



Small holdings and 'Homes for Heroes' in Surrey

Lavender Cottage and the Little Woodcote Estate

When driving past Lavender Cottage and the land surrounding this early 20th century home in Wallington, you may not think twice about the open fields, but this area is in fact a unique remnant of the small holding farm system that was popular during the 20th century. In particular, the small holdings offered to returning servicemen after World War One, as part of the 'Homes for Heroes', during the 1920s.

Small Holdings pre World War One

At the turn of the 20th century, farming in Britain was suffering the affects of many difficult years, with low prices and competition from imports from across the British Empire. Combined with the desperate need of work for the labouring classes, the government introduced the Small Holdings Act in 1908. This meant that councils across the country were required to buy and lease land for smallholdings and allotments, to allow people to rent small plots of land for a mixture of uses, including dairy farms, orchards and growing crops.

Eager to get into farming

The small holdings were hugely popular with many applying. Tenants were provided with a farmhouse and land ranging from 10 to 120 acres. However, livestock and instruments for farming were the responsibility of the tenant – although loans were available to allow them to establish themselves initially.

'The Lemons' - 1912

Lavender cottage and the surrounding land was one of the first areas within this part of Surrey to be allocated for small holdings. The area surrounding today's Lavender Cottage, down as far as 'Little Woodcote Lane', originally covering over 71 acres, was purchased by the Surrey Agricultural Committee for £5,500 in December 1912. At this time, the area was commonly referred to as 'The Lemons', named after the first detached cottage built here (today's No.274 Woodcote Road) a few years earlier. At this time, the former owner had already cultivated around eight acres of fruit plantations. Further plots of land were purchased in Wallington and Beddington at this time, including 'Old Lodge Field' and 'Woodcote Green'.

Lavender Cottage - 1913

The purchase of the land allowed the council to offer small holdings for rent. New semi-detached cottages were built, including today's Lavender Cottage, completed in 1913. It is uncertain when the first occupant moved into Lavender Cottage, with records giving no indication of a resident at this time. It is possible that the outbreak of war in 1914 halted the development, as men were encouraged to join the war effort.

'Homes for Heroes'

After World War One, the need for small holdings and opportunities for returning servicemen to get back into work was a high priority for the government and local councils. In 1919 the Surrey County Council purchased further land, to the west of 'The Lemons', known as 'The Little Woodcote Estate', as part of an initiative offering 'Homes for Heroes' under the Land Settlement Act. The Little Woodcote Estate covered over 370 acres and was initially divided into ten small holding farms ranging from 17 to 50 acres in size. Prior to this, a large part of 'The Little Woodcote Estate' was used for growing lavender and peppermint, an obvious inspiration for the name of Lavender Cottage.

Charles Machell

Records for the Surrey small holdings show that a Mr. Charles Machell moved into Lavender Cottage shortly after World War One. His rent was £11, 18 shillings and six pence p.a. and included the house and almost eight acres of arable land. Unfortunately, there are very few records giving details for Mr Machell, but he continued to work his land until he passed away in 1952. There are also no military records giving details for Charles Machell, but there are, however, records for his son Leslie George Machell, who fought as a Private with the 21st London Regiment. Leslie George Machell joined his father and became a small holder, moving to No.68 Little Woodcote Lane in 1925.



The Machell family

The Machell family were closely linked with farming in the area throughout the 20th century, and after Charles passed away, Lavender Cottage and the land passed to his grandson, Godfrey in 1953. At this time the rent was re-evaluated to become £58, 15 shillings and 10 pence. The house consisted of “three bedrooms, bathroom, two living rooms, kitchen, larder, hall and outside W.C.” The rent was re-evaluated again in 1954, rising to £75 pa and again in 1956 when an additional £12 was added because a new bathroom and hot water system was installed in the house. Godfrey also took over his father’s farm in 1968, combining the two Machell farms.

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