman, as I am told, to our present Queen."

The Vicar's notes appear to be broadly correct. William HODGSON of London who died in 1809 did leave a substantial fortune - although not as much as £10,000 - to his brother George and his brother's son, also George. His will mentions many other relatives, quite a few of whom seemed to be living in or near London. It also mentions his uncle Ralph, whose own will proved in 1802 confirms that he had indeed been coachman to Queen Charlotte, wife of King George III. John HODGSON of Denton and his wife Ann had a large family born between 1741 and 1762; one of their daughters, Ann, married the Rev Thomas PEACOCK of Denton but died young. John's father, John of Grafts, explained in his will that he had given him some money on his marriage and intended giving him some more "*upon his settling for himself in the world*".

Ralph of Winston

Ralph the son of Hugh of Grafts moved to the next village of Winston. In 1701 he married in Durham Cathedral Jane GARTHWAITE, also from Winston, and they raised a large family there, although little is known about what happened to most of their children. Ralph was one of the bigger tenants on the estate which formed the manor of Winston, owned by the Earls of Bridgewater.

Hugh of Winston

It seems likely that Hugh took over his father Ralph's farm in Winston. Certainly he was a tenant of the Bridgewater Estate at least by 1748, when an estate rental showed him as one of the two largest tenants. The land tax records confirm that he was a substantial farmer. Hugh married his second cousin Margaret DARNTON, and their four surviving children became or married substantial farmers in their own right. Margaret died young, and at the age of 73 Hugh remarried a young woman and fathered another child. This daughter Elizabeth married Edward SHAFTO, a son of Sir Cuthbert SHAFTO of Little Bavington in Northumberland. Their only daughter Jane married William Wilkinson BROCKETT, son of William Neville BROCKETT of Headlam Hall. Despite these connections, both Elizabeth and Jane maintained close contacts with Winston both before and after they were married, although Elizabeth died of fever at the age of 24 and Jane moved away after her husband's death due to a riding accident. Hugh HODGSON died in 1788 and his will described him as a yeoman.

Richard of Primrose Hill

Richard HODGSON, the eldest surviving son of Hugh, took over from his father as a tenant farmer on the Bridgewater Estate. By 1801 the records show that he was farming Primrose Hill, one of four farms on the estate, and the farmhouse was built at around this time. The farm may well have comprised the same land earlier occupied by Hugh, and previously by Ralph. Richard never married but provided a home at Primrose Hill for his father's widow, and her mother, daughter, son (by a later marriage), and granddaughter and her family. Jane's son, born a few months before Richard died in 1833 at the age of 90, was named Richard Hodgson BROCKETT. William BROCKETT remained at Primrose Hill for a little while after Richard HODGSON's death, but the farm was subsequently relet and passed out of the family (although by a coincidence it was later tenanted again by descendants of the HODGSONs).

The BLENKINSOPs of High Cliffe

Margaret, daughter of Hugh HODGSON of Winston, married George BLENKINSOP, and they farmed and raised a family at High Cliffe, another of the Bridgewater Estate farms in Winston. George died in 1801 and three of his sons took over the farm, but seem to have moved away by 1820.

The HODGSONs of Hedgeholme

John HODGSON, son of Hugh and brother of Richard and Margaret, married his third cousin Ann HODGSON of Westholme, and moved away from Winston. Having farmed in Croft-by-Darlington and at Westside House in Gainford, by 1801 he had settled at Hedge Holme, a farm just the other side of the river Tees from Winston, and remained there until his death in 1832. He was succeeded at Hedge Holme by his youngest son William, whose widow Mary was still farming there in 1891.

John's eldest son, Hugh, seems to have stayed at Westside House for a few years after his father left, and then moved to Kirkby Ravensworth in Yorkshire, where he died in 1839. One of Hugh's daughters, Elizabeth, married Robert SMITH, the new tenant at Primrose Hill, and they and their children farmed there until the early 1900s. Two of Elizabeth's brothers, Robert and Christopher, also seem to have moved to Winston where they worked on farms.

Ralph, the second son of John of Hedge Holme, farmed between 1805 and 1816 at Osmondcroft, another farm in Winston, not part of the Bridgewater Estate but owned by an absentee landlord. In 1851 Ralph was a farmer at Ingleby Barwick in Yorkshire.

The HODGSONs of Woolhouse

The fourth of the farming offspring of Hugh HODGSON of Winston was another Hugh, who moved back to a farm in the area where his great-great-grandfather Ralph had lived. The Woolhouse lies within what was once the deer park called Marwood Park, and was also owned by the Raby Estate. Hugh settled there about 1772 and stayed till his death in 1816. His elder son, also Hugh, lived for a few years at Osmondcroft, at that time the home of his wife's family, and then moved to Westside House by 1805. He must have arrived there immediately after (or overlapped with) his cousin Hugh, the son of John of Hedge Holme (the two cousins had moreover married sisters). In the 1840s Hugh moved from Westside House to join his son (another Hugh!) who was farming at Snotterton in Staindrop; the family was still at Snotterton when the younger Hugh died in 1864.

Returning to the Woolhouse, the tenancy passed to Hugh's younger son John, and on John's death in 1865 to his son Hugh. This was the last of the line at the Woolhouse; Hugh never married, and when he died in 1880 the farm was let out of the family. John had another son, William, who farmed for some years at Wigglesworth in Cockfield, but he died young in 1856.

The Raby Estate sold the Woolhouse in the mid 1980s. Recent owners were restoring the farmhouse back to its seventeenth century origins. This means it is quite different from during the 100 year occupancy by the HODGSONs, but is nevertheless both attractive and exciting.

Conclusion

So what does this confusion of Ralphs and Hughs show? It demonstrates a long and wide dynasty of (predominantly tenant) farmers stemming from the original Ralph HODGSON of Marwood Park Wall. It shows too how they came to dominate the farming in and around Winston, in particular. By about 1800, no less than five of the major farms in the village were occupied by descendants of Ralph - Westholme, Walker Hall, Primrose Hill, Osmondcroft and High Cliffe. At the same time, they also occupied the nearby farms of Alwent and Westside House in Gainford, and of Hedge Holme. It is perhaps no surprise that a member of the family was once described in the Teesdale Mercury as "of a well-known farming stock".