

RICHARD CHILDREN (1670-1753)



On the 28th May 1734 Richard Children of Ramhurst Manor in Leigh (left) purchased Moorden Farm, then 224 acres, from The Earl of Guildford for £3450.

Richard came from a well established family with an estate on the outskirts of Leigh called Childrens.

By 1750 The family owned twelve farms within the parish, including Great & Little Barnetts, Wickhurst &

farms at Hollandens. There are some similarities between the farm buildings at Moorden & Great Barnetts, especially the granary, which could mean the Children family, along with their tenants of both farms at this time, the Turner family, may have been responsible for building them.

In addition to farms in Leigh the Children family also owned substantial property in Tonbridge.

Richard lived at Ramhurst Manor until his death & has a memorial (left) in Tonbridge parish church by the noted sculptor Roubiliac.



ANN CHILDREN (1678 - 1755)

According to his will Richard Children left Moorden to his wife Ann. Ann retained Moorden for two years then it passed to her son, John Children.

JOHN CHILDREN (1705 - 1771)



John Children predominately lived at Fox Hall (left) the family's residence in Tonbridge.

He was succeeded by his son George, to whom Moorden Farm passed when he died.

GEORGE CHILDREN (1742 -1818)



George Children was a close & devoted father & a kindly & much loved Tonbridge figure, as his memorial in the parish church attests.

A barrister who never practised, George Children was a JP for half a century, under-sheriff for Kent & Sussex, a proprietor of the Medway Navigation Company, & one of the founders of the Tonbridge Bank set up in 1792.

The formation of the bank came about due to Tonbridge's increased wealth as a Trade Centre after improvements to it's main river, the Medway, were made.

Unfortunately by 1807 the bank was struggling & eventually closed it's doors in 1813. Over the next three years George sold off all his properties in Tonbridge & Leigh, including Moorden, which was 260 acres by then.

WILLIAM WELLS I (1768-1847)



Just south of Moorden lay Redleaf House, (right) the seat of William Wells I, who purchased Moorden in 1813, at the time of George Children's bankruptcy.

William had made his fortune from the sea, firstly at the young age of 25 as a ship's captain for the East India Company & then by establishing the largest Thames shipbuilding partnership, based in Blackwell, which he sold around the time he bought Redleaf in 1806.

William was also a Trustee of the National Gallery & a major arts patron & collector, with an amazing number of old masters in his collection including the famous triple portrait of Charles I by Antony Van Dyck, works by Veronese, Titian, Bruegel, Canaletto, Guido, Rembrandt, Rubens, Van der Velde, Jan Steen & Cuypp4.

For a while in the 19th century, Redleaf became the centre of one of the greatest gathering of artists & art that our country has seen, with artists such as EW Cooke, W.P. Frith, Frederick Goodall, Thomas Sidney Cooper, F.R.Lee, Thomas Webster, J.M.W. Turner & Sir Edwin Landseer spending a considerable amount of time there. Sculptor Farrington records two visits to the Redleaf estate which William claimed had cost around £50,000, & found that the people thereabouts were "remarkably civil".

As well as an arts collector, William had a keen interest in gardening & on purchasing Redleaf he undertook an impressive re-landscaping of the grounds which included a large rocky, unusual varieties of conifers & the first ever seen crazy paving4. He created ornamental garden buildings & built several lodges & improved existing surrounding cottages5.

Moorden was one of many farms & properties Wells bought to increase his estate & it too benefited from improvements & additions instructed by him, such as the new farmstead.



Redleaf House, seat of William Wells I, painted by J.M.W. Turner in 1847. For the Entrance of the History of Kent 1847.

WILLIAM WELLS II (1818 - 1889)



Childless at the time of his death in 1847, William Wells I left Moorden & the rest of the Redleaf Estate to his 29 year old great nephew, also a William Wells.

William's family seat was Holmewood Hall in Huntingdonshire. He had a great interest in politics & sat in the House of Commons as a Liberal Party politician from 1852 - 1857 & from 1868 - 1874.

Wells was a generous & kindly landlord with a keen interest in agriculture, promoting the use of steam power in the sector & standing as a devoted council member of the Royal Agricultural Society.

His achievements included the suppressing of the sale of adulterated manures, seeds &

feeding stuffs & increasing income by the drainage of land.

In Huntingdon he had implemented the drainage of Whittlesey Mere in 1951 to provide alternative agricultural land, which proved a great success to the local area at that times.

Much of the farmland on the Redleaf Estate, including Moorden, also underwent substantial drainage around 1850 under Wells' instruction.

Unfortunately it seems William's expenditure on such undertakings, followed by the agricultural depression, meant on his death in 1889, he had a large number of debts. His decline in income may perhaps explain his decision in 1870 to sell the Redleaf Estate, which included Moorden Farm.

FRANK CLARK HILLS (1807 - 1892)



Moorden Farm, along with the Redleaf Estate, was bought by Frank Clark Hills

Frank was a very remarkable man, one of the great Victorian industrialists, & almost unknown. His career had started at the Deptford Chemical Works where he used gas works' waste as a power source & also developed steam powered road transport.

In the early 1840s he aquired the East Greenwich tide mill that happened to be opposite the Thames Ironworks where he later became involved, eventually as Chairman on the board in 1870.

Ship building was Frank's passion &

there are stories about him excitedly running round each new battleship as it set out on its first journey down the Thames.

On arriving at Redleaf, Frank made many changes including building North Lodge in 1872 & by 1884 had even replaced the main house itself with a new mansion (below). He had made a great fortune as an industrialist & was able to invest a great deal into the estate & could well have been responsible for improvements to the Farmhouse at Moorden that took place during the latter part of the nineteenth century.



Frank lived out his days at Redleaf with his wife Ann, enjoying his retirement with his 'zoophytos' & a new gramophone. It is said that he could recite 'Paradise Lost' in its entirety off by heart.

FRANK ERNEST HILLS (1851 - 1896), CONSTANCE HILLS (1854 - 1932) EDWARD HENRY HILLS (1854 - 1895) & ARNOLD FRANK HILLS (1857 - 1927)

On Frank's death in 1892, he left Redleaf to his three sons. Frank Ernest & Edward Henry died soon after their father. Frank Ernest left his share of the estate to both his wife Constance & his younger brother Arnold, making him the majority owner. Although for most of his life Arnold & his family resided in the West Ham area of London, in later years he took a great interest in the running of Redleaf & invested into it's surrounding communities. had St Lukes, the Church near Moorden, built as

a memorial to his late father & brothers, one of several buildings in the area he is remembered for.

It is likely Arnold (left) was responsible for changes made around the turn of the century to Moorden Farmhouse, such as the addition of the formal front porch & bay window. He was also responsible for building the farm workers cottages at Moorden.

Interestingly newspaper articles during the 1890's suggest Arnold as the farm manager of Moorden implying he took an particular interest in the farm.



His interests & achievements were in fact vast as his obituary in the Essex Chronicle after his death at Hammerfield house, Penhurst, on 11th March 1927 shows

While at Harrow Arnold distinguished himself by captaining the football eleven in 1875, and carrying a still higher athletic reputation through Oxford. While at University College he won the mile championship in 1879, and played against Cambridge in the winning 'Gosport' eleven in 1877 and 1878, and also against the rest of the University, again with a win. He played for England against Scotland in 1873, and gained his cap as an International. In the schools he brought off a second-class in classical moderations in 1877, and in modern history two years later. Mr. Hills became a director of the old Thames Iron Works, and for the next 25 years made a great crusade in the interest of the Thames shipbuilding. He built the Thunderer (above), the last of the Thames warships. Although crippled with rheumatism, he continually agitated in the interests of the Thames shipyards, speaking at demonstrations while lying on his trapeze chair, but in spite of all he could do the last was closed down in 1912. He took a great interest in his employees, and under a profit-sharing scheme distributed £100,000 among them. At one time 6,000 hands were employed at the Thames Iron Works when four first-class battle cruisers were being built. One of these was constructed for the Japanese Navy. Mr. Hills was able to secure the building of the first Thames Dreadnought by getting £25,000 under the next lowest tender. In spite of cruel personal handicap he built a deep water dock and other works at Dagenham for the construction of the Thunderer, which despite the strike and lock-out of 1910 was launched within nine months of the laying of her keel. "The late Mr. Hills was president of the National United Temperance Council, the Essex United Temperance Council, and the Vigilantines' Football Union, and in connection with these activities he gave some remarkable vegetarian lunches. He was the father of the West Ham Football Club, which began its existence under the name of the Thames Ironworks. Mr. Hills married in 1868 Mary Elizabeth, elder daughter of Mr. Alfred Lalano, of Hamworth Park, Medococor, and after buying Hammerfield he occupied himself in local affairs to the extent of being a J.P. and Deputy-Lieutenant for Kent."

Like his father before him, Arnold had left his mark on the Redleaf Estate & local area, but his & Constance's death marked a point by which the golden years of the estate were over & it began to diminish. Arnold had left his part of the estate to his son Arthur, who faced death duties & looming upkeep costs, so Redleaf Mansion was eventually separated from the estate & sold.

ARTHUR LAFONE FRANK HILLS (1890 - 1974)

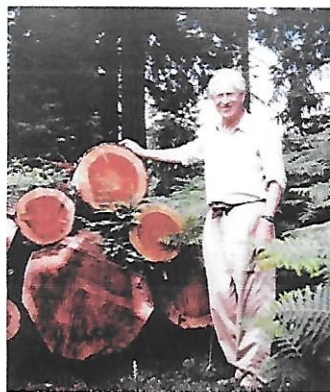
Arthur had married Moira Emeline Guinness in 1923 & when in the country they lived at Campmill Farmhouse, another of the estate properties.

Arthur would have been involved with some of the progressive changes to Moorden, including the addition of the new 'Lower' Stable building & the modernisation of the Farmhouse in the early 1930s, but financial pressures, probably during and as a result of the Second World War meant much of the outlying estate properties continued to be sold off. Some land at Moorden was also sold for council housing.

Arthur advanced the estate in a different way; he was a passionate woodsman & as well as successfully utilising the estate woodland for timber production he planted many unusual specimens of trees within them. In 1964 he won gold at the royal show for the estate woodlands & in 1969 received an OBE for his services to forestry.

PATRICK HENRY LAFONE HILLS (1925 - 2010) & PENELOPE MARY URSULA OGLIVY

By around 1968 his son Patrick (below) had taken over running the estate. Arthur had built himself White Court at Campmill allowing Patrick to move in to Campmill Farmhouse with his wife Ann. Patrick had studied at Cirencester & later worked for Cluttons as a land agent. Like his father he had a love of forestry & planted a number of impressive Redwoods within the estate woodlands.



Patrick & his sister Penelope Ogilvy, who had moved to Scotland, inherited Moorden when their father died & in the late 1980s Patrick implemented the conversion & sale of it's out-dated farm buildings, replacing them with more contemporary farm barns.

After Patrick's death Moorden Farmhouse was sold off & the rest of the farm remained in a trust for his descendants.

Redleaf & The Grove woodlands have also been sold in recent years.