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Preliminary study on the survival of historic
hedgerow boundary features to the south of
Worcester city

A report for the
Campaign to Protect Rural England
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Contents

1. Introduction
2. Study area
3. Sources consulted and study methodology
4. Boundaries of possible historic interest

Figures:

1. Survey area south of Worcester
2. Hedgerow boundaries possibly qualifying under the historical importance criteria of the Hedgerow Regulations

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1. Introduction

An area immediately to the south of Worcester city is proposed to be included within the site allocations for future development applications within the South Worcestershire Development Plan (in preparation). The draft preferred options document for the Development Plan is due to be available for public consultation for 8 weeks from 26 September 2011.

A preliminary study was undertaken in July-August 2011 on behalf of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) that aimed to give an indication of which hedgerows within the study area might be important based on historical criteria and may therefore qualify for that reason as important under the Hedgerow Regulations.

The study focused on those hedgerows that might meet Hedgerow Regulations criteria by having existed for 30 years or more and meeting section 5a of Part II of Schedule 1 of the regulations:

‘5. The hedgerow -

(a) is recorded in a document held at the relevant date at a Record Office as an integral part of a field system pre-dating the Enclosure Acts; or

(b) is part of, or visibly related to, any building or other feature associated with such a system, and that system -

(i) is substantially complete; or

(ii) is of a pattern which is recorded in a document prepared before the relevant date by a local planning authority, within the meaning of the 1990 Act, for the purposes of development control within the authority's area, as a key landscape characteristic.’

2. Study area

The study area lies immediately to the south of Worcester city (figure 1). It falls across the junction of four modern parishes: Whittington, Norton-juxta-Kempsey, Kempsey and St Peter the Great. The latter is now absorbed within the Worcester city boundary but remains a separate administrative parish. Approximately two thirds of the land area of St Peter the Great is already developed for housing and only a small linear section of the parish (part of the area that remains undeveloped) falls along the northern edge of the study area, cut off from the rest of the parish by the A4440.

The study area is bounded by: the A38 to the west, Broomhall Lane to the south, the M5 motorway to the east and the A4440 to the north.

The largest area of settlement within the study area is the housing development situated within and adjacent to the old Norton Barracks. There are also a number of farms scattered within the remaining countryside.

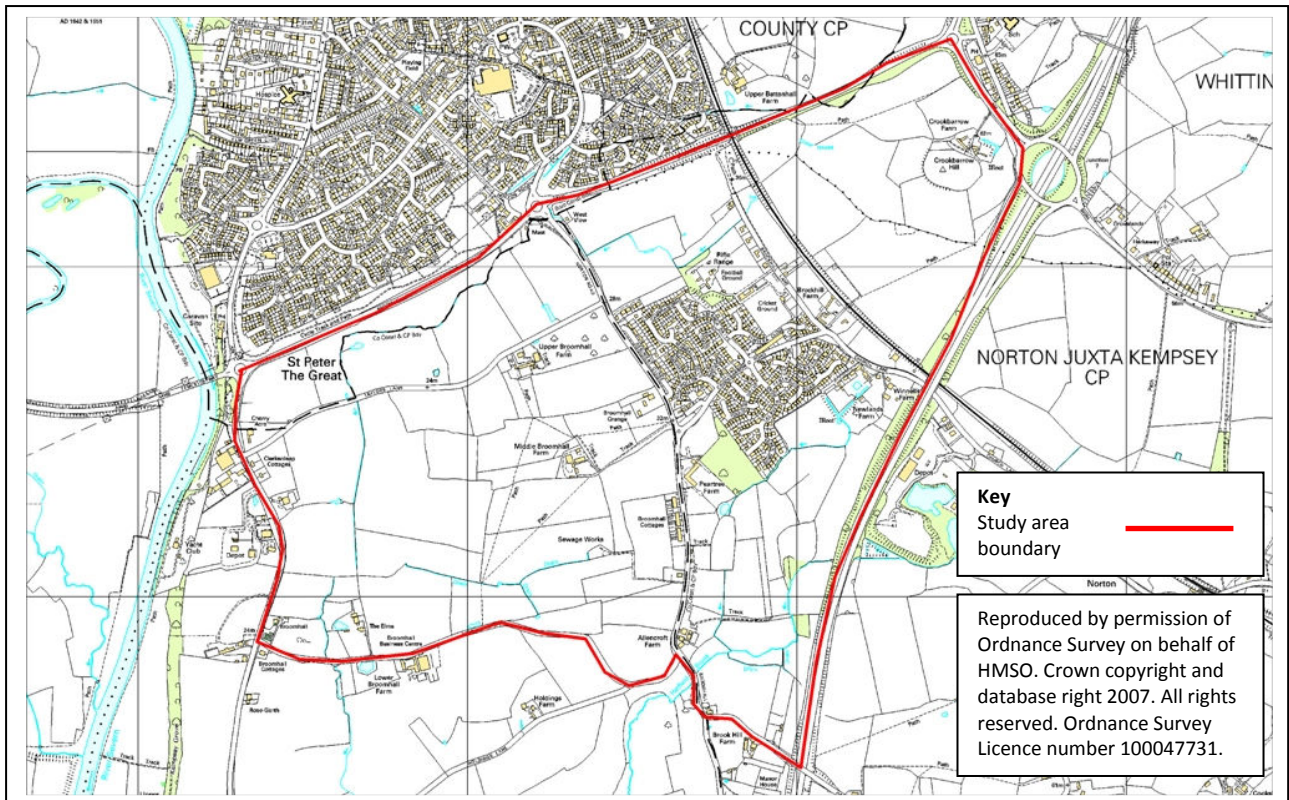


Figure 1. Survey area south of Worcester

3. Sources consulted and study methodology

Enclosure

It was established that neither Kempsey nor Whittington had been enclosed by Act of Parliament, but there was evidence of post-mediaeval enclosure of previously open field systems, presumably by private agreement between individual owners, at a similar time to the Parliamentary enclosures. Modern aerial photographs clearly show a number of surviving ridge and furrow formations and the 'dog-leg' boundaries characteristic of where mediaeval strip field and open field systems have later been enclosed.

An Enclosure Act was passed for Norton-juxta-Kempsey in 1845, which began to be implemented in 1854.

Historic mapping

First edition Ordnance Survey mapping dating from 1811/1812 was consulted and the boundaries recorded on this were compared with later historic maps, modern OS mapping and aerial photography. The recording of boundary features on the 1st edition OS maps was often merely indicative and it can sometimes be difficult to determine with any confidence which boundaries that existed then still remain today. Exceptions to this are boundaries associated with a road or track whose route has not altered, boundaries associated with the perimeter of a complex of historic farm buildings or fields, such as those containing orchards, that were generally immediately adjacent to the farm. Interpretation of the OS mapping was further complicated by the study area lying across the join of several separate maps and the north-south-east-west orientation of each being slightly variable.

Aerial photograph interpretation

Modern aerial photographs were examined to establish which boundaries within the modern landscape appeared to still exist as a hedgerow. Aerial photograph interpretation of the presence of hedgerow boundaries can be problematic as other boundary features, for example a fence line grown over with vegetation such as bramble, can easily be mistaken for a hedgerow.

Ground truthing of hedgerow presence

To confirm the aerial photograph interpretation a presence/absence field survey was undertaken by car and using public rights of way. This resulted in a small number of boundary sections being eliminated from the assessment as no hedgerow was present.

Unfortunately, not all of the hedgerows in the study area were visible from roads or footpaths: the countryside between Norton Road and the M5 is not served by any public rights of way and only a limited number of the hedgerows within this area could be seen from the road and the boundaries circling Crookbarrow Hill could also not be accessed.

4. Boundaries of possible historic interest

The majority of lanes and farm tracks within the study area are unchanged from the 1st edition OS mapping. We can assume that these lanes and tracks were, for the most part, always bordered by hedgerows and therefore hedgerow boundaries still present along these routes will likely qualify under Hedgerow Regulations criteria. The only known exceptions are: short sections of the A38 and the Norton Road where they meet the modern A4440 bypass: and most of the length of Crookbarrow Road where this has been modernised as part of the Norton Barracks development.

Some sections of countryside within the study area were more noticeably unaltered by modern land use. Evidence for this included the presence of ridge and furrow, dog-leg field boundaries and historic farm building complexes along with parts of the 1st edition OS mapping that could be aligned reliably with the modern boundaries.

Figure 2 shows those boundaries that may qualify under the historical importance criteria of the Hedgerow Regulations. However, note the question marks over the boundaries within the Norton Road-M5 part of the study area where ground truthing was not possible at this stage.

