

ECONOMIC HISTORY

Introduction

Before the 20th century Brooksby's economy was based on agriculture, with traditional mixed farming in the Middle Ages giving way to pastoral farming from 1492. There was also a watermill. Following the creation of the agricultural college from 1950, the main economic activities in the parish became education, and (from 2006) quarrying.

The Agricultural Landscape

This was a productive arable landscape in the Middle Ages. Ridge and furrow has been mapped across most of the parish,¹ and scatters of early medieval pottery have been found both within those fields and also in fields where ridge and furrow is absent (probably ploughed out).² An area between the railway line and river navigation has neither, and this was probably always meadow.³ Late medieval pottery finds are less widespread, and suggest areas of early enclosure to the west of the Hall and near the southern parish boundary.⁴ The village may have been deserted in 1492, and the land laid to pasture, initially almost certainly for sheep.⁵

Predominantly pastoral farming continued until the mid-20th century.⁶ During the Second World War farmers were 'directed' to increase the amount of arable land and from 1950, the Agricultural College placed even more emphasis on arable land use,⁷ reflecting changes to national farming practices, and the knowledge their students would need.

¹ R. F. Hartley, *The Medieval Earthworks of North-East Leicestershire* (1987), 64–65.

² P. Liddle and R. Knox, *The Brooksby Survey: an Interim Report* (Leicestershire County Council Museums, Arts and Records Services, 1991), Fig. 14.

³ R. F. Hartley, *The Medieval Earthworks of North-East Leicestershire* (1987), 64–65; P. Liddle and R. Knox, *The Brooksby Survey: an Interim Report* (Leicestershire County Council Museums, Arts and Records Services, 1991), Fig. 14.

⁴ P. Liddle and R. Knox, *The Brooksby Survey: an Interim Report* (Leicestershire County Council Museums, Arts and Records Services, 1991), Fig. 15.

⁵ Below, Agriculture before 1500.

⁶ W. G. Hoskins, 'The Leicestershire crop returns of 1801', in *TLAHS*, vol. 24 (1948), 145, citing TNA HO 67/15 for Lincoln Diocese; List and Index Society, volume 196; Geographical Publications Ltd, Land Utilisation Survey of Britain, Sheet 2-Gt Britain (south) (1942).

⁷ Oral testimony of James Fryer, Brooksby College Head of Farm Estate and Grounds (2019).

In 1847 there were 9 a. of woodland, four spinneys and one plantation.⁸ In 1904 Brooksby Spinney fox covert was 3 a. 3 r. 36 p. and the nearby 'plantation' covered 1 a. 3 r. 4 p.⁹ The areas of these were unchanged in 2016.¹⁰

Most sale documents for the Brooksby estate mention that ownership included fishing rights in the River Wreake.¹¹

Agriculture before 1500

In 1086, the major part of Brooksby was part of the 13 appendages of Barrow-on-Soar. In the Brooksby section there were two carucates, 7 a. of meadow and a mill rendering 5 shillings. Across all 13 appendages the Earl of Chester had 4.5 ploughs in demesne and 13 bordars had 15.5 ploughs.¹² On the estate of Countess Judith there were six bovates (c.90a.) worked by two bordars with one plough, and 4 a. of meadow. This estate had been and still was worth 4 shillings.¹³

In 1327, six people were assessed for tax.¹⁴ In 1377, 1379 and 1381 there were 39, 20 and 21 people assessed respectively.¹⁵ The large tax rebate of 36.7 percent in 1445, the largest in the Wreake Valley, indicates a parish struggling economically. Four ploughs were put down, four houses destroyed and 24 people left the village in 1492, when the lord of the manor, Sir John Villiers enclosed 160a. of open-field land, to convert it to pasture.¹⁶ His son George claimed in 1545 that

⁸ ROLLR, Ti/49/1.

⁹ ROLLR, DE 688/30

¹⁰ Author's own survey.

¹¹ For example, ROLLR, DE 688/30.

¹² P. Morgan (ed.), *Domesday Book* (1979), 237a 43, 1, p. 648.

¹³ P. Morgan (ed.), *Domesday Book* (1979), 236c 40, 36, p. 647.

¹⁴ W. G. D. Fletcher (ed.), 'The earliest Leicestershire lay subsidy roll, 1327', *Associated Architectural Societies Reports and Papers* 20 (1889), 148.

¹⁵ C. C. Fenwick, *Poll Taxes 1377–81*, I (Oxford, 1998), 487, 559, 631.

¹⁶ L. A. Parker, 'Enclosure in Leicestershire 1485–1607' (Univ. of London Ph. D. thesis, 1948), 36, citing TNA, E 368/319; I. S. Leadam, *Domesday of Enclosures 1517–1518*, I (1897), 237, citing BL, Lansd. MS 1, 153.

enclosure had started in 1378.¹⁷ Archaeological evidence from manuring scatters suggests that the parish was mainly arable for at least part of the 15th century.¹⁸

Agriculture after 1500

Brooksby's lords owned land in several parishes and there is little information about how they farmed their Brooksby demesne, or how it was stocked. In 1606, 71 per cent of Sir George Villiers' farm land in Brooksby, Hoby and Goadby Marwood was meadow or pasture.¹⁹

On his death in 1669, Francis Barford's farm in Brooksby was predominantly a pastoral farm. He owned barley and malt worth £10, nine cows and 104 sheep, together worth £52 10s., two colts and two pigs.²⁰

Of 31 fields in the parish, c.1720, 25 had the name 'meadow' or 'close', suggesting Brooksby was predominantly pasture. There were 19 lots rented by individuals or groups.²¹ In 1773, George Wright (III) was letting fields to about 16 individuals or groups, who paid rent totalling £67 1s. 9d. annually.²² In 1801, there were 60a. of arable land, seven percent of the parish area, sown with 22 a. of turnips, 21 a. of barley, 7 a. of peas, 4 a. of wheat, 5 a. of oats and 1 a. of potatoes.²³

In 1828, Hall tenant Robert Clarke left Brooksby and sold 20a. of wheat, 20 a. of barley and 70 a. of meadow and clover eddish 'now standing or growing'.²⁴

In 1847, there were 197 a. (23%) of arable land, 643 a. (75%) of pasture and meadow and 19 a. (2%) of woodland, roads and river. There were 12 tenants paying a total annual rent of £300. Only two tenants, Bernard Simpkin and H.C. Woodcock, had arable land. This was in the west of the parish. H.

¹⁷ L. A. Parker, 'Enclosure in Leicestershire 1485-1607' (Univ. of London Ph. D. thesis, 1948), 36, citing TNA, E 368/319.

¹⁸ P. Liddle and R. Knox, *The Brooksby Archaeological Survey; an Interim Report* (Leicester 1991).

¹⁹ G. F. Farnham, *Leicestershire Medieval Village Notes*, VI (1929), 262 citing TNA, C 142/293/14.

²⁰ ROLLR, PR/I/67/144, probate inventory of Francis Barford.

²¹ ROLLR, 7D 39, rental on loose paper inside note book of Sir Nathan Wright (c.1720).

²² ROLLR, QS 62/57/1-52, land tax (1773-1832).

²³ List and Index Society, volume 196.

²⁴ *Leicester Chronicle*, 2 Aug. 1828.

C. Woodcock rented what was to become Ives Barn/Hives Farm, Bernard Simpkin occupied much of what became Grange Farm land (Map 1).²⁵ None of the tenants lived in Brooksby in 1841 or 1851.²⁶

In 1879, Ernest Chaplin let by auction 500 a. of grass feeding land in 24 lots, with a shepherd provided.²⁷

In 1881, the arable land was 215 a. (25 per cent). The main crops were 45 a. of wheat, 37 a. of barley and 30 a. of oats, with 65 a. of non-permanent pasture and fallow land. There was 649 a. of permanent grass, 54 a. of clover or sainfoin and other grass crops laid down permanently, and 4a. of woods and plantations. The grassland was grazed by 205 cows, 294 sheep and 24 horses; there were seven pigs.²⁸ In other agricultural returns around this time there are no separate figures for Brooksby as they were combined with Rotherby's.²⁹

When the whole Brooksby Estate of 830 a. 0 r. 31 p. was up for sale in 1890, it contained 'three high class farms': Brooksby Lodge (later Brooksby Hall Farm) with 84 a., Barn Lodge (later Brooksby Grange Farm) with 97 a. and Ives Barn (later Hives Farm) with 63a.³⁰ There were 9 lots in total and much of the land was not included in these three farms; a large area was controlled directly by the Hall i.e. 60a. plus 230 a. for the whole Hall estate, plus another 207 a. which was probably the later Spinney Farm which never had a farmhouse only a barnyard. There were also 2 lots of 'accommodation land' of 55a. and 40 a. land around the corn mill and neighbouring hunting box. Accommodation land was pasture rented out usually to people outside the parish. Total income was £2445. This sale did not go ahead. In 1893 a sale of farm goods from the Hall estate included 210 sheep, 10 Shorthorn bullocks, 4 dairy cows, 5 horses, 7 pigs and agricultural implements.³¹

²⁵ ROLLR, Ti/49/1, tithe award (1847) and map (1848).

²⁶ TNA, HO107/592/12, 1841 census and HO 107/2091/39, 1851 census

²⁷ *Leicester Chronicle*, 29 Mar. 1879; 14 Apr. 1879.

²⁸ TNA, MAF 68/761.

²⁹ For example TNA, MAF 68/1559 (1917).

³⁰ ROLLR, DE 5099/160.

³¹ ROLLR DE 1826/47.

In 1904, pasture occupied 78 percent of the farm land in the parish, a similar proportion to 1846 and 1881.³²

In the 1930s and 1940s, Brooksby was largely grassland.³³ When Brooksby Hall estate was put up for sale in 1935 it included Hall Farm, with 186 a. 0 r. 30 p, principally pasture and only two arable fields.³⁴ In 1941 the farm, which was still owned by the second Earl Beatty, was 155 a. and the arable component was 34 percent of the total. This increase was due in part to the 'direction' of the War Agricultural Executive Committee (WAEC) to plough up a field of grassland to grow oats in 1940 and two more fields in 1941 to grow linseed, kale and oats.³⁵ The main crops on the farm in 1941 were wheat (14 a.), barley (6 a.), oats (9 a.), beans (7 a.), mangolds (3 a.), flax (3 a.) and potatoes (2 a.) There were 39 cattle, 94 sheep and lambs, 14 pigs, 102 poultry and 6 horses (3 for farm work).

The change in land use was even more marked at Grange Farm where slightly more than half the farm area in 1941 was arable, that is 138 a. out of a total of 310 a.³⁶ The WAEC had 'directed' tenant farmer A. Surtees to plough up 44 a. of grassland in 1940 to grow oats, potatoes and roots (mangolds and turnips). In 1941 the 'direction' was for 121 a. of wheat, oats, barley and roots. In that year the main crops were barley (46 a.), oats (40 a.), wheat (20 a.) and potatoes (14 a.). There were 212 sheep and lambs, 88 cattle (mostly for beef), 7 pigs, 150 poultry, and 6 horses (3 for farm work).

From 1948 until his death in 1976 Mr Venn, owner of Grange Farm, ran a racehorse training facility and stud at Brookside, with a manager who lived at the farm house. In 1976, there were two grass gallops of one mile and 1.25 miles,³⁷ adjacent to the Main Road, on land that became part of Brooksby Quarry from 2006. In 1961 the well-known racehorse trainer Jenny Harvey (later Pitman)

³² ROLLR, DE 688/30, sale of Brooksby Hall Estate (1904).

³³ Geographical Publications Ltd, Land Utilisation Survey of Britain, Sheet 2-Gt Britain (south) (1942).

³⁴ ROLLR, DE 4674/2346, Brooksby Hall Estate sale (1935).

³⁵ TNA, MAF 32/385/289, farm survey of Hoby and Rotherby parish (1942).

³⁶ TNA, MAF 32/385/289, farm survey of Hoby and Rotherby parish (1941).

³⁷ ROLLR, DE4674/1940, sale of Brooksby Grange Farm to Mr Venn (1948); DE 5099/537, sale of Grange Farm of Mr Venn deceased (1976).

of Hoby worked at Grange Farm as a schoolgirl at weekends and school holidays and briefly after leaving school.³⁸ In 1976 the farm with its horse training facility was bought by the agricultural college for £272,000 and reverted to normal farm use.³⁹

Spinney Farm was run by the War Agricultural Executive Committee during the war.⁴⁰

The advent of the college appears to have further increased the proportion of arable land.⁴¹ 'College Farm' c.1974 consisted of Hall Farm, Hives Farm and Spinney Farm, a total of 485 a. Although a major aim was to use the farm as a teaching unit it was run on strictly commercial lines. Two-thirds of the farm was arable, with wheat, barley and sugar beet. There was a Friesian dairy herd of 120 based at the new steading (barn yard) of Spinney Farm. A flock of 200 ewes produced fat lambs. The progeny of 150 sows was used for bacon, and pork was derived from a further c. 300 pigs. Up to 500 bought-in calves were reared for beef. The horticulture unit occupied one-third of an acre. There was a small poultry unit producing eggs, table poultry and turkeys.

In 2019, there were 200a. of permanent grass and 450 a. of arable land, with the latter contracted out by the College to a farmer resident outside the parish.⁴² The College looked after the pasture, woods, ponds and lakes. There were 30 beef cattle, 30 dairy cows with offspring and 450 sheep. The pigs were kept at Hall Farm.⁴³

Brooksby Mill

³⁸ J. Pitman, *Jenny Pitman: the Autobiography* (2011), 30-44.

³⁹ ROLLR, DE 5099/537, sale of Grange Farm of Mr Venn deceased (1976); oral testimony of Malcolm Britton, former Brooksby College lecturer.

⁴⁰ J.R. Hubbard, *Brooksby* (1977), 75.

⁴¹ College Farm survey c. 1974 in possession of Malcolm Britton, former lecturer at the college.

⁴² Oral testimony of James Fryer, Brooksby College Head of Farm Estate and Grounds (2019).

⁴³ Oral testimony of James Fryer, Brooksby College Head of Farm Estate and Grounds (2019).

There was a mill at Brooksby in 1086 rendering 5 s.⁴⁴ There are references to a Milne Croft in 1307,⁴⁵ a water mill in 1322-3,⁴⁶ a mill with its pond was mentioned several times c.1346 and in a document of 1599.⁴⁷ It is not clear whether the mill continued in operation throughout the next 200 years but a mill and mill meadow are mentioned in a rental c.1720.⁴⁸ In 1834, widow Ives occupied the mill,⁴⁹ and a miller is mentioned in some trade directories and censuses to 1875.⁵⁰ There was still a corn mill, near the road bridge to Hoby, in 1890.⁵¹ It had been 'taken down' by 1904, although the miller's house remained.⁵² The Agricultural College dismantled the building and established a piggery on the site, although it was no longer in use in 2019,⁵³ the pigs being kept at the Hall Farm site. The piggery's bacon houses on the eastern side of Hoby Road at the back of the station were no longer in use for meat production in 2019.

Quarrying

The excavation of sand and gravel deposits on the south side of Main Road began in 2006 by Lafarge Aggregates. It was estimated in that year that there were 3.14 million tonnes of reserves under an area of 304.7 a. and extraction would be at a rate of 300,000 tonnes per annum to 2021.⁵⁴ A further 1.6 million tonnes of reserves have subsequently been identified to the south, which would provide a further six years of work, subject to planning consent.⁵⁵ In 2019 the quarry occupied 15 per cent of

⁴⁴ P. Morgan (ed.), *Domesday Book* (1979), 237a, 43, 1, p. 648.

⁴⁵ G. F. Farnham, *Leicestershire Medieval Village Notes*, VI (Leicester, 1929), 253, citing De Banco Roll 151 Easter 32 Ed I 1304 m. 57 d Leyc; TNA, CP 40/151 m. 57d.

⁴⁶ J. Nichols, *History and Antiquities of County of Leicester*, II (1795), appendix 131, citing Harl. MSS 7178, Burton Lazars Cartulary (1332-3).

⁴⁷ J. Nichols, *History and Antiquities of County of Leicester*, II (1795), appendix 132, citing Harl. MSS 7178, Burton Lazars Cartulary (c.1346); ROLLR, 42D 31/71, exemplification of common recovery (1599).

⁴⁸ ROLLR, 7D 39, rental on loose paper inside notebook of Sir Nathan Wright (c.1720).

⁴⁹ *Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws* (Parl. Papers 1834 (44) xxix), pp. 104-5.

⁵⁰ TNA, RG10/3295/4, 1871 census; Barker and Co., *Dir. for Leics. and Rut.* (1875), 41.

⁵¹ OS Map, 1:2534, sheet XIX.1 (1884 edn); ROLLR, DE 5099/160.

⁵² ROLLR, DE 1826/12/1-6, letter dated 25 June 1904.

⁵³ J. R. Hubbard, *Brooksby* (1977), 83; oral testimony of Malcolm Britton, former lecturer at the College.

⁵⁴ <https://www.agg-net.com/resources/articles/site-reports/brooksby-quarry-opens-for-business> (accessed 18 Feb. 2020).

⁵⁵ <https://www.agg-net.com/resources/articles/site-reports/brooksby-quarry-opens-for-business> (accessed 18 Feb. 2020).

the parish area. Lafarge Aggregates became Lafarge Tarmac in 2013, then just Tarmac in 2015 after a takeover by Cement Roadstone Holdings.⁵⁶

Transport Services

In the three years from January 1839 to January 1842 the Melton Mowbray Navigation landed 261 tons of coal at Brooksby wharf, 2.4 per cent of the total for the canal.⁵⁷ There is no obvious evidence in the censuses that the Navigation employed Brooksby residents.⁵⁸

Brooksby resident employees of Midland Railway Company between 1846 and 1964 included a station master and his family.⁵⁹ A crossing gate keeper and his family are noted in 1871 and 1891.⁶⁰ Other residents were also employed as porters and signalmen.⁶¹

In the period 1872 to 1880 Brooksby Station had an average of 10,615 passenger bookings *per annum*, which was second highest at 10 *per cent* of the total, for 7 stations from Rearsby to Whissendine.⁶² The station was also second highest for 'coaching receipts' of £764 per annum (6 per cent) and 9,198 tons of minerals and stones (14 per cent).⁶³ There were two coal merchants at the railway station in 1908,⁶⁴ and 1912.⁶⁵

Other Services

⁵⁶ <https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/company/00453791>; <https://www.tarmac.com/news-and-media/news/2015/august/uk-constructihon-leader-tarmac-relaunches-under-crh-ownership/> (accessed 18 Feb. 2020).

⁵⁷ M. G. Miller and S. Fletcher, *The Melton Mowbray Navigation* (Railway & Canal Historical Society, Oakham 1984), 15.

⁵⁸ For example TNA, HO107/592/12, 1841 census.

⁵⁹ TNA, HO/107/2091, 1851 census and RG14/9334/408, 1911 census.

⁶⁰ TNA, RG10/3295/4, 1871 census and RG12/2543/24, 1891 census.

⁶¹ TNA, RG10/3295/4, 1871 census.

⁶² J. Simmons, 'Public transport in Leicestershire 1814-80', in *Trans. LAHS*, 70 (1996), 116, citing TNA, RAIL 491/674.

⁶³ J. Simmons, 'Public transport in Leicestershire 1814-80', in *TLAHS*, vol. 70 (1996), 116, citing TNA, RAIL 491/674.

⁶⁴ *Kelly's Dir. of Leics. and Rutl.* (1908), 48.

⁶⁵ *Kelly's Dir. of Leics. and Rutl.* (1912), 48.

The tenants of Brooksby Hall were usually actively involved with the Quorn Hunt.⁶⁶ Large parties of up to 60 guests stayed there for several days during the winter hunting season.⁶⁷ With the addition of day riders there could be as many as 500 on horseback.⁶⁸ The occupations of Brooksby residents in the censuses do not fully represent the importance of fox hunting, as the censuses were taken after the hunting season ended.

There were 11 servants at the Hall in 1901.⁶⁹ In 1890, J.G. Williams built new stables,⁷⁰ and employed grooms or stud grooms, of which there were five altogether in 1911.⁷¹ There were also three dog kennels mentioned in 1904.⁷²

Since 1993, the Agricultural College has established commercial projects to boost income, including hiring parts of the property for weddings, parties, conferences and sport, a cafeteria, Sunday lunches, ghost tours, horticulture courses, fishing and, since 2015, horse riding at the Equine Centre at Hives Farm.⁷³



Equine Centre

⁶⁶ For example, *Leicester Chronicle*, 26 Jan. 1828 and 7 Mar. 1840.

⁶⁷ ROLLR, 8D 62/BOX68/3(BOX 630), plan for convalescent home (1940).

⁶⁸ J. R. Hubbard, *Brooksby* (1977), 38.

⁶⁹ TNA, RG13/3012, 1901 census.

⁷⁰ J. R. Hubbard, *Brooksby* (1977), 65.

⁷¹ TNA, RG14/1933/408, 1911 census.

⁷² ROLLR, DE 688/30, sale document (1904).

⁷³ <https://www.brooksbymelton.ac.uk/commercial/> (accessed 1 Mar. 2020); *Brooksby Melton College Further Education Guide* (2019-20), 126.