The Burgage Manor and Farming

A century before the Norman conquest Southwell and its surrounding parishes formed a royal estate of wooded hills and fertile river valleys – a rich agricultural landscape which in 968AD was granted by the king to the Archbishop of York. The Manor of Burgage, sandwiched between the parishes of Southwell to the south and Normanton to the north, was a small part of this royal gift. The Burgage Manor remained under the Lordship of the Archbishops of York until the mid19th century when it passed to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners.

The Burgage Manor (light grey) and the Burgage Green (dark grey).

The Burgage Manor extended from the River Greet in the north to Back Lane (now Burgage Lane) in the south and from the Potwell Dyke in the east to the New Dyke Lane (now the Ropewalk) in the west.

Sadly the early manorial records for the Burgage are missing – those from 1806-1973 can be found in the Nottinghamshire Archives. The village of Laxton in north Nottinghamshire is one of few villages in England where the mediaeval system of open plough fields controlled by a manor court still survives and anyone interested should visit the website at - http://www.laxtonvisitorcentre.org.uk/.

A similar system would have controlled farming in mediaeval Southwell and one remnant of this in the landscape is the ridge and furrow pattern resulting from centuries of ploughing in elongated strips. A 1940 aerial photograph of Southwell shows ridge and furrow in the fields alongside the Ropewalk inside the Burgage Manor (now hidden under modern housing).
Alongside the arable fields were pasture and meadows for livestock and within the Burgage Manor lay rich meadow land, especially alongside the Greet River. Areas of common grazing, such as the Burgage Green, were shared by smallholders and wealthier farmers, all strictly controlled by the manor court. This part of the old manorial court survived up to 1973 - house holders surrounding the Green met annually in the kitchen of the Burgage Manor House under the direction of the Archbishop of York’s local steward to manage the Green and to rent to local farmers the ‘rights of herbage’ – the grass and hay on the Green.

Haymaking on the Burgage Green
William Calverton’s 16th century farm on the Burgage.

Although the manorial records are missing we have some other clues to farming and farmers on the Burgage, the most important being the probate inventory of William Calverton, yeoman farmer of Southwell, who died in late 1566. Four trustworthy neighbours were given the task of drawing up an inventory of all his moveable chattels for the purposes of probate. From this inventory we learn that he cultivated over 80 acres of land where he grew barley, winter corn and peas and his livestock consisted of cattle, oxen, sheep, pigs, horses, ducks, geese and hens.

The main farm buildings were on the Burgage and in Easthorpe; their exact location is not recorded but a hall (farmhouse), kiln, beasthouses, yard and orchard were in a plot that extended down to the roadside in the Burgage – probably alongside the Green.

From the household contents we can roughly reconstruct the rooms in his house which was probably similar to the plan below.

![Ground floor plan of typical hall farmhouse](image)

We can follow the progress of William’s neighbours from the passageway of his house into a hall – this was the main room of the house which contained tables, chairs, benches, cupboards, dining and serving dishes, pots and pans (some of pewter). The parlour was usually a small room at the far end of the hall and provided a private more comfortable room for the family away from the bustle of servants and visitors in the main hall. William Calverton could afford wall hangings for both hall and parlour, silver spoons and a 40 piece pewter dining set – he was comfortably off.

The inventory goes on to record a feather bed and four additional bedsteads each with a mattress, sheets, blankets, pillows and bolsters – the parlour often doubled as a bedchamber but there may have been additional bedrooms upstairs.
The next rooms visited are not named but must be the working end of the house - kitchen, pantry, buttery for they contained cheese, salt, butter, tallow and grease, cooking utensils, fire spits and irons and a variety of tubs.

Heating was provided by an open fire in the hall burning wood and coal – in earlier times this would have been by a central hearth but by the mid-16th century someone of William’s status probably had installed one or more fireplaces with flue and chimney stack. A cooking fire and ovens would have been essential for kitchen use. Many early kitchens were separate from the main farmhouse because of the risk of fire but it is not clear how William’s kitchen was arranged.

Outside was a yard surrounded by barns, corn garners, beast houses, a kiln and an orchard. The kiln would have been used for corn drying but may also have been employed in the malting of barley for beer which was common practice at the time. Extensive palings and fencing are noted including some that extended down to the Burgage road side.

**Yeoman, Husbandman and Labourer**

William Calverton was a typical yeoman farmer, but most who worked on the land did so on a smaller scale – husbandmen working 10-15 acres and farm labourers who worked for the larger farms and struggled to supplement their wages on plots of 1-3 acres. Many of the craftsmen and traders in the town also had access to small plots of land for vegetables, pigs, hens and even a cow for milk.

One such was Robert Young, a clay pipe maker who lived on the Burgage in the 17th century. He appears in the 1674 Hearth Tax list for Southwell which records him living in the Burgage in a house with one chimney. He died in 1680 and his probate inventory records a modest cottage with a workshop for the manufacture of clay pipes with clay, moulds, clamps and kiln. In his yard was one cow, one heifer and a calf.

**The last two centuries**

The 18th and 19th century saw several businessmen based in the Burgage also doubling as farmers – Charles and John Walker both millers and maltsters and Thomas Elsam landlord of the White Swan.

In the early 1900s a Mr Brown ran a small holding somewhere on the Burgage selling a variety of livestock including Blue Andalusian chicks and eggs.

*Advert 1932 Nottingham Guardian*
Blue Andalusian Cockerel

The last farmer to rent the grazing rights on the Burgage Green was Mr C. Hall whose dairy supplied milk to Southwell - his dairy was located here, No 7 on the map. Mr Tom Fairholme worked at the dairy and is pictured on the Green in the 1970s just before the business closed.

*Mr Tom Fairholme with dairy cows on the Burgage Green 1970s*

The Burgage Green is now administered by Southwell Town Council but several of the householders around the Green keep a watchful eye. According to old manorial custom some of them, called toftsteaders, retain the right to graze livestock on the Green – so watch out for the occasional pig or cow when enjoying your picnic.
Sources

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NAO PR.SW. Probate Inventories of Robert Young 1680 and William Calverton 1566