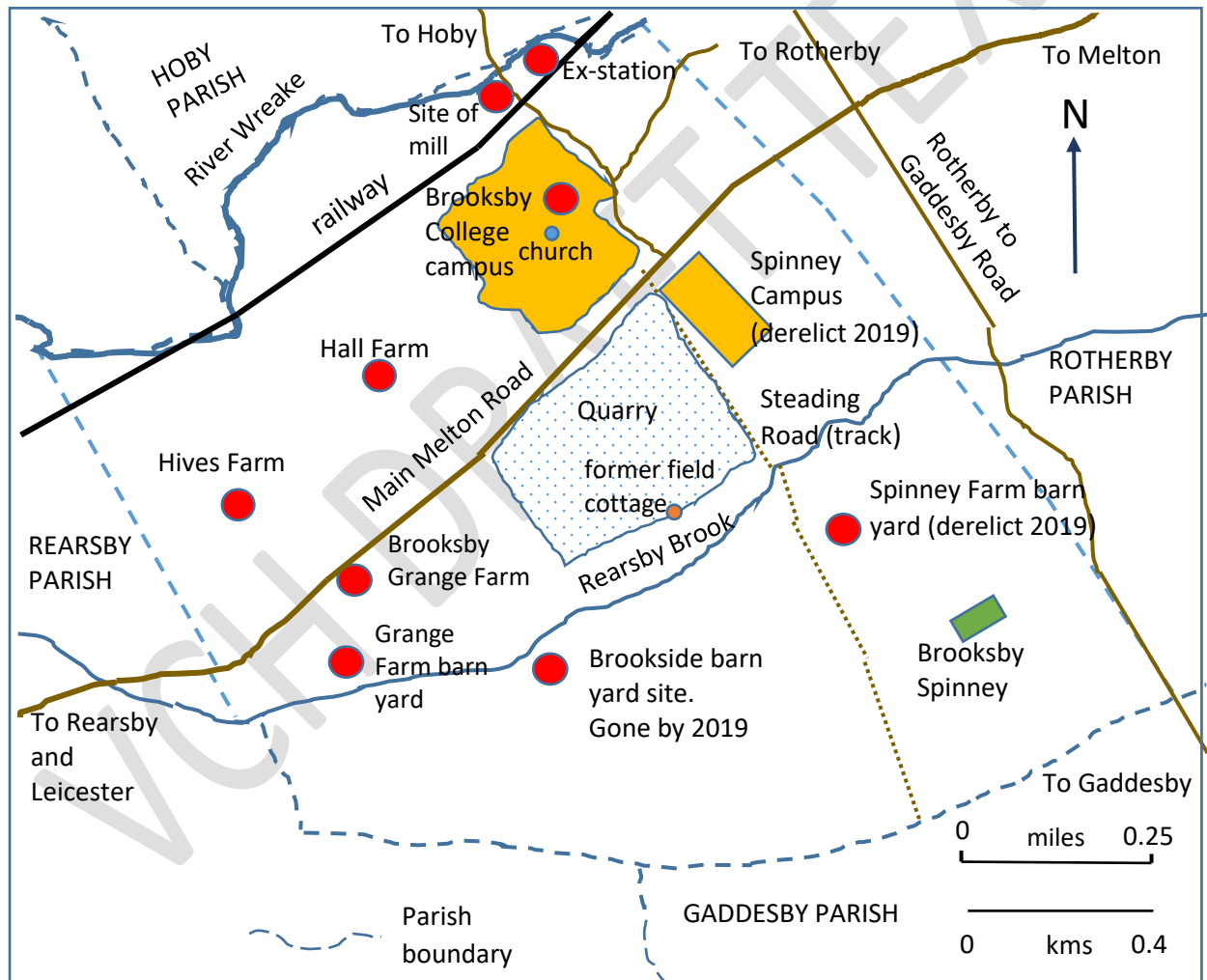


## THE PARISH OF BROOKSBY

### Introduction

Brooksby parish lies on the south side of the valley of the River Wreake, nine miles north-east of Leicester. The parish is bisected by the main road between Leicester and Melton Mowbray, five miles to the ENE. For much of the medieval period and later the lords of the manor were from the Villiers family.<sup>1</sup> The medieval village was probably abandoned in 1492, following enclosure for pasture by Sir John Villiers,<sup>2</sup> leaving a manor house, the church and a mill as the only buildings.



*Brooksby Parish in 2020*

<sup>1</sup> Below, Landownership, Brooksby Manor.

<sup>2</sup> Below, Economic History, Agriculture before 1500.

The manor house became Brooksby Hall.<sup>3</sup> Its former residents include George Villiers, 1st duke of Buckingham (d. 1628), born there in 1592, the seventh Earl of Cardigan (d. 1868) and Admiral David Beatty, 1st Earl Beatty (d. 1936).<sup>4</sup> During the 19th and early 20th centuries, Brooksby Hall was associated with fox hunting.<sup>5</sup> The Hall became a farm training centre for ex-servicemen in 1945. This evolved into an agricultural college, which became the Brooksby campus of Brooksby Melton College in 2000.<sup>6</sup>

In 2020, some land to the south of the main road had been let for use as a quarry. In 2010 all the land and almost all the buildings in the parish (with the exception of the church) were owned by the College, but since that date a few buildings have been sold, such as Hall Farm house and the former railway station.<sup>7</sup>

### **Boundaries and parish origins**

In 1891 the area was recorded as 867 a. (351 ha.).<sup>8</sup> The parish is roughly the shape of a rhombus, with its northern boundary along the canalised River Wreake. The eastern and western boundaries run in almost straight lines to the southern boundary which follows the crest of a ridge which is the watershed between the Rearsby Brook and an unnamed stream further south.

The settlement was recorded as Brochesbi in 1086, possibly meaning the 'farmstead or village of a man called Brok' or 'farmstead or village at the brook'.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Below, Landownership, Brooksby Hall.

<sup>4</sup> *ODNB*, s.v. 'Villiers, George, first duke of Buckingham (1592-1628), royal favourite', accessed 30 Jan 2019; *Leicester Chronicle*, 25 June 1831; ROLLR, DE 2072/110.

<sup>5</sup> Below, Social History, Social Structure and Character.

<sup>6</sup> Below, Social History, Education.

<sup>7</sup> Oral testimony of Malcolm Britton, church warden and former lecturer at the College.

<sup>8</sup> Census 1891.

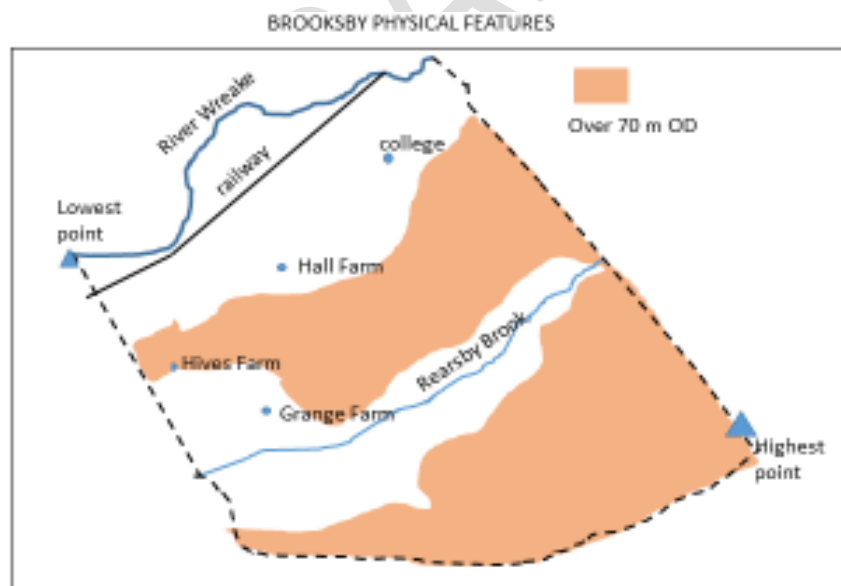
<sup>9</sup> B. Cox, *A Dictionary of Leicestershire and Rutland Place-names* (Nottingham, 2005), 16.

## **Landscape**

From north to south there is the flood plain of the River Wreake, a westward-pointing spur of higher ground, the valley of Rearsby Brook and another spur on the southern boundary.

## **Geology**

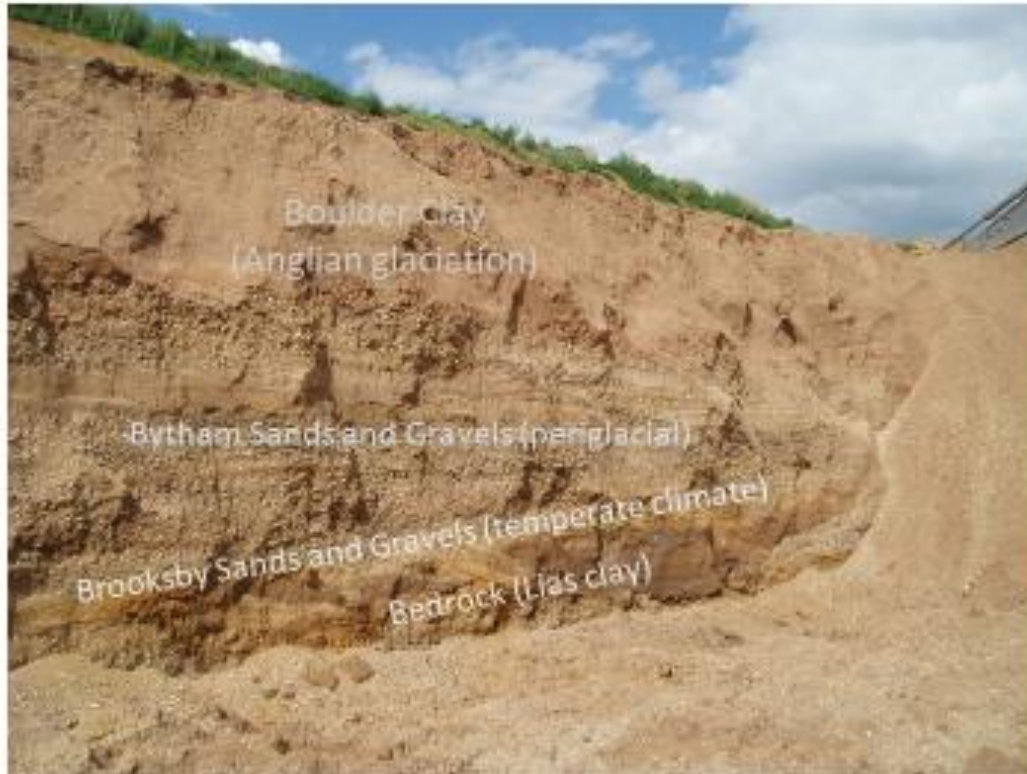
The parish is almost entirely covered by superficial deposits of the Quaternary Period. The boulder clay of the Anglian glaciation remains on the higher ground of the two spurs. The Bytham Sands and Gravels outcrop in a band along the side of the Wreake Valley, underlying the Agricultural College and the deserted village site. At the base of these deposits the Brooksby Sands and Gravels were formed during temperate conditions in the channel of the eastward-flowing river called the Bytham River by geologists.<sup>10</sup> It ran from near present-day Stratford-upon-Avon to present-day Lowestoft, through the site of Castle Bytham in Lincolnshire. Since 2006 the sand and gravel have been exploited commercially at Brooksby Quarry.<sup>11</sup> In post-glacial times river alluvium was deposited in the valley floors of the River Wreake and Rearsby Brook.



<sup>10</sup> J. Rose, 'Bytham River aggregates', *Quarry Management* (2007), 21; M. Stephens, K. Challis, A. Graf, A. J. Howard, J. Rose, D. Schreve, 'New exposures of the Bytham River at Brooksby, Leicestershire', *Quaternary Newsletter* 115 (2008), 14–27.

<sup>11</sup> Below, Settlement.

*Map 2 Physical features*



*Figure 1 Brooksby Quarry July 2016*

**Soils**

A large part of the parish has slightly acid loamy and clayey soils with slightly impeded drainage. It is classified as moderate to high fertility used for both arable and pasture.<sup>12</sup> The alluvium of the Wreake Valley flood plain with loamy and clayey soils is naturally wet and is best used as meadows, with woodland in the old river meanders.

<sup>12</sup> [www.landis.org.uk/soilscapes](http://www.landis.org.uk/soilscapes) (accessed 2 Jan 2019).

## Communications

### Roads

The most important road in the parish was Melton Road, which in 2020 was part of the trunk road from Leicester to Melton Mowbray. It was a turnpike road between 1764 and 1872, but there was no tollgate in Brooksby parish.<sup>13</sup> The minor road from Hoby through Brooksby to the Leicester-Melton road may have passed to the west of the original mill,<sup>14</sup> but from 1884 it crossed the river to the east of the mill.<sup>15</sup> The track which runs south from the Melton Road, that became Steading Road (Map 1), was present in 1816.<sup>16</sup>

### Coaches, carriers and buses

In 1846, there was a daily coach in each direction running between Melton Mowbray and Leicester, and a daily coach and an omnibus between Melton Mowbray and Syston railway station. There was also a daily carrier on this route from Melton to Leicester and another went three days each week.<sup>17</sup> There is no evidence that any of these services stopped at Brooksby.<sup>18</sup> In 1887–8, carriers went to Leicester from Brooksby and Hoby on Wednesdays and Saturdays.<sup>19</sup> Village carriers went to Melton Mowbray on Tuesday market days from Syston and Rearsby and presumably went through Brooksby.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> A. Cossons, *The Turnpike Roads of Leicestershire and Rutland* (2003), 62, citing Turnpike Act of 1st Authorisation, 4 Geo. III, c.84 (1763-4) and Annual Continuance Act, 35-6 Vic., c. 85 (to expire 1 Nov.1872); ROLLR DG 9/Ma/LI [DG 9/2727], John Prior's map (1777).

<sup>14</sup> ROLLR, Ma/L/1 [DG 9/2727], John Prior's map (1777); British Library, Surveyors map OSD 265, two inches to one mile 1816.

<sup>15</sup> OS Map 25", Leics. XIX.10 (1884 edn).

<sup>16</sup> British Library, Surveyors map OSD 265, two inches to one mile 1816.

<sup>17</sup> W. White, *Hist., Gaz. and Dir. of Leics. and Rutl.* (Sheffield, 1846), 252, 253, 206-7.

<sup>18</sup> W. White, *Hist., Gaz. and Dir. of Leics. and Rutl.* (Sheffield, 1846), 430.

<sup>19</sup> *Wright's Dir. of Leics. and Rutl.* (1887–8), 294.

<sup>20</sup> *Wright's Dir. Leics and Rutland* (1887-8), 294.

Buses were introduced in the 1930s,<sup>21</sup> and in 2019 there was a regular service between Melton Mowbray and Leicester which stopped at Brooksby, with buses every 20 minutes during the day.<sup>22</sup> There were also dedicated buses serving the College.<sup>23</sup>

### **Waterways**

In the 1790s the Melton Mowbray Navigation Company straightened nine loops of the river in the parish to make it more navigable.<sup>24</sup> One of the cuts, next to the water mill, contained Brooksby Lock, which created a rise in water level of 7ft 7ins (2.3 m.). A weir was constructed in the original river.<sup>25</sup> The canal wharf was almost certainly close to the mill.<sup>26</sup> The advent of the railway eventually led to the closure of the Navigation in 1877.<sup>27</sup>

### **Railway**

In 1846 the Midland Railway Company constructed a line from Syston to Peterborough, which included a station and sidings at Brooksby.<sup>28</sup> In 1846 four passenger trains each way stopped at the station on every weekday.<sup>29</sup> By 1868 the number had increased to eight.<sup>30</sup> Occasionally there were special excursion trains stopping at Brooksby, for example to a brass band contest and musical fete at Peterborough in 1859.<sup>31</sup> A dock for loading and unloading cattle at the station was recorded in 1879.<sup>32</sup> The station was closed for passengers in 1961 and for goods in 1964.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Oral testimony of older residents in the 1990s.

<sup>22</sup> Route 5A timetable at arrivabus.co.uk (accessed 4 Feb. 2019).

<sup>23</sup> Below, Social History chapter.

<sup>24</sup> ROLLR DG 9/Ma/LI [DG 9/2727], John Prior's map (1777); J. D. Welding (ed.), *Leicestershire in 1777: an Edition of John Prior's Map of Leicestershire* (1984), 24, 26.; OS Map, 1", sheet 43 (1835 edn).

<sup>25</sup> M. G. Miller and S. Fletcher, *The Melton Mowbray Navigation* (Oakham, 1984), 25–7, 44.

<sup>26</sup> Below, Economic History.

<sup>27</sup> Melton Mowbray Navigation (Abandonment) Act, 40 & 41 Vict., c. 78; ROLLR, QS 79/3/17.

<sup>28</sup> ROLLR, QS 73/32 plans for Syston to Peterborough Railway; *Leicester Chronicle*, 5 Sep 1846.

<sup>29</sup> *Leicester Mercury*, 5 Sept. 1846.

<sup>30</sup> W. White, *Hist. Gaz. and Dir. of Leics. and Rutl.* (Sheffield, 1868), 356.

<sup>31</sup> *Leicester Mercury*, 3 Sep. 1859.

<sup>32</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 29 Mar. 1879.

<sup>33</sup> J. Simmons, 'Railways', *VCH Leics.* 3 (1955), 125; J. Gough, *Midland Railway: as Chronology* (1989), 80.

## Population

In 1086 the two carucates held of Earl Hugh were part of almost 37 carucates of arable land in 13 manors that were appendages of Barrow on Soar, and the 84 individuals mentioned are for the whole bloc.<sup>34</sup> If populations were proportionate to the number of carucates in each manor this would give about four to five households on the earl's lands at Brooksby. There were also two bordars on Countess Judith's land.<sup>35</sup>

An exodus of 24 families and destruction of four dwellings accompanied the enclosure of land in 1492.<sup>36</sup>

In 1524 there were ten Brooksby residents assessed for tax, who all appear to have been members of the Villiers household.<sup>37</sup> In 1603 there were 10 adult Anglican communicants, 'but one entire household',<sup>38</sup> and only one household was recorded in 1670.<sup>39</sup> In 1676, there were 17 adults, making Brooksby the least populous of 44 Wreake Valley parishes.<sup>40</sup>

The population in 1801 was 43. This reduced to 23 in 1811, and remained fairly constant until the 1850s. Between 1861 and 1931 the population was around 60 to 70, depending on whether the hall was occupied.<sup>41</sup> From 1936 Brooksby became part of the civil parish of Hoby and Rotherby, and separate population figures are not available.<sup>42</sup>

From the 1950s, the term-time population was boosted by resident students. It was estimated that the permanent population of the parish in 2019 was about 50.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> P. Morgan (ed.), *Domesday Book* (1979), 237a 43, 1, p. 648.

<sup>35</sup> P. Morgan (ed.), *Domesday Book* (1979), 236c 40, 36, p. 647.

<sup>36</sup> Below, Economic History, Agriculture before 1500.

<sup>37</sup> Deserted Villages Research Group, 'Provisional list of deserted medieval villages', *Trans. LAHS* vol. 39 (1962–3), 27, citing TNA E 179/133/108, lay subsidy (1524).

<sup>38</sup> A. Dyer and D. M. Palliser (eds), *The Diocesan Population Returns for 1563 and 1603* (Oxford, 2005), 382.

<sup>39</sup> *VCH Leics.*, III, 171.

<sup>40</sup> A. Whiteman, *The Compton Census of 1676: A Critical Edition* (Oxford, 1986), 337.

<sup>41</sup> *VCH Leics.*, III, 184.

<sup>42</sup> F. Youngs, *Local Administrative Units, II Northern England* (1991), 222.

<sup>43</sup> Estimate by Malcolm Britton, Brooksby church warden and former lecturer at the College.

## Settlement and built character

Sand and gravel extraction at Brooksby quarry since 2006 has uncovered over 700 artefacts, including many hand axes of the Palaeolithic period, made from quartzite pebbles deposited by the eastward-flowing 'Bytham River'.<sup>44</sup>



*Palaeolithic hand axes from Brooksby Quarry.*

Flint blades and cores from the Mesolithic period have been found in three locations, east of Grange Farm, close to Brooksby Spinney and near the minor road to Rotherby. Field walking over 600 a. of land suggests there were three or four scattered settlements or farmsteads at various times from the Neolithic period to the 8th century. Later pottery sherds suggest a single village formed after the 8th century.<sup>45</sup>

The village may have declined in stages. It was probably finally abandoned in 1492, following enclosure.<sup>46</sup> Earthworks, including house platforms, indicate that the medieval village stood

<sup>44</sup> M. Beamish, 'Archaeology in Leicestershire and Rutland', *Trans. LAHS*, 84 (2010), 349.

<sup>45</sup> P. Liddle and R. Knox, *The Brooksby Survey: an Interim Report* (Leicestershire County Council Museums, Arts and Records Services, 1991).

<sup>46</sup> Above, Population.



immediately south of the church.<sup>47</sup> In 1795 there was just the hall with its outbuildings, a farm, probably a mill and the church remaining.<sup>48</sup> There were no farmhouses in 1834.<sup>49</sup>

During the 19th century, the land was let in several large blocks, and three farmhouses were built for tenant farmers; Hall Farm, Hives Farm and Grange Farm.<sup>50</sup> These were brick with Welsh slate roofs. Barns identified in 1816 had become Hall Farm and Grange Farm by 1848.<sup>51</sup> By 1890, at Grange Farm there was a separate five-bedroomed house near the main road.<sup>52</sup> In 1904, 'a pair of modern cottages' stood near the main Grange Farm barn yard, and Ives Barn (later Hives Farm) had 'a well-built brick and slated dwelling house'.<sup>53</sup> In 2019, the main Grange Farm barn yard was being redeveloped as a residential property.

With the advent of the College there was considerable building of residential, teaching and administration blocks in the Hall grounds, and to the south of the Main Road at Spinney Campus. This latter site was abandoned in 2012. It was for sale in 2019, with planning consent for 70 houses, a café and small commercial area.<sup>54</sup>

In 2019 the dominant buildings were the medieval parish church, Brooksby Hall,<sup>55</sup> and large modern college buildings in the grounds of the Hall.

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<sup>47</sup> Leics HER, MLE3842; R. F. Hartley, *The Medieval Earthworks of North-East Leicestershire* (Leicester, 1987), 22.

<sup>48</sup> J. Nichols, *History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester*, III (1795), 189.

<sup>49</sup> *Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws* (Parl. Papers 1834 (44), xix), 104-5.

<sup>50</sup> Above, Parish of Brooksby, Settlement.

<sup>51</sup> British Library, Surveyors map OSD 265, two inches to one mile.

<sup>52</sup> OS Map 25", Leics. XIX.14 (1903 edn).

<sup>53</sup> ROLLR, DE 688/30, Brooksby estate sale (1904).

<sup>54</sup> Melton Mowbray Borough Council planning application 16/00920/OUT (2017).

<sup>55</sup> Below, Landownership; Religious History.



*Hives Farm January 2019*

There was a mill on the river in 1086.<sup>56</sup> This was ‘taken down’ between 1884 and 1904.<sup>57</sup> The miller’s house was dismantled and the College replaced it with a piggery. This was no longer in use in 2019.<sup>58</sup>

The railway station of 1846, also near the river, is a grade II listed building.<sup>59</sup> There was a signal box and a house at the eastern end of the platform for the stationmaster’s family. There were also houses for the two families headed by crossing keepers or signalmen.<sup>60</sup> After the station closed in 1964 the site was bought by the college and most of the buildings were demolished, but the station building was converted into a residential property which had been sold to a private owner and used for commercial canoe making in 2019. The signal box was transported to the college cricket field and was once used by the scorers at the matches.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>56</sup> P. Morgan (ed.), *Domesday Book* (1979), 237a, 43, 1, p. 648; below, Economic History, Brooksby Mill.

<sup>57</sup> OS Map 25”, Leics. XIX.14 (1884 edn); ROLLR, DE 1826/12/1–6, letter dated 25 June 1904.

<sup>58</sup> J. R. Hubbard, *Brooksby* (1977), 83; oral testimony of Malcolm Britton, former lecturer at the College.

<sup>59</sup> National Heritage Listed Building entrance ref. no. 1074999.

<sup>60</sup> Censuses 1861 to 1911; photographs of 1920 in J. R. Hubbard, *Brooksby* (1977), 84.

<sup>61</sup> J. R. Hubbard, *Brooksby* (1977), 83; oral testimony of Malcolm Britton, former lecturer at the College.

In 1955, Spinney Farm barn yard was created and the first of seven Spinney Farm Cottages were constructed.<sup>62</sup> In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century the college created a commercial fishing lake between the main campus and Hall Farm buildings.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> J. R. Hubbard, *Brooksby* (1977), 81.

<sup>63</sup> J. R. Hubbard, *Brooksby* (1977), map inside back cover; OS map 2.5 inches to the mile, sheet 246 (surveyed 1999, 2000 edn).