

20th-century heritage in Worcestershire: Future Work and Research Priorities

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20th-century non-domestic buildings and public places in
Worcestershire



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

Future Work and Research Priorities

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1. Introduction

This short report sets out a strategy for research on 20th-century heritage in Worcestershire, setting it within a national context and so offering some thoughts on how this could be developed in other areas and counties. It summarises the key questions that have arisen from recent work on 20th-century non-domestic buildings and public places in Worcestershire. In exploring avenues and priorities for future research, this strategy will aim to promote a deeper level of understanding of 20th-century heritage across the county, within both its local and national context.

20th-century heritage forms a significant layer of our history, yet despite increasing awareness and conservation interest, particularly with regards to pre-WWI and inter-war architecture and military heritage, many 20th-century buildings and landscapes are at risk because of neglect or lack of management, insensitive change or demolition. A lack of proactive identification and recognition of the *wider* range of 20th-century heritage, combined with poor mechanisms for its protection and maintenance and an absence of research frameworks to drive understanding has led to the loss, with no or limited record, of many interesting and locally significant heritage assets, others remain at risk of demolition as settlements across the county are re-developed.

2. Existing Framework

Research Frameworks can help to co-ordinate and prioritise areas of research, as well as promote cross-sector collaboration, by providing an overview of current understanding and by identifying gaps in knowledge. Generally organised by geographical area or theme, Archaeological Research Frameworks have sought to integrate archaeology, the historic built environment and landscape, to variable degrees of success.

Although 20th-century heritage is becoming more widely accepted as an area of academic study and research, its inclusion in England's Regional Research Frameworks has historically been limited, with the North East's *Shared Visions* (Petts and Gerrard 2006) the only regional framework to give it equal consideration.

Historic England is co-ordinating the development of a new generation of wiki-style research frameworks that encompass the whole of the historic environment, and include the result of the recent HistBeke (Historic Built Environment Knowledge Exchange) project.¹ As of 2020, the research frameworks of the North East, North West, South Yorkshire and East of England – are in the process of being updated, with drafts, summaries and priorities accessible online. It is planned that these and others will be accessed, and then commented upon, enhanced and adapted, via the [OASIS website](#).

At present, no review date has been set for the 2011 West Midlands Research Framework for Archaeology, which includes a paper by Paul Belford on 20th-century archaeology ('The archaeology of everything') and draws on papers presented at a series of seminars in 2002 and 2003, although reviewed regional assessments for the Romano-British (White and Hodder eds., 2018) and later Prehistory (Hurst ed., 2017) periods have been recently published.

With increasing recognition of the conservation and academic value of the recent past in its local context – including its archaeology, built environment and landscapes – there is an expectation that 20th-century heritage will be more comprehensively accepted as part of any updated Regional Research Framework. The updated North East Regional Research Framework certainly builds on its 2006 framework, identifying additional key areas for research. The North West Regional Research Framework has also actively promoted the research of later heritage through an update to its *Archaeological Resource Assessment of the Industrial and 20th-century period* as well as its first iteration

¹ <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/support-and-collaboration/research-frameworks-typologies/research-frameworks/>

of a multi-period *Resource Assessment for Historic Buildings and Designed Landscapes*.

The 2019 multi-disciplinary, wiki style, Scottish Archaeological Research Framework, which highlights key research questions both nationally and within different geographical regions, also reviews the modern period, with research recommendations for the period subdivided into high level, strategic themes, which aim to negate too vague or narrow a direction as well as entrenched divisions between research traditions.

While the 2011 West Midlands Research Framework recognises the value of the archaeology of the recent past, it outlines a framework that groups together the archaeology of the last 500 years - the Post Medieval (c.1500-1750), Industrial (c.1750-1900) and Modern (c.1900+) - under the four thematic groups of Capitalism, Industrialisation, Consumption and Globalisation. Buildings remain detached from their wider archaeological context, reflecting the cultural divide between archaeological advisors and Conservation Officers (Pye Tait, 2014). This divide is recognised in the 2007 Worcester Urban Archaeological Strategy which encourages continuing liaison and information exchange between archaeological and building conservation professionals, the production of a dedicated all-period resource assessment and research framework for the built environment and the continuing promotion of the built heritage to community and heritage groups (WCC 2007, 117).

3. Research Priorities for Worcestershire

This section comprises an agenda for future research, set out as a series of questions which cover the whole theme of 20th-century heritage and then the topic headings. These match the format used for setting out our understanding of heritage assets and their significance in a national context (*20th-century Buildings and Public Places: a framework for assessment*) as well as at a county level (*20th-century non-domestic buildings and public places in Worcestershire*). As with all **research agendas**, there are **research tasks** that we would like to

undertake ourselves and in partnership with other groups across the county. These are not set out in detail, but in summary would include:

- Oral history including memories of how places have changed.
- Survey and investigation of buildings.

The research priorities have been divided into questions for **key themes**, these extending across and between topics, and questions for key topics.

3.1 Key Themes

A) Historic development

1. **Patterns of change.** What is the pattern and morphology of pre-war, inter-war and post-war development, of different types, across Worcestershire? How do they relate to each other?
2. **Drivers of change.** To what extent were changes driven by national need or local change?
3. **Time depth.** How does 20th-century heritage relate to the historic development of landscape, as mapped by Historic Landscape Characterisation? Can this help to tell us to what extent places of the recent past have been created afresh or adapted, with retained elements of earlier places?
4. **Design context.** To what extent does 20th-century built heritage in Worcestershire reflect wider national and international developments in architectural form and design?
5. **Social values.** How are changing social values – in social class, the role of families and in the places of women and children in society - reflected in different types of buildings and places, and how they have developed over time?

6. **Identity.** How do different styles of buildings, and the elements that make up places, reflect the identities of different groups in society? What is the evidence for these being driven by local communities, developed out of national movements (such as religious revival or political organisation) or both? To what extent is 'hidden archaeology' – the archaeology of individuals and groups whose activities have been unrecognised, unauthorised or illegal until recent decades, including queer archaeology – invigorating a reconstruction and reinterpretation of 20th-century buildings and places?
7. **Globalisation, industrialisation and technology.** What is the evidence for social, technological and industrial change as shaped by international developments, from Britain's place as the epicentre of the Empire to the development of international trading systems?
8. **Consumerism.** The changing shape of consumer society and its influence on all aspects of life and landscape 'is one of the defining characteristics of the age'² – from shops and shopping to the way in which increased leisure time and new technologies have enabled access to places for leisure and recreation. Can we define different types of places and landscape whose character has been created or shaped by different types of consumer behaviour?
9. **Government.** National and local government legislation and policy has also reached into many aspects of life and landscapes, from the protection afforded to nature and heritage to large-scale strategic planning. For example, to what extent were strategic plans for post-war development in Worcestershire, including the 1946 Minoprio and Spencely Masterplan for Worcester City adopted? How has this impacted later 20th and 21st Century development across the county?
10. **Migration, integration and multi-culturalism.** What evidence is there in the built environment for the construction, use and adaptation of 20th-century immigrants from the British Empire and other parts of the world?

² Belford in Watt 2011, 229

What are the similarities and differences? Does the evidence change from one of adaptation to the creation of new buildings and places, notably places of worship but also including shops and restaurants?

11. ***Rural labour.*** What is the evidence for transient labour in rural areas and where is it from?
12. ***Disability.*** How and when have buildings and places been adapted, and how successfully, to suit the needs of people with disabilities or additional needs?

B) Recording and conservation

13. To what extent have 20th-century buildings of different dates and types, demolished or re-developed in Worcestershire, since the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework in 2012, been preserved through building recording mitigation?
14. How effective is the protection offered to 20th-century heritage by national designation and policies to protect heritage through Local Listing and Neighbourhood Development Plans?
15. To what extent do local communities recognise 20th-century heritage, and their different dates and types, as positive or negative features of the wider landscape?
16. Which building types are most at risk of demolition and re-development and should therefore be considered a priority for recording and research?
17. To what extent should approaches to the conservation of 20th-century heritage differ from those of earlier dates? Should we be more engaged in enabling buildings that we value, particularly at a local level, to be recorded and then adapted in ways that might result in loss of plan form and details whilst retaining what we most value, so that they can be enjoyed by future generations?

3.2 Topic Questions

A) *Agricultural and Subsistence*

1. How did the location of County Council Farms and Small Holdings relate to existing settlement?
2. What is the evidence for the development of industrial and semi-industrial buildings that adhere to national standards, and how do they vary across the county?
3. Why did Worcestershire County Council select particular Small Holding schemes and not others?
4. How much variation was there in the pattern of market gardening? What is the survival, size, construction, design and usage of temporary accommodations?
5. To what extent does mid-century map evidence record the location and character of seasonal agricultural labourers' accommodation?
6. To what extent has allotment provision, by Local Authorities in Worcestershire, fluctuated over the course of the 20th and 21st Centuries? How does this relate to wider socio-economic factors?

B) *Civil*

1. To what extent have the designers of buildings responded to national trends including legislative reform and/or local styles?
2. Are there differences between the styles and approaches by in-house design teams, distinguishing between those at central and local level, and commissioned architects?
3. In what ways has 20th-century civil architecture in Worcestershire succeeded in breaking down social barriers and fostering wider social interconnection?
4. To what extent did village halls enable social interaction and express local identity?

C) Commemorative

1. How different or similar are approaches to the design of memorials to the fallen and those who served in the First World War?
2. How have attitudes to, and the design of, commemorative architecture changed in Worcestershire after World War II?
3. To what extent are significant local people of the 20th-century commemorated in local development and design?
4. What else should be commemorated?

D) Commercial

1. How does commercial architecture reflect the changing preferences of 'consumer society' and of consumer groups over the 20th Century?
2. What is the evidence for the designers of commercial buildings responding to national trends and developing local styles?
3. How does the architecture of small-scale retail, and of eating and drinking establishments, reject or accept the trends set by large companies?
4. What is the evidence, for example in retained shop fronts, for small-scale retail in rural areas?
5. To what extent did the development and expansion of the co-operative movement shape urban and rural built heritage in Worcestershire?

E) Communications

1. How do the county's sites and any buildings relate to the development of the national communications infrastructure?

F) Defence

1. To what extent have military sites – airfields and camps in particular – stimulated the growth of settlements and the development of places with their own distinct character and uses?
2. How are the two World Wars reflected in the adaptation of different non-military building types and places? What legible traces are there of their impact?

G) Education

1. How did schools, colleges and libraries develop across the county, and in rural, suburban and urban areas, in response to legislation and settlement change?
2. For secondary schools, are distinctions such as grammar, technical, secondary modern or comprehensive expressed imaginatively in their plans and provision?
3. Who commissioned and who were the designers of schools and further education colleges in the county, and to what extent did they follow or find their own solutions to internal planning, the provision of sports facilities etc?

Gardens, public parks and public spaces – see Recreation

H) Health and Welfare

1. How have hospitals of different scales and types responded to historic developments and the foundation of the NHS?
2. To what extent does 20th-century heritage in Worcestershire reflect changing attitudes to physical disability and mental health provision across the course of the 20th-century?

I) Industrial

1. What is the distribution, character and significance of workers housing related to 20th-century service industries, the defence industry and civil defence?
2. To what extent has the nationalisation and subsequent privatisation of large-scale industry impacted positively and negatively Worcestershire's urban and rural landscapes?
3. To what extent did pre-existing technical and intellectual skills, across the Region, influence the emergence of 20th-century manufacturing, technological and service industries in Worcestershire?

4. How did the local geology and topography, including access to raw materials and natural energy, contribute to industrial growth and development in 20th-century Worcestershire?
5. What is the evidence for the survival of earlier crafts and traditions?

J) *Public Art*

1. How has post-war art in the county become etched in the collective memory and social consciousness of local people?
2. What local examples are there of 20th-century architecture incorporating public art?

K) *Recreation (including public parks and open spaces), Entertainment and Sport*

1. In what ways do public parks and communal spaces reflect changing social attitudes to children during the early 20th-century?
2. The retention of green and blue infrastructure, including greenspaces, archaeological earthworks, veteran trees, hedgerow boundaries and significant views, was an important factor in the design of Redditch New Town, not only to enhance the natural feeling of the environment but also to alleviate climatic conditions within the landscape. To what extent has this vision been respected or disregarded in later strategic or development control planning decisions?
3. What is the extent and survival of communal green space adjacent to Village Halls and Community Centres? To what extent have these communal landscapes changed/been lost because of 21st Century development or 'improvement'?
4. To what extent were communal buildings, including health clinics and estate pubs, and spaces designed as part of post-war social housing estates in Worcestershire? To what extent have these communal landscapes been lost/weakened by 21st Century development?
5. How were the social beliefs, values and experiences of 20th-century industrialists reflected in the provision of sports and leisure facilities for workers and their families?

6. Does the architecture of club and society buildings express different or shared identities? What was the range of activities happening within them?
7. How have buildings and spaces been adapted for new and significant types of activity, such as for mainstream and 'underground' music and other groups.
8. How do buildings for recreation and leisure relate to more general trends in access to countryside and leisure, including the decline in earlier traditions of outdoor play and recreation?

L) *Religious, ritual and funerary*

1. To what extent has shifting attitudes to religious belief and practice been reflected in 20th-century architecture and ritual landscapes across Worcestershire?
2. What was the pattern of adaptation and new building across the county, and how does it relate to the provision of educational and recreational buildings that replaced these aspects of life in which different churches had played a leading role?

M) *Transport and Travel*

1. How did transport infrastructure develop across the county over the 20th-century?
2. How has it followed or driven all other aspects of life, work and leisure in the county?

N) *Public Utilities*

1. How has the provision of public utilities such as gas, electricity and mains water been managed across urban and rural landscapes in Worcestershire?

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