

Owners and occupiers of Number 20, Horsefair

Owners pre-1709 to 1777

In 1753 John Doharty ([BA 3676-29](#)) drew up his proposed plan of Kidderminster for Lord Foley, showing the lord's plans for development of the town following the growth of hand loom carpet weaving in the town. On the extreme edge of this plan the Horsefair can be seen. There is, however, little detail as the Horsefair was not owned by the Foley's but was part of the estate owned by the Clare family.

It is possible that the Clare's first came to prominence in the town through the marriage of Simon Clare to Margaret Rice, daughter and heiress of Simon Rice, who had built the Chantry of St Mary at the east end of what was then All Saints Parish Church.

In 1589 Sir Francis Clare had purchased the manor of Caldwell from George Wintour of Huddington. His oldest son, Ralph, became a prominent member of the courts of both James I and Charles I, and was created a Knight at the coronation of the latter in 1626. Don Gilbert has described Sir Ralph as an archetypal Cavalier and one of the leading Royalists in Worcestershire during the Civil War period. In 1636 he was appointed High Steward of Kidderminster. He died in 1670, leaving no children, and was buried in Kidderminster Parish Church. The manor of Caldwell was inherited by his younger brother Francis, a Captain of Foot under Charles I, who in turn died in 1680. It was the direct descendants of this Francis Clare, His son Francis and his grandson Francis, who became the first documented owners of **20, 21 and 22, Horsefair**.

In 1709 Francis Clare, the son, leased a messuage, or cottage, to Edward Jones, who six months later sub-let it to Samuel Hurlstone, a labourer. **Nigel Gilbert** has deduced that this must be what became 22, Horsefair ([see article](#)). At this time Francis Clare himself was living at Caldwell Hall. In 1706 he had leased two acres of land " in the common field called Church Field near Whorwood Shipton "; directly to Samuel Hurlstone. Francis had been involved in his own building work, extending Caldwell Hall with a three storey Queen Anne building around 1700. In 1729 he died and was also buried at St Mary's Parish Church. In his will, proved in 1730, he bequeathed £1000 to both his unmarried daughters Anne and Sarah, but his main heir was his son, yet another Francis, who was not mentioned in the will.

Nigel Gilbert deduced that this Francis Clare built 20 and 21, Horsefair sometime before 1757, inspired by Lord Foley's development of weavers' cottages close to St Mary's Church, as there were specific exemptions from a lease of 1757. This Francis Clare became High Sheriff in 1754 and died in 1777, succeeded by his nephew, Anthony Deane, son of either Anne or Sarah. Almost immediately he sold most of the Clare manorial lands to Matthew and Thomas Jeffreys for just over £19,000.

1777-1817 Matthew and John Jeffreys

Matthew Jeffreys was baptised in 1740 at the Old Meeting. He was the son of John Jeffreys, who leased the Town Mills from Lord Foley. While Matthew followed his father into the family business of milling, he rapidly became a substantial landowner and was able to relinquish his interest in the mills before his death in 1815. He built his home, Blakebrook House, which was described by Nigel Gilbert as one of the finest and largest houses seen in Kidderminster, around 1785. Thomas, Matthew's brother, was a goldsmith and jeweller in Cockspur Street, London. The family was not always popular in the town. In 1810, a time of considerable hardship in the town, a number of Jeffreys barns and other buildings suffered at least three arson attacks in protest at the high price of bread.

Matthew's son, another John, could afford to describe himself as a gentleman and did not have to work for a living. In 1817 he sold all his property interests in the Horsefair to Thomas Roberts, and finally left Kidderminster for London in 1833.

1817-1852 The Roberts family

Before Thomas Roberts bought the land from John Jeffreys in 1817 he had taken over the lease of Horsefair properties, excluding 20 and 21, from Samuel Slade in 1803, paying £263. At the time he was listed as a gardener. By 1812 he had become an innkeeper, probably resident at the Cock Inn, adjoining 20, Horsefair. His will in 1823 mentioned four messuages on the east side of the Cock Inn, suggesting the inclusion of the building which later became the fish and chip shop. His widow Elizabeth inherited these properties for the term of her lifetime, until her death in 1852. She outlived her older son, Thomas junior, who inherited the properties to the west of the Cock Inn. Her younger son John inherited these four properties on the east side after her death.

1853 onwards

Little is known about the owners of the land after 1852 until the cottages were purchased by compulsory order by Wyre Forest District Council in 1999. Much more work is required to investigate any documentary sources and the rate books which should reveal the owners and tenants. Nigel Gilbert's report on the cottages for the Historic Kidderminster Project in 2014 is the most comprehensive record so far and is recommended for further reading. **A copy of this can be found in the Research section of this website.**