

THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF A BULKELEY FARMER IN GEORGIAN TIMES

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In the library at Keele University is preserved a diary kept by Robert Bulkeley, a fairly prosperous farmer who actually lived at Bulkeley.

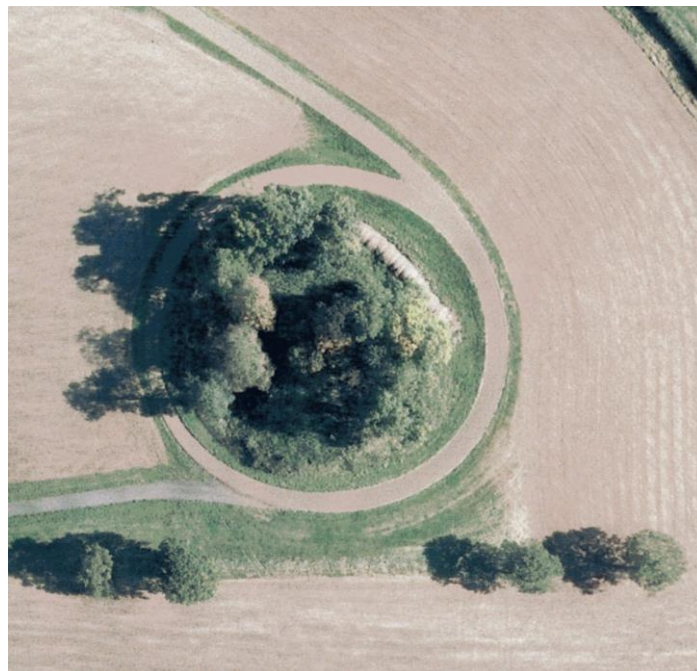
The diary covers the period 1714-1729, straddling the reigns of Kings George 1st and George 2nd.

As well as describing everyday farming operations the diary also records some of Robert's parish duties, and refers to family matters such as illnesses, births and deaths; children going to school; and some of their leisure pursuits, such as 'prison bars' (an ancient 'tag' game), cock fighting and hare coursing.

Robert's farm was of a mixed nature. He kept cattle and grew wheat and oats, which he had milled locally at one of two post windmills.

These were at Broxton and Ridley, both townships close to Bulkeley.

The site of the Broxton mill is still marked to this day by a group of trees known locally as 'Broxton Clump'.



Broxton Clump - site of Broxton Mill (Google Earth)

27 May 1718 *In morn I brought a batch to Broxton mill*

Other crops produced on the farm were of a more domestic nature, being gathered from orchard and hedgerow. In 1722 they included gooseberries and plums.

5 July 1722 *I at home all day getting and picking gooseberries.*

5 September 1722 *I at home all day, getting our plums.*

Horses were, of course, essential for all forms of transport and work on the land.

So, we find Robert at Malpas fair (held three times each year) in **December 1718** '*...with a design to sell grey mare*'.

References to farm work include three messy operations:

18 September 1718 *I at home all day, we began to mud fishpan*
meaning 'puddling' a pit with mud to make it waterproof so that it could be used to rear fish for household use.

28 December 1719 *At home all day mucking to Mill Post,*
which refers to spreading farmyard muck as fertiliser on the field known as Mill Post (the site of a former post windmill).

5 July 1729 *At home all day lading our pit to mud it,*
which means cleaning out a pit before puddling it with a new layer of clay.

Robert attended many of the area's markets and fairs, to do business, to meet other farmers, and to keep up to date with what was happening in the world at large.

He attended the weekly markets at Malpas, Tarporley and Whitchurch; and the occasional livestock fairs at Chester, Malpas, Nantwich, Over, Tarporley, Whitchurch, Wrexham, Mold, Caergwle and Holt.

18 October 1723 *I at Holt fair to buy a cow and sell another.*

4 June 1724 *I at Tarporley market selling corn.*

Salt was essential both for domestic cookery and for preservation of such commodities as meat and fish.

In Robert's case the salt did not come from the main Cheshire salt field but from the area of Wigland, just outside Malpas.

Wigland includes the hamlets of Higher and Lower Wych.

Earlier they had been known as Higher and Lower Foulwich, referring to the smoke and smells produced by the boiling of brine in lead pans.

15 May 1721 *In morn I sent for salt, one bushel from Dirtwich.*

2 October 1721 *Jack Alman fetched a buss [basket] of salt from Dirtwich.*

8 July 1724 *Robert went to Dirtwich for some salt.*

Salt production continued at Lower Wych until the mid-19th century.

Like many farmers since, Robert took on a number of public duties.

There were no Parish Councils then, but there were vestry meetings at Malpas church and township meetings in Bulkeley, which he would have attended.

At times he was elected for one year to perform the office of Overseer of the Poor, which explains such entries as:

22 December 1718 *I at Malpas all day dividing poor's money,*
referring to making annual payments of benefits to poor persons, always just before Christmas on Saint Thomas's Day.

In other years he served as an Overseer of the Highways, which explains entries such as:

10 June 1719 *I with team (of horses) at highways all day,*
referring to his statutory duty to provide horses and a cart, to work on the parish roads for so many days a year, and:

9 September 1729 *I at Chester for finger post,*
referring to his arranging for the manufacture, purchase and erection of a finger post sign, on the boundaries of Bulkeley and Peckforton townships.

This is just a sample of the entries in Robert's diary, which contains many more fascinating insights into the everyday life of a Cheshire farmer in the 18th century.