



FARMING – 1941

It has come to be accepted that the country was wholly unprepared for the declaration of the Second World War. That may indeed be true but in many areas a very great deal of planning and preparatory work had been proceeding for a long time. School air raid shelters were being dug as early as 1938; in this area evacuees started arriving from Birmingham on 1st September 1939, two days before the declaration of war and identity cards were in issue before the end of the month.

Planning for a quantum leap in agricultural production was well understood and well advanced. County War Agricultural Committees and district sub-committees had been set up to oversee the implementation of these plans. The committees had powers to inspect properties, to direct what crops were to be grown and, where necessary, to supply men and machinery to undertake the ploughing up and cultivation of under utilised land. They could also, in extremis, summarily terminate tenancies of farmers judged to be inadequate, taking possession, not just of the land, but sometimes of the farmhouse as well. When this did happen it was often because the farmer had become old or infirm and could and did cause great hardship to the families concerned.

Fields that had not seen the plough for centuries were turned over to cereal production, usually, in the first instance, to oats which could be successfully grown on land that did not have the fertility needed for wheat or barley. The blacksmiths at the Quaker Smithy had thirteen acres of land, presumably for grazing and fodder for the horses used in their cartage business; thus they would have no need of machinery to cultivate the land. Leicestershire War Agricultural Executive Committee stepped in, undertaking the work and providing machinery for the job. In 1941 four acres were sown to oats, the cultivation being charged as follows:

Ploughing @ £1.00 per acre	£4.00
Disc Harrowing (twice) @ 55p per acre	£2.20
Drilling @ 30p per acre	£1.20
Rolling @ 20p per acre	<u>80</u>
Grand total for the four acres	<u>£8.20</u>

Domestic food production doubled between the beginning and the end of the war.

Once the measures for increased production were in place, the committees, surprisingly early, turned to collecting data that could be used for post war planning. A National Farm Survey was organised providing in great detail statistics on more than 330,000 holdings nation wide. The survey was in two parts, a questionnaire returned by the farmers themselves and a report, assessment and map, prepared after a thoroughgoing inspection of the farm, by a member of the District Agricultural Subcommittee for the area. The nominal date of record was 4th June 1941. The table here reproduced does no more than scratch the surface of the information gathered in the survey.

Though some of its land is indeed in Swannington, Hoo Ash Farm has been included only because it was the Burton holding covered elsewhere in this issue of *Now and Then*. Readers will note, however, that Hoo Ash is the only farm that has more than half its land down to cultivated crops and this reproduces the pattern that can still be seen today. The intrinsic quality of most of the land in the valley bottom was rated either fair or poor whereas in the surrounding areas a higher proportion was rated good.

Assessing the quality of the land was one thing, rating the ability of the farmers was quite another and caused much heart ache. Inspectors were required to explain a low assessment, in other areas some felt free to be all too expansive in their criticism citing drunkenness and indolence among reasons for poor performance. In Swannington, in general, the larger farmers achieved the top, A, grade whereas only two of the farmers of less than 50 acres were in that category. These were J W Walker at Mount Pleasant who, although farming only 44 acres, appears to have been a professional farmer and George Walker of Woodbine Villas in Piano Row, who is described as "a hobby farmer" and is still remembered cycling through the village, leaning on one cow, with others making their own way



along. The smaller holdings were run by men with other jobs to attend to and with absolutely no need or incentive to maximise productivity in the period of agricultural depression before the war. For example John Knight, Arthur Toone and Jim Walker at Centre Farm, were all butchers for whom one might imagine land would have been a useful adjunct to their principal business. Chester and Rouse were blacksmiths and carters at the Quaker Smithy. W Webster and G Rose were colliers, a job which does

not leave one with much energy to worry about the niceties of husbandry. D Johnson ran the Post Office and still managed to keep a cow and 24 hens on his half acre. Bill Clarke, who had had to retire from mining as a result of ill health, got the newspapers for the surrounding area, delivered by W H Smith, at 4.30 in the morning, kept five cows and a large flock of chickens during the day, and seems to have spent a goodly portion of the night walking the streets as chief ARP warden. A fellow warden remembers him as a man of wisdom with an encyclopaedic knowledge of astronomy that illuminated the dark patrols.



Of the larger farmers, A W Adcock had been at Elm Farm for 23 years and was still regarded as a newcomer to Swannington. On the other hand the ubiquitous Walkers, though not all related, were definitely descended from old Swannington stock. J H Walker at The Hollies and C W Walker at Rose Cottage were brothers and were closely related to George Walker at Woodbine Villa. William Thorpe is well remembered as a most kindly man whose observance of the Sabbath was unwavering. One Sunday, a young boy concerned for the safety of cows on the road, came down from New Swannington to warn Mr Thorpe that some of his cattle were loose. He was told not to worry, they would surely be kept safe until they could be retrieved the following day. Mr Thorpe had taken over Manor Farm from James Richards thirteen years previously. William Tivey at Red Hills Farm was James Richards' son in law. J F White had fairly recently taken over from the Illsleys at Talbot Farm and his ability as a farmer was already well respected. J E R Dalby another comparative newcomer at Willow farm was highly rated as a farmer in spite of farming widely dispersed land some of which was "coal measure formation, difficult to deal with especially in dry weather". His daughter is remembered for gamely teaching the piano to, at least some, sadly unresponsive pupils.

Six of the larger farms had one tractor, each of which seems to have been a Fordson, but they all kept horses to be on the safe side and for some of the routine work. Tractors were little more than mechanised horses at that time; though Harry Ferguson had invented the three point linkage in the 1930's it would be some years before such cutting edge technology would reach Swannington. The ratio of tractors to farms is pretty much in line

Property	Size Acres	Grain Acres	Roots Acres	Fodder Acres	Grass for Mowing	Grass for Grazing	Cattle number	Sheep number	Pigs number	Fowls number	Turkeys number	Ducks number	Geese number	Horses number
Hoo Ash Farm	244	93	22	7	33	89	105	130	14	232	43			12
Elm Farm	128	53	9	0.3	25	52	26			32	1			3
Talbot Farm	126	32	9	1	23	61	44	40	1	95	4	8		6
Willow Farm	102	35	2.5	3.5	16	45	27			30				3
Manor Farm	93.5	30	6.5		7	50	19	2		42	2			7
Rechtill Farm	82	28	6.5		18	25	41			40				4
The Hollies	58	19	5	0.5	12	22	16	30	19	35	14	5		4
Mount Pleasant	44	10	3		6	24	27							2
J G Lowell Brook House	23	15			9									1
Breach Farm	22	5	1		5	10	12			11				2
Centre Farm	19	7			2	11	8			60	3			2
Rose Cottage	15	5.5			2.5	6	10		2	35				1
J Knight Burtons Lane	14				6	8	5	13	2	28				3
Chester & Rouse	13	4.5			3	6								2
A Johnson Foan Hill	12				8	6	8			12				
G Walker Woodbine Villas	11	3	0.5		2.5	5	5		2	20				2
A G Toone Hough Hill	9	3	2.5		3.5			2	3	62				
W Webster Forest View	7				5	2	5		2	30				
G Rose Rowlands	5				3	2	5			9				1
Wm Clarke Sunnyside	2.5				2.5		5			170				
O Smith The Glen	1.75				1.8									
D Johnson Post Office	0.5				0.5		1			24				

A much condensed summary of the census returns



with the national average. In 1940, 50,000 tractors were recorded nation wide, by the end of the war the figure was fourfold, standing at about 200,000. There does not appear to have been any other powered machinery though several farms had a stationary engine which would have been used for grinding, compounding and other tasks about the farm yard. Threshing at that time was generally carried out by contractors who towed their machine from farm to farm.

Excluding Hoo Ash Farm which, on the ridge above the village, had more fertile land, oats was the largest cereal acreage closely followed by wheat with barley some way behind: 100 acres, 80 acres and 31 acres respectively. Hoo Ash Farm grew 27 acres of wheat, 16 of barley and no oats but it also grew 50 acres of "mixed corn". Most of the larger farms grew a comparatively small acreage of potatoes and for winter feed turnips and mangelwurzels.

The livestock is shown in the table, the cattle were generally dairy cattle with a breeding bull on each holding, the exception being Jim Walker at Centre Farm whose cattle were bulls or bull calves. It is surprising that less than thirty per cent of the farms covered in this survey kept pigs. Householders were all allowed to keep a pig for home consumption and many households did. Of course they were largely fed on boiled kitchen scraps and though they thrived they were inordinately fat often reaching twenty score or more. No matter, they were greatly prized. The offal in particular provided succulent faggots and tasty fry that would have been a feast even in peace time, the hams and gammons were fine as long as they were eaten before they started to go rancid from the knuckle. The back and the belly were altogether different, one had to look long and hard to find even a hint of lean and after they had been cured on the thrill for a month the rashers were so salt and so fat as to be all but inedible.

The poultry was predominately laying hens but several farms kept a few ducks, forty three at Hoo Ash Farm and eight at Talbot Farm. Centre Farm, Manor Farm and Elm Farm had three, two and one respectively. J H Walker at The Hollies had five ducks and fourteen geese a family tradition kept going by his son, Sid, at Rose Cottage until his, so recent, sad death. The only other poultry recorded were four turkeys at Talbot Farm.

The vast majority of the land was rented, inevitably the predominant, though by no means the only, land owner was Wyggeston's Hospital. Rents seem to have ranged roughly between £1.50 and £2.00 per acre.

The farming census, which has been likened to a latter day Domesday Book, is housed at the Record Office at Kew. Certainly they are a mine of information and there is much research still to be done both on the returns themselves and, more particularly, on the detailed maps which have not yet been examined.

"Butch" Swannington's Championship Goalkeeper

Betty Swift is a familiar figure to the people of Swannington as she walks almost daily from her home on St. George's Hill to the Village Hall to carry out her duties as caretaker. Although hampered by painful arthritis in his knees, her husband Gordon, also known as Butch, usually accompanies her and helps her with all the heavy jobs.

Gordon is one of a number of exceptional gardeners who live on the Hill and you can pick out his house in late summer by the beauty and variety of the dahlias growing in the front garden.

Gordon and Betty agree on most things and have been married more than 50 years but there is some difference between them about whether they first met on that Mecca of courting couples, the Monkey Walk at Coalville.

Gardening may be his present hobby but fifty years and more ago he was a passionate participant in "the beautiful game." One of four footballing brothers that was his first love but in the summer he was willing to make do with cricket.

After Gordon left school he went to work for R.J.Kemp for eight years and became an electrician, a knowledge which he still puts at the disposal of the Parish Council. Too young to serve in the war he was employed altering the wiring in two of Leicestershire's historic homes both now demolished. These were Gopsall Hall and Gardendon Hall which had been taken over for the duration. There was also work to be done at various aerodromes and on Army gun sites. One of these was at The Altons. At this emplacement there were tubs full of oil and sawdust, which caught fire and covered the outskirts of Derby with choking smoke. As Gordon said "It was wicked to be there - wicked."

As a child Gordon lived in Waterworks Road Coalville and the first team he played football for was at Bardon Hill. There was no shortage of keen