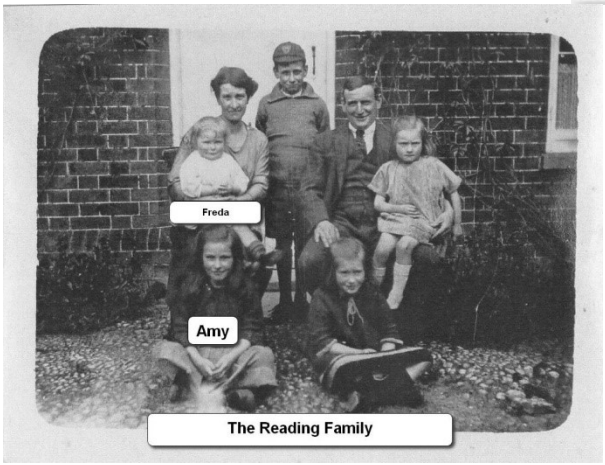
Swan Lodge (formerly Front Lodge photo c1981)

Sally Price whose mother Amy pictured below (The Reading Family) wrote about life at Swan lodge and recollections from her mother:

Excerpt from Sally Price about the Reading family at Swan Lodge (formerly Front Lodge) Hexgreave Park, Farnsfield.



My grandfather and his family lived in what is now known as Swan Lodge from about 1918 to after the second world war started. The Wilson family lived at the Hall during the time my family were there.

I identified Hilda and Freda on the Wesleyan School Photograph on your website. I have been researching The Reading family history for nearly 20 years now which has taken me from Warks. to Yorks. then to Farnsfield and finally Leics. Have found some very interesting information along the way and am now trying to pull it all together to pass on to my family and cousins.

I have an old photograph of what was Front Lodge when my grandparents lived there. On the photograph my mum, Amy, is the one sitting on the floor in front of her mother who is holding Freda.

My grandfather was working as a maltster for the Wilson family in Elland Yorkshire. He failed his medical for the first world war so was sent to work for another member of the Wilson family at Hexgreave Hall cutting pit props. The church baptisms register shows him recorded as a woodsman and later as a general labourer. The family moved into Front Lodge (Swan Lodge). No running water when they first moved there and outside (pan lavvy). All water had to be fetched with a cart from the nearest farm and drinking water with the use of a milkmaid's yoke and two buckets. My mother and her brothers and sisters said they had a very happy childhood there. They used to open the gates for the carriages to go up to The Hall. If a dinner party at The Hall had to be cancelled due to bad weather with no fridge freezers the food was distributed around the employees on the estate. So even with six children they were well fed. Apparently the chauffeur would always give the children a lift home if he saw them walking back home from school. The children earned a few pennies by selling conkers to the village children. Their mother gave them the milk can to put in the hedge on the way to school and they then went to the farm on the way back to have it filled. We always loved hearing the stories of Hexgreave and Farnsfield.

The Reading family are recorded on the 1939 National Register. The eldest two, John Thomas and Amy (my mother) were both married by this time and living elsewhere. Edith is visiting and her name is changed on the register when she married in 1940.

My mum married a Leicestershire man at St Michael's Church in Farnsfield in 1938, whom she met whilst nursing at Bosworth Hall. The family followed her in 1942 when the youngest child had finished school. Looking back at some of my notes from the stories my aunts told me:

Grandma liked to play cricket for the ladies' team when Farnsfield had a get together. She could whack the ball but had to have a runner.

My youngest aunt was employed at Lower Hexgreave (before she joined the ATS) by Mrs Jean Wills. (The Wills lived at Lower Hexgreave). She was the daughter of the Queen Mother's sister. I don't know how long they were there but my Aunty Freda who left school in 1938 worked briefly for her helping with the housework before joining the ATS. Mrs Wills was expecting her second child at the time she told me. She was married to Major John Lycett Wills a member of the tobacco family. At Christmas the staff could choose from a present list then the purchases were made at an upmarket shop in Nottingham. She received a pair of kid gloves. Mrs Wills was a very nice lady to work for. That generation of my family have all passed on now so thought I would share some of their memories.

(c) Sally Price 2021

Swan Lodge entrance (L) and Hexgreave Hall (R)