

Henry and Alice Procter had two sons, James, the eldest child, and John, the youngest. Between them in age were five daughters. The family ran Wolfen Hall farm and the mill from 1718, and when Henry died in 1743 it seems that his sons were still partners.

The Derby Stewards' letters give a very interesting peep into the running of His Lordship's estates. Under the chief steward at Knowsley were other stewards. Around 1740 Henry Smith was steward at Preston, and under him was the agent for Chipping, at that time a Mr Slater, who had charge of the limekilns. There is a letter (LRO DDK 1640) dated 25th January 1746 from James Procter at Wolfen Hall Farm asking if he could enlarge his barn, at his own expense. The barn was 24 yards long but only just over 4 yards wide, and very low. Correspondence between Preston and Chipping shows that Mr Slater was having problems with his bookkeeping, and eventually his job was offered to James Procter. There is a letter of recommendation (9th December 1750, DDK 1644) from steward Henry Smith at Preston to his chief at Knowsley - "I find that James Procter understands the nature of managing the limekilns, is a man of very fair character and he has the reputation of being diligent in business and strictly honest". James was probably about 50 years old, and he seems to have given satisfactory service to the Derby Estate.

John Procter, James' younger brother, obtained leases of "Blackburn's" farm (1767) and "Dobson's", both on Saddle Fell and adjoining the Wolfen Hall land. Then in 1774 he and his wife Jane and their younger son Henry purchased some steep hillside fields at Saunder Rake, lower down the Chipping Brook. (LRO DDED uncatalogued deeds, Box1). This land was quite undeveloped, but the Procters must have realised its potential value as the site of a very big waterwheel. They built Saunder Rake House in 1777 but otherwise seem to have done little development, and sold out to William Bond in 1803 a few days before John Procter died. Within a few years the Saunder Rake factory was built and spinning cotton, until 1866 when it became "Tweedy's" foundry.

By about 1824 corn milling had ceased at Wolfen Mill and it was being used by Thomas Chew to make spindles, and in 1840 was run by the Dewhursts, who made spindles and flies for the cotton spinning machines.

With a short break around 1910, Procters continued to run Wolfen Hall Farm until about 1948, a period of 230 years. About ten years later it ceased to be a tenanted family farm. There was an old legend that the farm would last until its yew tree died, and this proved to be roughly true. The Derby estate planted a replacement, but that died also.



Mr John Procter (1862 - 1945) of Wolf House Farm. From the Preston Guardian, 11th July 1914.