

Herefordshire Meadows Group

Ivingtonbury 27th September 2017

History of your farm by David Lovelace

This a short list and description of sources of information that may be useful for studying the history of your farm and farming generally in your area.

Personal and family farming knowledge.

If the farm has been in your family for some time you probably know more about its history than anyone else. You may have photos of your farm taken in past decades and such photos can be valuable records of general farming history. Your farm may have historic deeds, maps and other documents that are unique records of its history. Sometimes these are sitting in solicitor's offices and owners may not always be aware of their importance or even existence so they are at risk of inadvertent loss. Making a digital copy is easy these days and will help preserve them. For fragile and ancient documents owners might like to consider donating them to the Herefordshire Archive and Records Centre (HARC) who have the expertise to preserve, interpret and catalogue them. Senior members of your farming family may have valuable experience and reminiscences so if agreeable it would be a valuable contribution to local history to record them for posterity. HARC has collections of photographs of Herefordshire life including farming from the late Victorian period onwards.

Historic maps and associated data

Pre 1800 maps

Large scale maps that show field level detail earlier than 1800 are a rarity for Herefordshire. These are mainly estate maps and a comprehensive list of those known so far has been published: *Herefordshire Maps 1577 to 1800* by Brian Smith, Logaston Press 2004. A supplement to this publication with additional maps published by the Woolhope Club 2012. Recently, a set of 18th century maps of farms on the Kentchurch Estate has turned up so who knows what other pre-1800 maps still survive somewhere?

Tithe maps of c1840

The Tithe Commutation Act of 1838 'commuted' customary payments to parish vicars to a monetary tax based upon land holding and productivity. This act required the making of large scale parish maps and the recording of each land parcel for ownership, tenant, area, land use and field name. This information is recorded on a separate document known as the 'apportionment'. This 'second Domesday' gives an unusually detailed picture of the landscape and farming at that time. The original maps and their apportionments are held at HARC with reference copies at the National Archives but they have also been conveniently transcribed, along with field names and field numbers, to a 6" to the mile scale by historian and calligrapher Mr. Geoffrey Gwatkins who can be contacted through his web site: www.geoffgwatkinmaps.co.uk.

First edition 25 inch and 6 inch to the mile Ordnance Survey maps

These were published nationally in the 1880s and represent the most detailed maps ever produced, for example, every mature tree is plotted! The coloured editions of the 25" inch series maps are especially fine and beautiful and recently the National Library of Scotland (NLS) have placed high resolution scans of them online, including the majority of those for Herefordshire. NLS also have most other historic map editions for all of Britain including the first edition 6 inch to the mile series. <http://maps.nls.uk>

1909 Land Tax survey.

This attempt by the Lloyd George liberal government to introduce a property tax required, like the tithe survey 70 years previously, a valuation of every building and land holding in the country. Land ownership and tenancy is recorded on numbered and colour coded 6" and 25" OS maps with the individual valuations entered into a series of hand written books. Of particular interest are the often detailed descriptions of farmhouses, barns and contents. The original maps and books of surveys are held at the National Archives in Kew (reference series IR 128 and IR 58 respectively). HARC also has copies of the maps but only brief summaries of the surveys. I have digitised selected areas of the county.

The Royal Commission survey of Herefordshire buildings 1929-1932.

This was the first attempt at listing buildings for their historical interest and included those deemed to be earlier than about 1700 in construction including many farmhouses and sometimes barns. These surveys are arranged by parish and can be very detailed, in particular every building was photographed which is often the earliest such photograph. These are held at the English Heritage Archive and Library (formerly the National Monuments Record) at Engine House, Fire Fly Ave., Swindon SN2 2EH contact number 01793 414600. I have photographed a number of parish folders.

The Dudley Stamp Land Utilisation Survey map 1936

These maps were created as part of a national study of agriculture in England and Wales and record grassland, arable, orchard, woodland and marginal land on 1" maps. The high proportion of grassland at this time is striking. I have a digital set for Herefordshire.

War Agricultural Executive Committee (WAEC) farm survey and maps 1942.

WAECs were charged with dramatically expanding arable production during WWII and had powers over private interests by virtue of the Defence of Realm Act. Every farm, even tiny smallholdings, was subject to a survey to judge their potential. These surveys along with the individual 'June return' for each farm were released to the public domain under the 50 years rule in 1992. Associated with these farm surveys are maps annotated to show who was farming which field. Individual grassland fields for each farm subject to compulsory plough up orders are identified. This data set is comparable with the 1840 tithe survey in the level detail but additionally records data for each farm, including for example the number of working horses. The minutes of the deliberations of the WAEC, both county and district, are also preserved and give a fascinating insight into the way farming was controlled and carried out in the county during WWII. These are all at the National Archives: maps are in the reference series MAF 73, individual farm surveys are held in parish folders MAF 32 and the WAEC minutes MAF 80. Parish summaries of June returns are held for each year from 1880 to 1988 (MAF 68) and provide a unique series of statistics for farming in each parish.

The 1953 census of woods

A detailed record of stands of trees in every wood in the county down to 1 acre was conducted by the Forestry Commission (FC). This includes tree species, standing volume, structure (such as coppice or high forest), ownership as well as additional details in the surveyors' comments section. Each woodland and compartment surveyed is numbered on annotated 6" maps which are cross referenced to a two page survey of each compartment. This data set can be useful when planning woodland management or planting since it precedes most of the private sector coniferization and grubbing up of the late 1950s to early 1980s and will often reflect the species composition of native woodland suited to the land of your farm. This was to be the FC's most comprehensive national survey of woods and trees since it was set up in 1919 but only nine counties were completed before the survey was

abandoned as too expensive, the results never published. The original surveys and maps are held at the National Archives (reference series F22). Luckily for us Herefordshire was one of those nine counties! As part of my research into the county's woods I have a complete digital copy of this survey and its maps which I've put online www.r5r.eu/awir.html.

Aerial photography

For a true landscape record nothing beats a high resolution aerial photograph.

Oblique air photos (i.e. those taken out of a light aircraft window)

Historic England has acquired the so called 'Aerofilms collection', huge collection of mainly commercial air photos that date back to the 1920s and are now available online:

www.britainfromabove.org.uk

There is also a large set of oblique air photos of particular sites of archaeological and historic interest. These are usually earthworks (humps and bumps) or crop marks (near surface soil characteristics reflected in patterns of differential light reflectance from the crop). Most of these are held at the air photographic library part of English Heritage Archive and Library in Swindon but the HARC also has a set of oblique APs which includes more recent air photos taken by aerial photographer Chris Musson and by former council staff member Neil Rimmington. These and the full list of archaeological and heritage sites for the county can be accessed via the Herefordshire Historic Environment Record (HER):

<http://htt.herefordshire.gov.uk>.

Vertical air photos (for mapping and military purposes)

These high resolution photos are especially useful in analysing landscape changed since WWII. The earliest known for Herefordshire are those taken by the Luftwaffe in December 1940 but they only cover Rotherwas, its vicinity and some parts of the Lugg and Wye valleys (I have a set). The RAF photographed all the county in a series of flights from 1946 to 1959, those taken in winter being very useful in identifying archaeological sites and farming systems such as water meadows and ridge and furrow arable which may no longer exist. Recent vertical colour photography is now well known and used via Google Earth and Bing Maps but there is some earlier colour aerial photography from around 2000 also available on the 'history slider' of Google Earth. HARC has 1400 contact prints of vertical APs covering most of the county from 1946 to 1959. I have scanned all of them and I'll hand them over to HARC when they have sorted out their digital storage and database system but happy to receive inquiries myself. A more complete set of vertical APs of Herefordshire is held at the English Heritage Archive and Library, Swindon.

Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR)

LIDAR is a laser scanning technology which creates a 3D simulation of the object in view. When used to illuminate land below an aircraft, LIDAR produces a 3D model of the countryside. From about 2005 the Environment Agency has commissioned LIDAR scans of catchments in England and Wales for flood defence modelling purposes. Recently, the EA has released processed versions of LIDAR data which have proved uniquely useful for archaeological investigations on farmland and in woods. Raw LIDAR data consists of 3D 'point clouds' from the reflected surfaces from which a Digital Elevation Model (DEM) which can be visualised in software. What is available for download are two types of DEM: (a) Digital Terrain Model (DTM) which is the bare ground with trees and buildings digitally removed from the point cloud data and (b) Digital Surface Model (DSM) which consists only of the tops of objects first intercepted by the laser pulses. LIDAR data is available as flat images of the DTM and DSM data and the actual numeric height data for DTM and DSM. By far the most useful for archaeological purposes are the DTM height data files.

When imported into a Geographic Information System (GIS) – see below – these DTM files can show very subtle height variations revealing earthworks such as deserted settlements, lost field systems and water meadow ridges etc. Because the LIDAR laser pulses partially penetrate woodland canopies the resulting DTMs can reveal earthworks within woods. The EA LIDAR store: <http://www.geostore.com/environment-agency/survey.html>

Archives

There is vast body of original documents held in local and national archives going back to Domesday (and even further) relating to all aspects of rural life, economy and landscape. Increasingly comprehensive online searchable archive data bases have transformed historical research and the digital camera can capture quality copies of original archives. Both these development make it much easier than in the past for anyone to research local farming and landscape history, families and buildings. The most comprehensive online database is that maintained by the National Archives which includes all the local archives such as HARC: <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>

The HARC web site itself: www.herefordshire.gov.uk/archives.

Note that while the references to originals are mostly on an online catalogue, only a very small fraction of the originals have been photographed and available online.

A fruitful source historical information about county farms are the sale notices and sometimes legal land disputes printed in the Hereford Journal and Hereford Times all of whose editions up to 1900 have been digitised by the British Library and are word searchable – you will need to register and pay for this service:

<http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>

DIY digital mapping

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) used to be expensive, difficult to use and the domain of IT departments in large organisations. Now anyone with a little patience can download and start using the sophisticated and completely free package known as QGIS and create their own digital maps by importing a variety of data sources including aerial photography, scanned maps, geo-located photos from a smart phone etc. QGIS competes with GIS systems costing £Ks and is being increasingly adopted by many organisations including Government departments: The QGIS web site www.qgis.org includes a manuals and links to tutorials. Since I do QGIS training myself, I have put some Herefordshire specific resources online at www.r5r.eu/awir.html under ‘FOSS4G’ (= Free and Open Source Software for Geospatial) including the processing of LIDAR derived DTM files.

Other useful free online map sources:

Ordnance Survey free data

www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/opendatadownload/products.html

Government data mapping sets

<https://data.gov.uk> - go to ‘mapping’.

Historic Environment records (including parks and gardens) for England. Set the map view first and then tick the desired boxes under the what/when and resources tabs:

http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/advanced_search.aspx

Finale

Combined with the above resources anyone can now do professional quality research into any aspect of the history and environment of their farm and parish as well as record, map and analyse all its heritage features but also discover new ones.

For further queries feel free to contact me: David Lovelace (david@tilia.org.uk)