



The Worcestershire Tithe and Inclosure Map Project: creating a research resource

Background

This project provides access via CD and the Web to digitised 18th and 19th century maps and associated data. The aim is to transform these important historical documents into a powerful, searchable research tool.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the formation of the English landscape as we see it today. The main sources of information on these changes are maps documenting the details of Inclosure in the late 18th and early 19th century and the mid 19th century assessment of holdings during the survey of the Tithe Commissioners.

Inclosure maps and awards originated as a result of Parliamentary Acts of Inclosure, particularly those undertaken from the 18th century onwards. The Acts set out procedures where, for example, medieval open fields were inclosed into newly laid out field parcels, made provision for new roads which provided access to fields and documented who was responsible for boundaries. In many cases tithe payments were abandoned at this stage in favour of compensation to the tithe-owner. Where there is a nineteenth century inclosure map for a parish, there is often no tithe map. This is the case for much of the south-east of Worcestershire.

Tithe maps form part of the process undertaken by the Tithe Commutation Act of 1836. In Worcestershire the maps date between 1837 and 1849 with the majority of the maps completed between 1838 and 1843. The main task of this act, and the commissioners appointed as a result, was the replacement of tithe payment in kind, with a system which calculated a monetary value for individual parcels or apportionments of land. To achieve this the land of each parish had to be surveyed in order to establish the titheable value. The Tithe Apportionment document gives information about the land-owner, the tenant, the name or description of the land, the land use and the rent-charge paid for every piece of land in the parish.

Three copies of each tithe map were produced: one for the diocesan registry, one for the parish and the Commissioner's copy. Worcestershire Record Office holds surviving parish and diocesan copies, the Tithe Commissioners' copies are held at The National Archives in Kew.





The project

The Tithe and Inclosure Project has its origins in 1991 when a volunteer in Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service (WHEAS), Mr David Guyatt, began the painstaking task of tracing the original maps in Worcestershire Record Office and then transcribing them onto an OS base-map at 1:10000. The original purpose was to be able to easily compare the historic maps to the modern landscape and identify field names and field boundaries that might have archaeological significance. This project received no funding but was supported by WHEAS in the form of office space and materials. This transcription project is now almost complete. It has taken many thousands of hours of volunteer time and is a huge achievement in its own right.

The work of David Guyatt emphasised the value of tithe maps in any study of historic landscape and demonstrated a demand for easy access to this information from individuals, local groups and professionals. Access to the originals requires a visit to the Record Office, they are often cumbersome and time-consuming to use and are increasingly fragile. Because of this it was decided to digitise the data held within the maps and associated apportionment books. This project is innovative in that the original maps are not reproduced as images but as a GIS theme, with all the original information on owner, tenant, land use, place name, size and value of each field or plot held in a linked database. The database can be searched to map any combination of the data fields onto the GIS. This will enable studies of late 18th century and 19th century ownership, tenancy and land-use across the county as well as facilitating studies of earlier landscapes and searches for archaeologically significant place names.

Methodology

The digitisation project was started in 2002. At first the original maps were traced on to sheets of drafting film and then traced again onto an ArcView Geographical Information System (GIS), using a digitising tablet. Over the last year we have been working directly from digital images of the maps to improve accuracy. The result of this process is that each field, yard, stream, road, path and building becomes a 'cell' into which data can be linked from a database. The documentary record that accompanied the compilation of the original map is entered into a computer database that is linked to the cells on the map using the original field number as a unique identifier. This process reproduces all the information held in the originals. It allows the maps to be displayed and searched by land owner, tenant, field name, land-use and land value or combinations of the above (Fig 1).



Once complete each parish can be viewed in a number of ways.

- All the complete parishes are loaded into WHEAS Historic Environment Record GIS. This allows the data to be viewed and searched on its own or in conjunction with data on archaeological sites, ancient monuments, historic buildings, soils and geology, first edition OS maps and aerial photographs.
- On on-line site has been created www.worcestershiremaps.org.uk where maps can be viewed either on their own or over modern OS data. Whilst all the data is held within this site the search facilities are, at present, slightly limited.
- Data from individual maps or groups of maps can also be put onto CD where they can be viewed via ArchExplorer software.

At the time of writing 32 out of 194 parishes are on-line and 52 maps have been digitised in total.

Funding

The development of the methodology was funded in 2002 by £5000 from the County Council. Since then the project has been funded entirely by Worcestershire archaeological and historical societies via Local Heritage Initiative grants. Local groups have received £150,000 worth of funding for projects related to the use of historic mapping. Of this amount about £70,000 has been used to digitise maps and provide training. Additionally a large amount of volunteer time has been spent tracing maps and digitising apportionment and other data and the web site has been provided for no cost by the County GIS team.

The future

The aim of the project is to digitise all the surviving tithe maps for the county and to fill in any gaps with inclosure maps. We are also looking for funding to improve the on-line site by providing, for example improved search facilities. Once the digital maps have been created they can be used in many different ways, for example, we can create 'virtual fly throughs' of the 18th and 19th century landscapes in 3D, thus bringing the past back to life (Fig 2)

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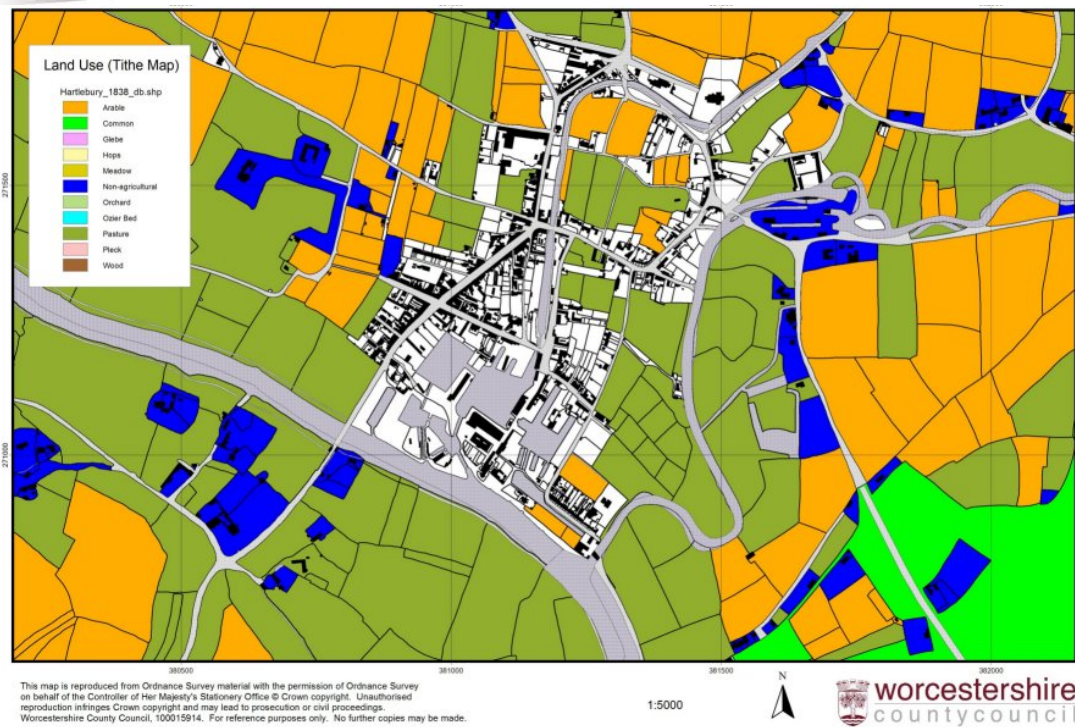


Figure 1 Stourport and its environs displaying land-use data from three tithe maps



Figure 2 3D historic reconstruction of land use at Elmley Castle using the digital Tithe map