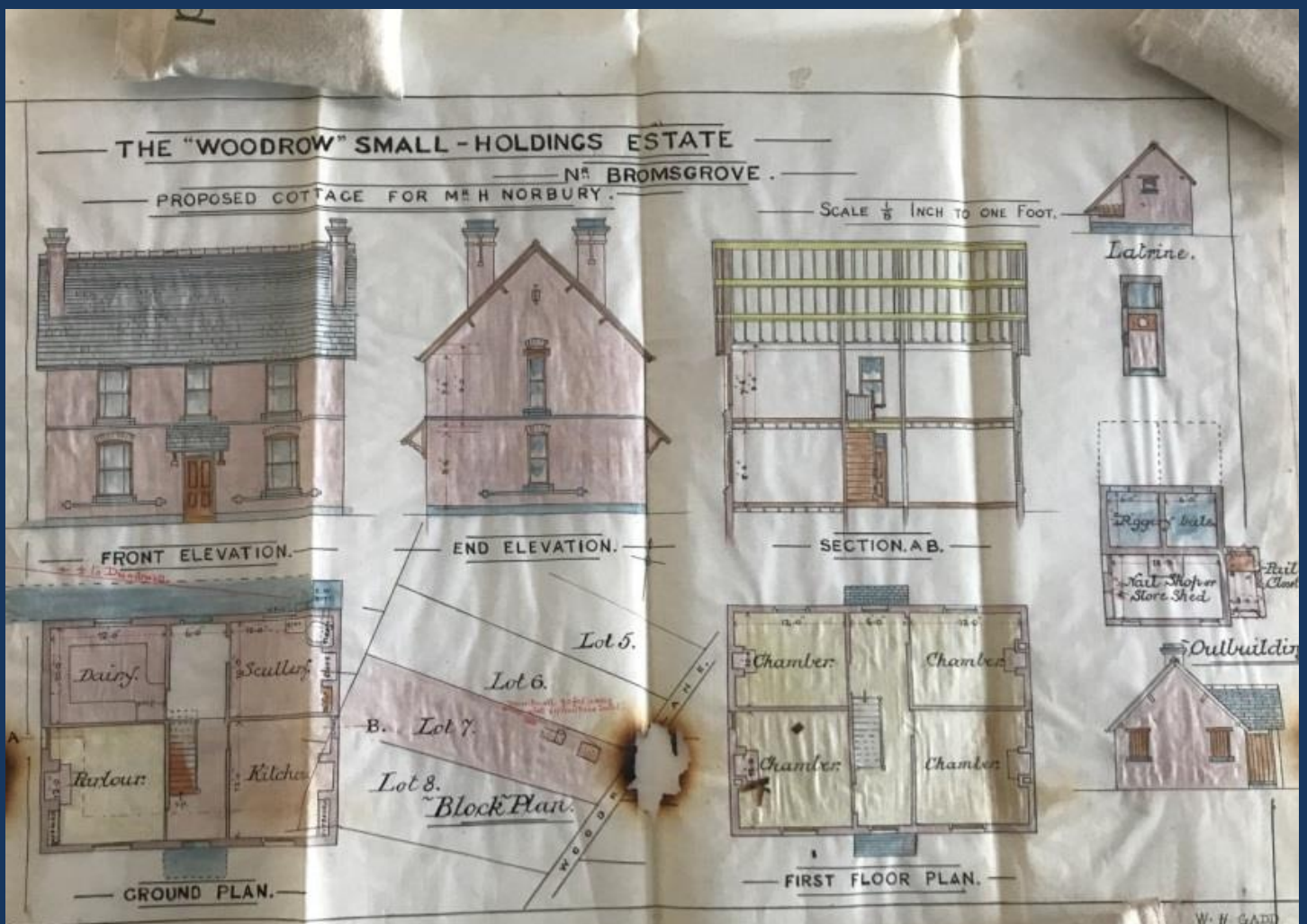


Case Study: Worcestershire's County Farms and Small Holdings

Published 2020 as part of NHPP7644 Adding a new layer:
20th-century non-domestic buildings and public places in
Worcestershire



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Published: Worcestershire County Council and Historic England 2020

Front Cover Image: Plan of Cottage Residence at the Woodrow Small Holdings Estate, Catshill for Mr H Norbury.

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Publication impeded until October 2020, due to the impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Adding a New Layer: 20th Century Non-Domestic Buildings and Public Places in Worcestershire Case Study

Worcestershire's county farms and smallholdings

The history of 'County' farms and smallholdings

The history of 'County' farms and smallholdings,¹ as owned by County and Local Authorities, can be traced back to the development of the Allotment and Small Holdings Movement in the first half of the 19th century. By the late 19th century a series of land reforms, most famously championed by Liberal MPs Joseph Chamberlain and Jesse Collings, encouraged the purchase of land by Local Authorities for all labourers who might desire them. Intended, amongst other things, to stem the decline of small farms and hence rural populations at a time of agricultural depression, the movement reached its peak in the first half of the 20th century when smallholdings were made available for servicemen returning from the Great War. From the 1930s they were promoted as a means of relieving long-term unemployment and encouraging good health and military fitness (Wade Martins 2006, 304). Farms and smallholdings owned and managed by Local Authorities remain important national and local assets, supporting wider economic and environmental objectives and providing a mechanism within which farmers, and in particular young farmers, can progress up the farming ladder. Despite this, the future of many farms and smallholdings owned by Local Authorities remains uncertain, with a recent Who Owns England Report², dated June 8th 2018, revealing that County Farms in England have halved in number during the last 40 years, reflecting a more general decline in small-scale farming enterprises.

¹ The spelling of 'smallholdings' follows modern convention, whereas the historic documents referred to in the text often use the spelling 'Small Holdings'.

² Shrubsole, G. 2018. *How the extent of County Farms has halved in 40 years*. Who Owns England. <https://whoownsengland.org/2018/06/08/how-the-extent-of-county-farms-has-halved-in-40-years/>. Accessed June 2018.

The 1892 Small Holdings Act gave Local Authorities new powers to purchase land for smallholdings, as distinct from Allotments, that could be *'sold by hire-purchase to the occupants with one fifth of the purchase price to be paid as a down payment and the balance over a number of years'* (Wade Martins 2006, 305). A 'Small Holding' was defined for the purposes of the Act as *'land acquired by the council under the powers and purposes of the Act, and which exceeds one acre and either does not exceed fifty acres, or, if exceeding fifty acres, is of an annual value for the purposes of the income tax not exceeding fifty pounds'* (Part 1 of the Small Holdings Act 1892).³

It was noted in 1913, by Dyke Acland, that many County Councils were reluctant to take up these new legislative powers. A further Act – *The Small Holdings and Allotment Act* – was enacted in 1908, repealing and consolidating the earlier legislation and, amongst other things, giving Local Authorities the power to compulsorily purchase land for use as allotments and smallholdings and compelling them to prepare draft schemes, for consideration by the Board of Agriculture, of the number, nature and size of holdings to be provided; *'In those counties where comparatively little has been done the Councils themselves are often apathetic, if not actually hostile to the working of the Act. The opinion of the County Council is in most cases a faithful reflex of the opinion of the landowner and the large farmer'* (Dyke Acland, 1913, 219).

Worcestershire County Council is recognised by Collings (1906, 213) as being at the forefront of 'Small Holding development': *'This was the case in Worcestershire, where the County Council have put the Act in force with unqualified success.'* Worcester is also noted, in The Times (1913) *The Land and the People*, along with Norfolk, Cambridge, the Isle of Ely, Lincolnshire, Somerset and Huntingdon, as being one of the counties which has made the most use of the Acts; the chief reasons being 'the lead given by energetic individuals who believe in the principle of Small Holdings and the previous prevalence of Small Holdings in the same districts' (The Times, 1913, 73).

³ Small Holdings Act 1892. Delivered by the National Archives on behalf of HM Government. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/55-56/31/contents>. Accessed December 2018.

The Worcestershire County Council Small Holdings Committee

The minute books of the *Small Holdings Committee*, held by the Worcestershire Archives and Archaeology Service, reveal that the Worcestershire County Council Small Holdings Committee was set up on the 12th December 1892. Their first Committee meeting was held on Saturday 31st December; Mr. John William Willis-Bund was elected as chairman. By the 18th September 1893, the board had already received their first petitions for land from the Lickey Electoral Division and Southern and Evesham Electoral Division.

Woodrow Farm

By the 28th October, the Committee was moving forward with plans to acquire land in the Lickey Electoral Division (the acquisition of land in the Southern and Evesham Division had been postponed) and by the 30th December, they were looking at purchasing a portion of Woodrow Farm in Catshill, which is documented at the time, as being 123 acres, 0 roods and 32 perches.

Minute 18, dated 30th December, 1893 of the Minutes of the Small Holdings Committee Vol. 1

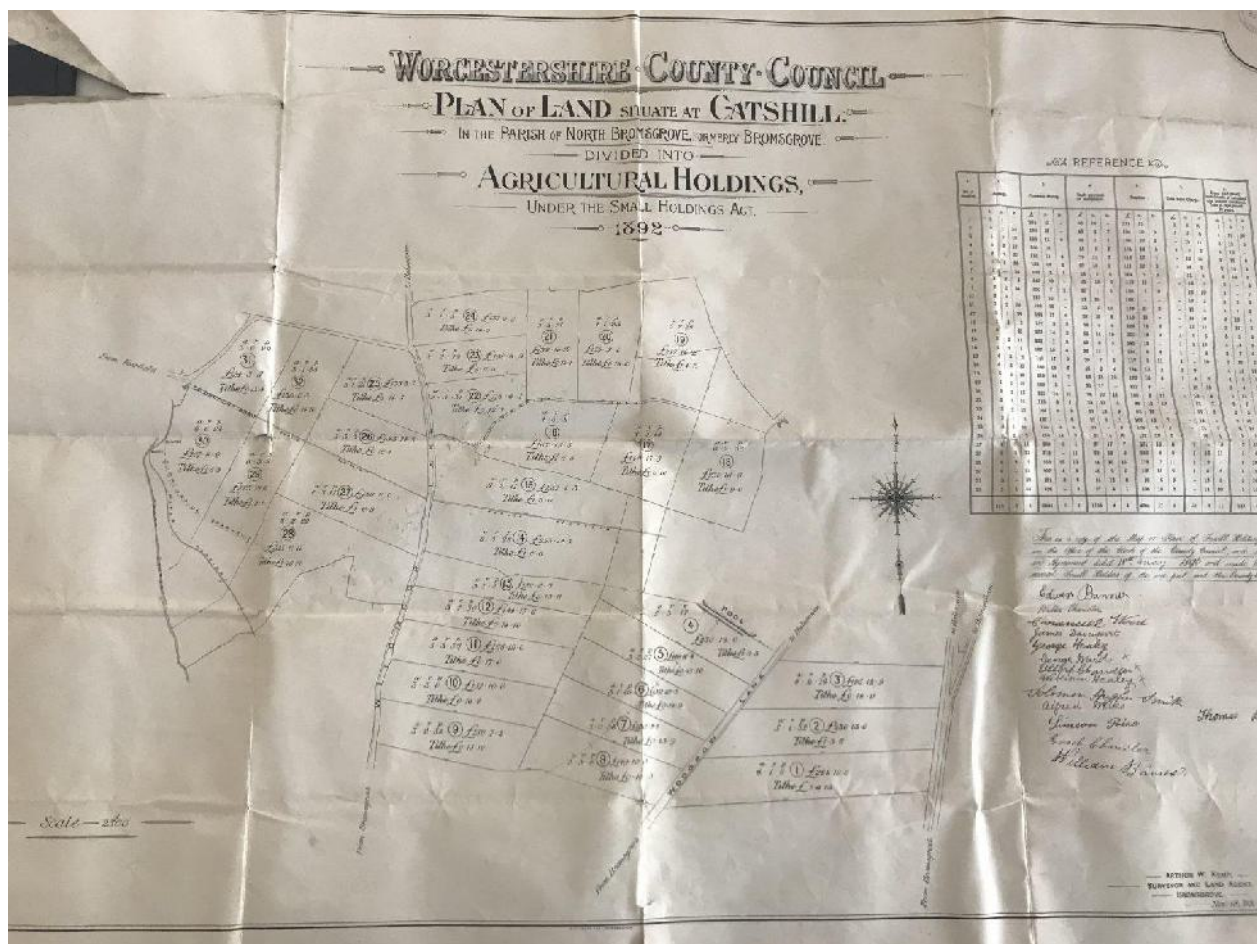
Small Holdings

Lickey Electoral Division

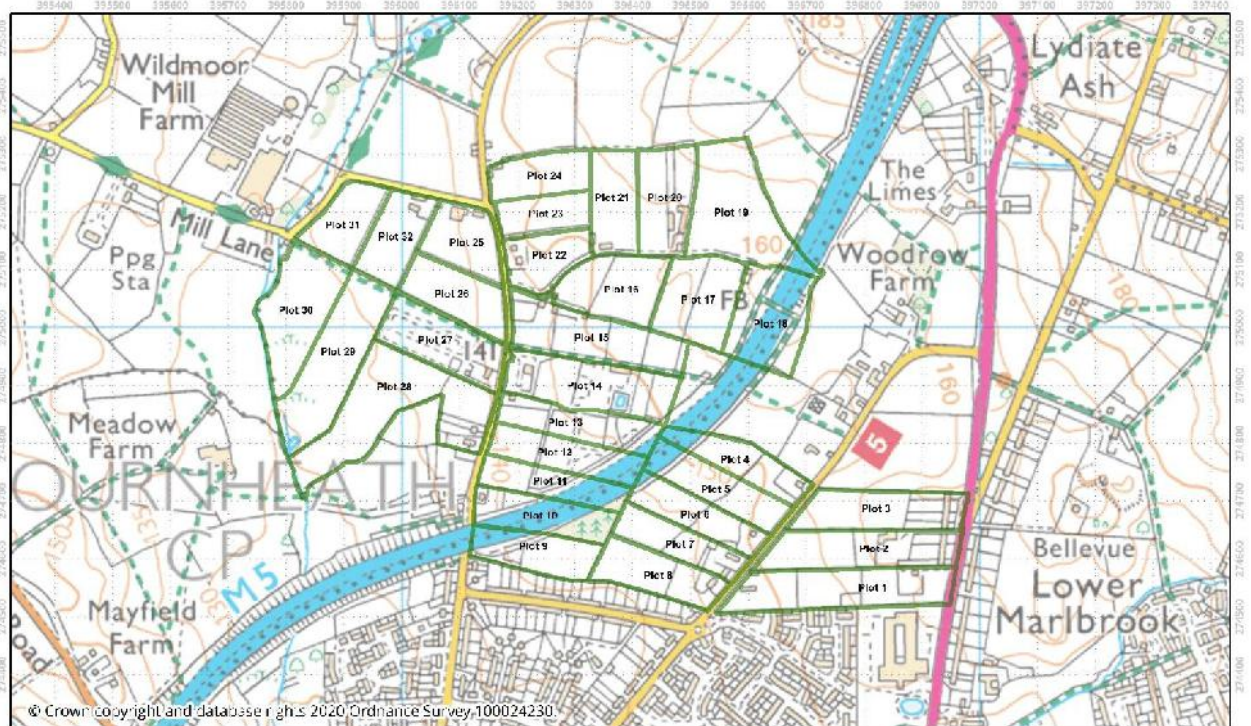
Mr Ernest James Bigwood of this Committee made a verbal report to the Meeting as to the inquiries made by him in accordance with Minute No.13 as to the possibility of acquiring land for Small Holdings in the Lickey Electoral Division; and the Meeting resolved that it be referred to Mr James Best, Mr Robert Woodward and the said Ernest James Bigwood to inspect a portion of the Woodrow Farm situate in the Parish of Bromsgrove – containing in the whole by admeasurement 123^a. 0^r. 32^p or thereabouts; and to negotiate with Mr Matthias Rollason of No. 186 Camden Street, Birmingham, the owner thereof for the acquisition of the same, if suitable, at a price not exceeding £34 per acre, for the purpose of providing Small Holdings, with power to enter into a conditional arrangement for the purchase of the said land subject to the approval of this Committee and of the Council.

By this point, the Committee had received more petitions for land from the Lickey Electoral Division as well as from Kings Norton and Hallow North. All were postponed; it appears that the Committee was taking a slightly cautious approach, focusing on Woodrow Farm as a 'pilot' before committing to the more widespread acquisition of land. By the 10th February 1894 the Committee recommended that the Council put into action Part 1 of the Small Holdings Act and purchase the land at Woodrow Farm (now noted as 147 acres, 0 roods and 22 perches), at £33 per acre, including timber. On 5th January 1895, the Committee agreed to the appointment of Land Agent Arthur W Kemp for the purpose of advising and reporting to the Committee on the division and fencing of land and the making of roads. Kemp was also charged with preparing a plan of the property. By 30th March the Committee had received Kemp's report which concluded that the boundary and inner fences were in unsatisfactory condition and timbers of little importance. In dividing up the estate, particular attention was given to layout, so as to ensure that

each holding had a road frontage. Kemp's report also noted that there were no ponds or present means of obtaining water. The 32 holdings varied in size from 2¾ acres to 7 acres and were to be divided by continuous iron fencing. The total cost of proposed works was estimated at £1,300 (£750 without the fencing).



The above plan of land, situate at Catshill in the Parish of North Bromsgrove, divided into Agricultural Holdings under the Small Holdings Act, 1892, was drawn up by Arthur William Kemp and approved by the Worcestershire County Council Small Holdings Committee on 9th December 1895. At the same meeting a table, again drawn up by Mr A W Kemp, fixing the purchase money of each Small Holding, was also approved.

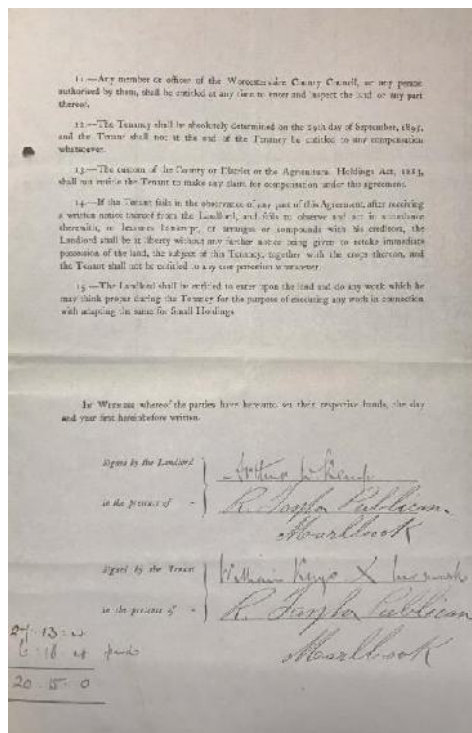
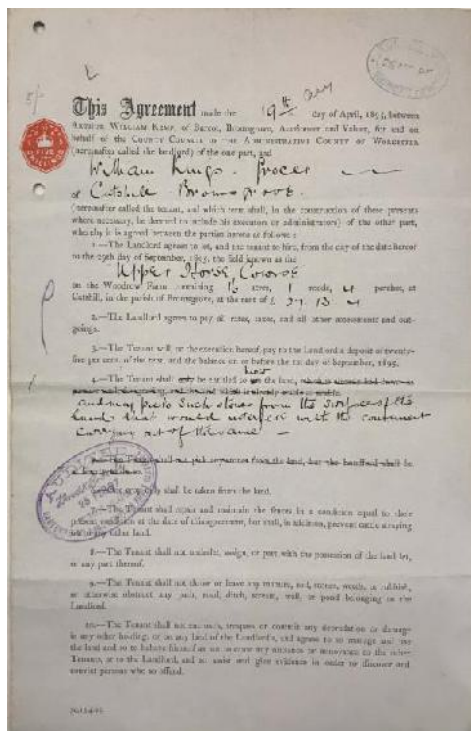


This transcribed plan of land situate at Catshill, divided into Agricultural Holdings under the Small Holdings Act 1892, emphasises how the Woodrow Farm Small Holdings Estate coalesces into a settlement; a planned unit similar in character to the Model Chartist Settlement in Dodford. With the exception of those smallholdings impacted by the construction of the M5, plot boundaries remain coherent.

On 5th January the Committee also authorised the temporary letting of the Small Holdings to suitable tenants. A Committee entry, dated 27th April 1895, reports that ‘in accordance with minute No. 48 we attended on April 5th with Mr Thornely and Mr Kemp at Lickey End and effected the following lettings until September 29th

	Name of the Tenant	Residence	Name of Field	State	Acreage (a. r. p)	Rent from 19th April to 29th Sept 1895 (£. s. d)
1	William Birmer	Wildmoor, Catshill	Thirstly Meadow (and part of Rye	Pasture and arable	7. 2. 7	11. 6. 4

			Hills)			
2	Enoch Chandler	Catshill	Long Meadow	Pasture	9. 2. 29	8. 9. 5
3	James Davenport	Catshill	Blickfield (part)	Arable	5. 0. 3	8. 15. 8
4	Abel Gould	Wildmoor, Catshill	Blickfield (part)	do.	2. 0. 0	3. 10. 0
5	Thomas Hunt	Bourneheath	Blickfield (part)	do.	1. 3. 20	3. 5. 7
6	Nehemiah Juggins	Catshill	Blickfield (part)	do.	3.0.9	5.6.11
7	William Kings (Grocer)	Catshill	Lamp Pasture and Middle Fie	do.	27.1.25	30.3.0
8	do.	do.	Upper House Course	do.	16.1.4	27.13.4
9	Simeon Price	Littlemoor Farm (Catshill)	Oak Leasow	do.	16.3.0	35.3.6
10	Solomon Smith	Wildmoor, Catshill	Blickfield (part)	do.	2.0.2	3.10.5
11	Alfred Wilkes	Catshill	Barn Close	Pasture	14.0.13	28.3.3
Total					105. 2. 32	165.7.5



One of eleven original signed tenancy agreements held by the Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service.

By December 1895 plans were in place for longer term tenancies. Tenants were expected to pay one fifth of the purchase price upfront, with the remaining 80% of the purchase price paid off over a period of 40 years. By 18th January 1896 the Committee reported that they had so far received 14 applications. By 25th April 1896 the Committee minutes list the successful applicants for all 32 plots. The table below references the successful applicants for plots 1 through to 32, noted in the Minutes of the Small Holdings Committee Vol. 1.

No. of Small Holding	Name of Small Holder	Address	Terms upon which purchased
1	Watts, Walter	Catshill, Bromsgrove	Complete at once.
2	Waldron, Ambrose	Catshill, Bromsgrove	do.
3	Crump, Charles	Lickey Rock, Nr. Bromsgrove	do.
4	Powell, James	Little Catshill, Bromsgrove	do.
5	Powell, James	Little Catshill, Bromsgrove	Tenant until 29 September 1896 when undertakes to complete

			purchase.
6	Rutter, Edwin	Marlbrook, Nr. Bromsgrove	Complete at once.
7	Norbury, Hezekiah	Catshill, Bromsgrove	do.
8	Jelfs, Edwin	Little Catshill, Bromsgrove	do.
9	Juggins, Walter James	Leatshill, Bromsgrove	do.
10	Moor, George	Little Catshill, Bromsgrove	do.
11	Price, Simeon	Wildmoor Farm, Catshill, do.	do.
12	Price, Simeon	do. do.	Tenant until 29 September 1896 when undertakes to complete purchase.
13	Banner, George	Golden ?, Little Catshill	do.
14	Stokes, Thomas	Post Office, Catshill	Complete at once
15	Wilkes, Alfred	Little Catshill, Bromsgrove	do.
16	Wood, Emmanuel	Royal Oak Inn, Catshill	Tenant until 29 September 1896 when undertakes to complete purchase.
17	Ward, George, [Catshill]	Catshill, Bromsgrove	do.
18	Healey, William	Catshill, Bromsgrove	do.
19	Healey, William	Catshill, Bromsgrove	do.
20	Chandler, Enoch	Woodrow Lane, Catshill	do.
21	Banner, Edwin	Little Catshill, Bromsgrove	do.
22	Davenport, James	Catshill, Bromsgrove	do.
23	Chandler, Albert	Catshill, Bromsgrove	do.
24	Chandler, Walter	Woodrow Lane, Catshill	do.
25	Waldron, Benjamin	Wildmoor, Bromsgrove	do.
26	Wilks, Alfred	Little Catshill, Bromsgrove	Tenant until 29 September 1896 when undertakes to complete purchase.
27	Price, Simeon	Wildmoor Farm, Catshill	do.
28	Burton, Thomas	Bournheath, Bromsgrove	do.
29	Healey, George	Little Catshill, Bromsgrove	do.
30	Waldron, Benjamin		Tenant until 29 September 1896 when undertakes to complete purchase.
31	Smith, Solomon	Wildmoor, Bromsgrove	Tenant until 29 September 1896 when undertakes to complete purchase.

32	Binner	Wildmoor, Bromsgrove	
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The minutes also note that the Clerk of the Council submitted to the Meeting: *a letter dated 1st April 1896 received by him from Mr Walter Watts of Catshill asking whether the County Council would allow him to sublet part of Lot No. 1 on the Woodrow Farm Estate to Mr William King as it is more than he can manage at the present time, and his reply thereto dated 15th April 1896 to the following effect that the County Council would consent to his subletting a portion, not exceeding one half of the Small Holding No. 1, to Mr. King, and further that the County Council would require Mr. King to enter into an Agreement of a form approved by them with Mr Walter Watts and that the Council would retain the power (if they think necessary at any time upon giving three months' notice from any date) to withdraw their consent to the portion of the Small Holding above mentioned being sub-let.*

Petitions for land by Electoral Divisions across Worcestershire

The successful acquisition of land at Woodrow Farm for the purpose of smallholdings encouraged petitions for land by Electoral Divisions across Worcestershire. The Minutes of the Small Holdings Committee references all such petitions and provides details of land acquired and tenancies approved.

A petition to the Chairman and Members of the Worcestershire County Council Small Holdings Committee, signed by 34 persons, minuted at a 'special' meeting on Monday 11th June 1906 to discuss the proposed purchase of Hathaway's Manor Farm, Littleton for the purposes of Small Holdings.

We the undersigned, being householders in the Parish of Littleton, Worcestershire, and desirous of hiring land for Small Holdings under the provisions of the Small Holdings Act 1892, respectfully apply to you to purchase the Farm known as Hathaway's Manor Farm of 86 acres, situate in Littleton which is to be offered for sale on June 11 next. We believe the land to be well suited for Small Holdings and we are individually well acquainted with it and desirous to hire it for Small Holdings which we are experienced in the management of, and have capital sufficient to work such land as we may be able to hire. We [append] our names together with the quantity of land that each of us is desirous to hire, and we estimate that taking it all round the land is worth the annual rent of about fifty-five shillings per acre, some portions of it more and some less, and this rate exclusive of rates and taxes we are prepared to pay for such portions as we may be able to hire, this [sum]. Dated May 24th 1906.

Smith (1946, cited in Prince 2012) notes how small, localised concentrations of 'County Farms and Small Holdings' owned by Local Authorities occurred where intensive and specialised farming methods flourished – including those specialising in vegetables, small fruit, poultry and pig breeding – and in those landscapes driven by the changing consumer demands of urban centres, particularly those better connected to their rural hinterland by the advancement of the railway network. Concentrations are noted in the Market Gardening and Fruit Growing landscapes of the Vale of Evesham. The Minutes of the Small Holdings Committee also records concentrations in the North East of the County, likely due to its close proximity to growing urban populations in Birmingham and the Black Country, and around Wyre Forest, where small-scale farming developed in correlation with the development of rural industries from the 17th century, and fruit growing, which boomed during the 19th century (Lake, Hathaway and Robson-Glyde, 2014, 2).

The market-gardening and fruit-growing district of the Vale of Evesham, occupying the Worcestershire section of the Avon Valley, is unique among agricultural regions of Great Britain. It is a major fruit-growing area of Britain; its orchards at blossom time draw sightseers from all over the Midlands. It is the leading asparagus growing area in the country, the second sprout-growing area and important producer of crops ranging from radishes to gilliflowers, from leeks to loganberries. In terms of aggregate human and mechanical power applied per unit area it is probably one of the most intensively cultivated spots on the earth's surface. Most important of all it is home to one of the most vigorous and flourishing small holding communities in the British Isles (Buchanan, 1948, 235).

In his article *Small Holdings and Allotments in Worcestershire*, S Thornely (1904) draws attention to the fact that Catshill was historically a centre of the nail-making industry. Many people found themselves unemployed with the development of industrial-scale nail manufacture, towards the end of the 19th century and the need for smallholdings was brought to the attention of the County Council by means of petition, as required by the 1892 Small Holdings Act. Thornley describes how many of the men previously had allotments so had some knowledge of the proper cultivation of the land. Catshill's proximity to Birmingham is also mentioned as a positive attribute for the development of a Small Holding community.

Building Schemes

Many smallholdings were developed as bare land – land without the provision of buildings – but building schemes were arranged as part of some smallholdings developments, including at the Woodrow Farm Small Holdings Estate in Catshill. It was felt that the erection of buildings would increase rental value and make for a more secure investment. A smallholder could apply to the County Council for a sum of money to be advanced to him to enable him to build. The smallholder was responsible for forwarding to the Clerk of the Council plans and specifications, to be submitted to the County Surveyor and the County Medical Officer. With the approval of the two Officers, the Council, on the recommendation of the Small Holdings Committee, could then advance up to three-fourths or 75% of the actual

contract price of the approved build (Thornely, 1904, 5). Very good houses are described as consisting of a good kitchen and living room with a back kitchen and larder and three good bedrooms and necessary out-buildings including stable, tool house, copper for boiling pig food, and generally two pigsties (Thornely, 1904, 5).

Map regression indicates that ten out of the 32 smallholdings on the Woodrow Farm Estate were developed with building schemes – Plots 1, 4, 6, 7, 18, 20, 21, 25, 28 and 32. The archives held by Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service contain Specifications and Plans associated with the erection of some of these cottage residences, all of which appear to survive, albeit sometimes in an altered or extended state.



Plan of cottage residence, plus ancillary buildings including a coach house, stables and pig sty, at the Woodrow Farm Small Holdings Estate (Plot 25), for Mr B. Waldron. Although extant it was not possible to obtain photographs of this residence during field survey. Surrounded by construction fencing the building, which was last sold in 2019, appears to be undergoing renovation.



Plan of cottage residence at the Woodrow Farm Small Holdings Estate (Plot 7), for Mr H. Norbury.



Extended cottage residence at Plot 7 of the Woodrow Farm Small Holdings Estate.

The *Specifications for Works* required and materials applied in the erection of cottage residences associated with the Woodrow Farm Small Holdings Estate are detailed documents which outline the preliminaries of construction – a description of a project that allows the contractors (excavators, bricklayers, carpenters, joiners, plumbers, glaziers, iron founders and painters) to assess potential costs – plus more

prescriptive descriptions of the dimensions, construction, workmanship and materials.

The following extract is from a Specification for Works required to be done and Materials supplied in the erection of a Cottage Residence, at Catshill Small Holdings, for Mr W. Watts [Plot 1].

Cement	<i>All cement to be used to be best London Portland from a proper and approved establishment and mixed with equal quantity of sand, and any cement which shall be found to be overburdened shall be confiscated at the sole cost and loss of the Contractor – And all cement and mortar shall be protected from the weather –</i>
Bond	<i>Brickwork shall be executed in bond approved by the Architect with the bonds strictly preserved throughout, all headers shall be whole bricks, and every brick shall be full bedded and flushed up all round with mortar and no joint of brickwork shall exceed $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch –</i>
Joints	<i>All joints of brickwork exposed to view shall be worked fair and have the joints drawn in the neatest possible manner struck and double cut and the Contractor shall be required to make all joints and points same where they have been affected with weather – all quoins shall be carefully plumbed and truly built –</i>
Timber	<i>All the timber work shall be from selected well-seasoned of an approved brand and free from imperfections and the rates attached to items in quantities shall include all labour and requisites of every description that shall be required for Carpenter and Joiners work all timber framed where necessary and put together in the most substantial and workmanlike manner -</i>

Preliminaries

Mortar

All mortar used upon these works shall be composed of the very best quality and description of lias lime and clean sharp sand, mixed in proportion by admeasurement of 2 parts of unslacked lime to 3 equal and similar parts of sand – the whole of the mortar to be well and thoroughly burnt and mixed with a proper quantity of water and to be worked to as fine a degree of consistency as possible and no mortar which has become set or perished on any account shall be used or mixed in the mortar in the preparation of the same –



Cottage residence at Plot 1 of the Woodrow Farm Small Holdings Estate.



Cottage residences at Plots 28, 4, 21, 32, 20 and 18 of the Woodrow Farm Small Holdings Estate. The heritage of County Farms and Small Holdings, like all 20th-century heritage, has, up until now, been poorly represented on the County Historic Environment Record. Analysis of cottage residences associated with the Woodrow Farm Small Holding Estate suggests that many buildings arranged as part of Small Holding developments are likely to retain elements of their historic character and aesthetic. Cottages are more likely to survive with ancillary buildings either demolished or converted as part of an extension. Regrettably, none of the buildings that have been extended and/or altered appear to have been recommended for archaeological mitigation – i.e. building recording – and it appears likely that similar buildings, across the County, have been altered and/or demolished without any consideration of their historic development, significance and/or character.

The development and organisation of Small Holdings across Worcestershire

The Minutes of the Small Holdings Committee provides an incomparable understanding of the development and organisation of Small Holdings across Worcestershire, including information related to tenancies and the tenants themselves: 'Mr Rutters Small Holding (Plot 6) is reported as being badly cultivated and that the Small Holder had sublet his holding contrary to the terms and conditions of the let and that the house was in a dirty condition' (Minute dated 8th November 1902). The Minutes also offer a wonderful insight into more general rural affairs including land drainage, pest control and the depopulation of rural settlement. A Minute dated 23rd March 1901, for example, refers to the depopulation of the villages of Stock Wood and Stock Green where about 35 houses in the villages had been shut up for want of repair as a result of the landowner refusing to spend money on them.

Surprisingly the Minutes of the Small Holdings Committee make little mention of the outbreak of War in 1914. At the outbreak of War, British agriculture was still in an advanced state of depression, with more than 60% of food consumed sourced from overseas. It wasn't until 1917, when the country faced food shortages and even starvation as a result of Germany's unrestricted submarine warfare, that the Government took steps to increase home grown food production by guaranteeing prices for wheat and oats and by mobilising extra labour, most notably the Women's National Land Service Corps, prisoners of War and school children (Stamper 2017).

The first reference to the War, identified in the Minutes of the Small Holdings Committee, is mention of the Local Recruiting Officer (Captain L [C] Green) who had stated on several occasions that there were a large number of men in the south of the County, particularly among the smallholders, who were eligible for military service but whom he could not get to join. The proposed employment of German prisoners of war in the Evesham District is also considered in Minute 1570 (1916). Spinks (2018) references local concerns (in 1915, in the Evesham District) that agriculture would come to a standstill if more farm labourers and market gardeners were conscripted; and that the military authorities misunderstood the situation

believing 'the Small Holder' to be analogous with a factory worker (Spinks 2018, 47). The potential of using female labour also appears to have been raised in the Evesham District as early as 1915, although, as Spinks suggests, there appears to have been little initial support for the idea. By 1917 the Vale of Evesham was reliant on not only women's labour, but also child labour and German prisoners of war (Spinks 2018, 137).

The notion that smallholdings were seen as a way of rewarding returning soldiers (Wade Martin 2006, 304) is, however, demonstrated in Minutes from the summer of 1918 onwards. Minute 1647 deliberates the proposed purchase of land for discharged soldiers and a motion – agreed by 11 votes to 1 – to appoint a sub-committee to consider the suitability for colonisation by discharged soldiers of a certain farm. Demand certainly appears to have been high and by 9th August 1919 the new sub-committee had already held meetings in the Evesham, Worcester and Upton upon Severn Districts that had attracted 332 applicants, 313 of which had been interviewed and 270 provisionally approved.

By the summer of 1920 the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries had determined the funds available for each county for the training and resettlement of ex-servicemen, including disabled servicemen. The amount allocated to Worcestershire is referenced as £180,000, although as the Chairman states, the amount already spent or agreed to be spent in the purchase and equipment of land was already about £110,000 leaving only £70,000 for further acquisition and equipment (Minute 19, Land Settlement, dated 14th August, 1920.) Minute 1737, dated 5th July 1919, reveals that it wasn't just men petitioning for land; a letter from the Honorary Secretary of the Women's Agricultural Council reflected similar concerns from the wider women's movement in inter-war Britain.

Emerging pressures for post-war housing development in rural landscapes is also reflected in requests for land – in areas already acquired for Allotments and Small Holdings – from North Bromsgrove Urban District Council (Minute dated 10th August 1918) and Evesham Rural District Council (Minute dated 24th May 1919) respectively. In this case, both requests were met with an unenthusiastic response, with the Small Holdings Committee issuing the following reply to North Bromsgrove

Urban District Council: 'The County Council are of the opinion that not only is there other land available as building sites but that it would be unwise to build houses for the Working Classes on land acquired for allotment purposes'.

The table below records the acreage of land purchased for the development of smallholdings in Worcestershire pre and post-World War I.

Summary of Small Holdings 1908 – 19214

4th February 1922

Land Purchased

	acres	roods	perches	Cost (£)
PRE-WAR	1390	1	23	55,821
POST-WAR	2248	1	33	109,312
TOTAL	3638	3	16	165,133

Land Leased

	acres	roods	perches	Rent (£)
PRE-WAR	1133	1	37	1651
POST-WAR	74	0	5	260
TOTAL	1207	2	2	1911

Grand total of land purchased and leased – 4846 a. 1 r. 18 p.

Grand total of Holdings set out to Xmas 1921 – 1106

Grand total of Rent to be paid by Small Holders – £13202. 10. 4

Despite minor recoveries at the end of WWI a state of agricultural depression continued, exacerbated by the 1921 repeal of the 1920 Agriculture Act⁵ and the

⁴ Despite discrepancies all figures are as quoted in the original archival source.

⁵ Guaranteed minimum prices for wheat and oats, introduced as part of the 1917 Corn Production Act, were continued in a modified form by the 1920 Agriculture Act. Despite a clause – stating that four years notice would be given if Parliament intended to abolish the guaranteed prices – the Act was repealed, just before it came into effect (Whetham, E.H 'The Agriculture Act, 1920 and Its Repeal—the "Great Betrayal" in *The Agricultural History Review* Vol. 22, No. 1 (1974), pp 36-49 (accessed June 2020)).

1929 collapse of the US Stock Market, and the global economic depression which followed thereafter. Dairy farming did not suffer as badly as the arable and beef sectors and large swathes of land were returned to pasture for the production of milk and cheese. Under pressure from the Agricultural Labourers Union, the Worcestershire County Council Small Holdings Committee agreed a motion, for approval by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, to reduce rents, as of 29th September 1922, by between 15% and 33% (Minute, dated 4th November 1922).

Small Holdings and the Co-operative movement

The rise of the British Co-operative movement is acknowledged in Minute 1369, when the Chairman of the Small Holdings Committee reads a letter, dated 21st January 1914, received from the General Secretary of the Agricultural Organisation Society, stating that the 'Society exists for the purpose of advocating the principles of co-operation amongst agriculturalists and of giving advice and assistance at the formation and organisation of properly registered Co-operative Agricultural Societies'. The Committee agree a motion to supply the Secretary of the Agricultural Organisation Society with the required information or facilities to enable him to conduct a preliminary enquiry with a view to the promotion of co-operation amongst the various tenants of the Allotments and Small Holdings belonging to the council.

A particularly intriguing report, on the *Far Forest Small Holders and Far Forest Dairy Association*, sheds fascinating light into the history of Agricultural Co-operation amongst smallholders in Worcestershire. The report, dated 14th November 1908, records a meeting between members of the Small Holdings and Allotments Committee and the Far Forest Dairy Association, 16 of which are Small Holders (of which 10 are shareholders in the Association and the remaining six suppliers of milk to the Association).

The report describes Far Forest as being primarily a place of smallholdings. The Far Forest Dairy Association is recorded as having 90 members in total, 54 being defined as 'Small Holders' or 'Cottagers'; the Association is also described as being in possession of the Far Forest Dairy and Waterworks as well as a store on Long Bank, Bewdley Road, retail shops in Kidderminster and Bewdley and a village shop

at Far Forest⁶. It appears, from the report, that the meeting was held as part of an enquiry looking into a petition for a loan to replace the machinery and fixed plant at the waterworks, which is described as old fashioned and in need of replacing. The Dairy, reputed to be of benefit to both smallholders and the neighbourhood, is described as failing on account of the cheapness of raw milk in the summer, lessening the demand for sterilised, bottled milk. The Association contend that the erection of a new dairy and cheese making plant will benefit smallholders by regulating the supply chain and facilitating a profitable industry from the surplus milk.

Smallholdings, both in Worcestershire and nationally, reached their peak in the first quarter of the 20th century. The following table records the statistics submitted to the Small Holdings Committee by the County Land Agent, of the number of schemes carried out since 1908 and still in possession of the County Council at 31st December 1938. The total number of schemes carried out since 1908 is reported as being 143, of which 123, in 43 parishes, were still in the possession of the County Council.

⁶ *George Frederick Eyre, was a man of means (a member of the publishing firm of Eyre & Spottiswoode, official publishers of the Prayer Book). At his own expense he set up a farming co-operative, persuading 15 farmers to join him. He set up a dairy at Hedgwick House, adjoining the old vicarage, selling bottled milk, and also at Raven's Nest cottages at the top of Sugar's Lane. There was a shop in Kidderminster, one on Long Bank and also the Forest Stores to sell the produce. The Long Bank shop stocked all the requisites for smallholding, the seeds having the proprietary name of 'One for All'. Unfortunately, the Foresters were suspicious of any innovation and it was thought that the parson was doing very nicely for himself out of it and support was withdrawn.* Extract from Elliott, W. 2011. The History of Far Forest. Wyre Forest Study Group Annual Review. wyreforest.net/wp-content/uploads/Historical_Articles/2011-WE-History-of-Far-Forest_optimize.pdf (accessed June 2018).

Minute 1145 County Council Small Holding Schemes

10th June 1939

Land purchased and let to Small Holders	acres
Prior to December 1926	3926
Since December 1926	896
Sub Total	4822
Land leased and sublet to Small Holders	574
Total	5396

Number of Small Holdings	1254
Number of Tenants	1107
The Rents paid to lessors amount to £900 per annum	
The cost of land purchased	£186,000
Cost of equipment	£94,700
Rents paid by Small Holders	£12, 482
Other land purchased since 1908 and resold to Small Holders	453 acres
Number of Small Holders purchasing	178

As war approached in 1939, smallholders, like all farmers, were expected to produce more food. The War Agricultural Executive Committees (County War Ags) responded to the need for increased food production, in 1940–41, by surveying uncultivated land that could be bought back into cultivation. The Agricultural Returns as at 4th June 1941 showed that there were 2,536 holdings of between 1 and 5 acres and 1,704 between 5 and 15 acres, out of a total of 7790 holdings in Worcestershire (TNA: MAF 68/3995). This was followed by the more extensive National Farm Survey (1941–1943) which gathered a wide range of information on all farms, over 5 acres, in England and Wales. The 1947 Agriculture Act, although committing to the provision of publicly owned smallholdings as an integral part of British Agriculture, specified that the provision of smallholdings should be determined primarily by agricultural considerations rather than, as in the past, by social considerations (Small Holdings – First Report of the Small Holdings Advisory Council, 1949, 1).

Smallholdings were to be fully economic units and let to people with previous agricultural experience. Where provided, they were not to bring about a radical change in the general structure of the local agricultural industry. Existing estates were to be reviewed and where necessary re-organised so as to be capable of serving new Government Policy. *Part IV Small Holdings of the 1947 Agriculture Act* was brought into force in Worcestershire on 1st October 1949. Boosted by the pressure for post-war Rural Development, as evidenced in the Minutes by applications from the Rural and Urban District Councils for development land, what has followed since has been the gradual decline of the Worcestershire Small Holding Estate. In 1951, there were 2,368 holdings of between 1 and 5 acres and 1,905 holdings of between 5 and 15 acres, out of a total of 7625 holdings in Worcestershire (TNA: MAF68/4365). By 1956 the number had dropped to 2,153 holdings of between 1 and 5 acres and 1,826 holdings of between 5 and 15 acres, out of a total of 7,231 holdings (TNA: MAF68/4550).

Conclusion

A changing rural economy, recent pressures on local government to deliver savings through the sale of land and assets and current Government housing targets, which are leading to the large-scale review of Green Belt in the County, makes the study of the extent and significance of Worcestershire's County Farms and Small Holdings more crucial than ever before. A 2016 update on the Worcestershire County Council Small Holdings Strategy records that in 2006 the County Estate was 4255 acres, which included 247 acres of leased land (where the County Council was the tenant and then let the 247 acres on to farm tenants). By 2016 the 247 acres of leased land had been surrendered along with some 960 acres of the estate, generally to long-standing tenants. The report also states that as of March 2015 the average smallholding in Worcestershire was 37 acres, compared to a national average of 83 acres. It also considered the viability of holdings and made recommendations to create a more flexible estate by amalgamating smaller units, to secure business viability and efficiency.

Although the number of county farms and smallholdings has declined significantly since the mid-20th century, partly as a consequence of the amalgamation of very small units, the Worcestershire County Farm and Small Holding's Estate remains a

significant local and national asset. As well providing a mechanism for young and aspiring farmers to enter the industry. Crucial, given the general decline in small-scale farming enterprises, it also contributes to sustainable rural communities, biodiversity and landscape, including the historic landscape. As a county with a diverse farming landscape with areas traditionally dominated by high densities of small- to medium-scale farming enterprises, smallholdings have long been an integral part of the Worcestershire countryside; reflecting local traditions as well as national influences. Historically concentrated in distinct zones, in particular areas dominated by Market Gardening and Fruit Growing (e.g. the Evesham area) and areas profiting from industrialisation and transport developments during the 19th century (e.g. the Wyre Forest and Bromsgrove), some clusters of Small Holdings, including the 35 holdings that make up the current Worcestershire County Council Farm and Small Holding Estate (as of 2018) and the Woodrow Farm Small Holding Estate, have now been added to the Worcestershire Historic Environment Record. New records will also be added as part of the Market Gardening Heritage Project as part of its survey of surviving market gardening buildings, known locally as 'ovels'⁷.

The Worcestershire archives reflect how the Small Holdings Movement not only supported many rural communities through agricultural depression and the decline of 'traditional' rural industries, such as the nail industry in Bromsgrove; it also provided a mechanism to support the rehabilitation of many physically and psychologically injured soldiers returning from the Great War. Both developments reflect the national rise in social idealism and collective responsibility from the late 19th century as well as public investment in agriculture, health, welfare and education. The plans of cottage residences found within the Worcestershire archives indicates that the County Council, as well as providing bare land, was investing in fully-equipped smallholdings with existing or newly built residences and agricultural buildings, of 'vernacular' character, that not only had to meet stringent specifications, but also the approval of the County Surveyor and County Medical Officer.

⁷ *The Market Gardening Heritage Project is being run by Worcestershire Archive & Archaeology Service, in partnership with Cleeve Prior Heritage Trust, Vale Landscape Heritage Trust, Worcestershire Farmsteads Project and Cleeve Prior Parish Council, thanks to £68,700 of funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (HLF) and £5000 from Historic England.*

Extant cottage residences, associated with the Woodrow Farm Small Holding Estate, retain much of their historic character and aesthetic, despite the loss and/or conversion of ancillary buildings. None of the buildings extended and/or altered appear to have been recommended for archaeological mitigation – i.e. building recording, as part of planning consent. Although there is potential for similar extant smallholding developments elsewhere in the County, the probability of loss and/or alteration of buildings without consideration of their historic development, significance and/or character, is high. Many more buildings, as well as the smallholding landscapes, within which they inhabit, remain at risk of uninformed alteration and expansion, demolition and rural and peri-urban settlement expansion.⁸

As the amalgamation – as well as the development – of farmland intensifies, leading to the loss of hedgerow and plot boundaries, as well as other landscape features, the inherited character, and socio-economic history, of our local smallholding landscapes and rural socio-economic history risks being undermined, to great cost. As efficiency and economy of scale become ever more intensive driving factors in the farming economy, it should be remembered that ‘County Farms and Small Holdings’, as well as being a vital part of our cultural, social and economic landscape, can support a healthier, greener and more sustainable 21st-century Worcestershire.

⁸ Where opportunities arise The Worcestershire Farmsteads Project – in collaboration with WAAS – is looking to record buildings associated with historic Small Holding activity (see report for Badsey Forge, WAAS: 899:1944 BA16101/2/16). As part of this project all current tenants of the Worcestershire County Council Farm and Small Holding Estate were invited to get in touch with WFP to discuss research and recording.

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Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Alan Wadsworth, Project Leader of the Worcestershire Farmsteads Project, who has given his time so generously in the pursuit of archive material and information. Jeremy Lake provided further comments and references. Thanks also to Chris Crump, of Worcestershire Archaeology, and staff at Worcestershire Archives for their help and support throughout the course of this case study.

Photographs

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