

Great Dodford and the Later History of the Chartist Land Scheme

By P. SEARBY

“And yet again the scene is changed,
‘Location Day’ arrives,
O’Connor’s boys come settling here
Like bees from busy hives.
The gay procession wends its way,
The waggons and the gigs,
‘Fergus and Freedom’ flaunts aloft,
‘Less parsons and more pigs’.

Sing of the land they bought and let,
Sing of the poor man’s share,
Sing of allotments fair for each,
Sing of the acres square.
Sing of the ring of axe and spade,
Sing of the fields they dug,
Sing of the muddy roads they made,
Sing of the homes so snug.”¹

I

THE most significant development in the Chartist movement in the 1840’s was Fergus O’Connor’s land plan, to settle members of the working class on plots of two, three, or four acres. On a four-acre plot, O’Connor claimed, a settler could by careful spade cultivation grow enough to make £100 a year profit, after feeding his family and paying rent, tithe, and taxes. In May 1845 the Chartist Co-operative Land Society (later called the National Land Company) was set up to carry out O’Connor’s plan. His vision of a life of rural comfort, health, and independence appealed so widely that within a few years the company had about 70,000 members, each buying shares of £1 6s. in instalments of as little as 1s. Plots were allocated to the members by ballot; the purchase of two shares entitled a member to compete in the ballot for a two-acre plot; three or four shares were necessary to compete for plots of three or four acres. By the summer of 1848, when a select committee of the House of Commons was investigating the work of the National Land Company, about 250 members had been ‘located’, after suc-

¹ ‘A.A.T.’ and W. G. Whinfield, *A Dodford Ditty or a Song of Home*, Dodford, 1900.

cess in the ballot, on four estates that had been bought and prepared for the scheme.

Recent writers on Chartism mention these first four land settlements—at Herringsgate near Rickmansworth, Minster Lovell near Witney, and Snig's End and Lowbands near Gloucester. They do not mention, however, the fifth and last settlement at Great Dodford near Bromsgrove in Worcestershire. At Dodford, says Miss J. MacAskill in the most detailed account of the land plan, "no allotments were made."¹ But the current six-inch Ordnance Survey map shows at Dodford the characteristic planned pattern of a Chartist land colony, quite unlike that of the surrounding countryside: the narrow, straight lanes, and the four-acre plots with cottages at their head; while on the ground the brick bungalows themselves are unmistakably the work of the National Land Company—each with its trefoil over the front door and identical in appearance with those at Snig's End.

Before its Chartist days Great Dodford contained little more than a large farmhouse called the Priory, which incorporated some of the remains of a Premonstratensian priory founded by Henry II. O'Connor bought the Priory and 273 acres of land in January 1848; he paid £10,546 for them.² After the preparation of the Snig's End estate the National Land Company's horses and building equipment were moved from there to Dodford in the summer of 1848, so that the new settlement could be made ready. At the same time, the select committee was meeting and much criticism of the National Land Company was emerging from it. O'Connor told a meeting of 5,000 Midlands Chartists at Dodford in July that despite the attacks on the land plan by a "lying and slandering press" and the "bullying" of the committee, the settlement at Dodford would be completed and the land plan would continue.³ The committee reported at the end of July. Despite its criticisms of the scheme it held out the possibility of legalizing the land company. O'Connor argued that its resolutions were "drawn up in the best spirit . . . and must be taken rather in the spirit of kind remonstrance and advice than as the slightest attempt to injure the land plan": the company would easily be legalized by Parliament if it altered the features which the committee had objected to—and in particular the system of balloting for plots. O'Connor admitted that the ballot system violated the Lottery Acts, and accordingly suggested a new procedure: henceforth plots should be given to those members of the National Land Company who paid large

¹ J. MacAskill, 'The Chartist Land Plan', *Chartist Studies*, ed. A. Briggs, 1959, p. 327.

² *Northern Star*, 8 January 1848; *Sixth Report of the Select Committee on the National Land Company*: H.C. 577, 1847-8, XIX, p. 14.

³ *Fourth Report of the S.C.*: H.C. 503, 1847-8, XIX, p. 75; *Northern Star*, 22 July 1848.

deposits or 'bonuses' in advance; members would in effect have to outbid each other to gain plots. O'Connor proposed this system reluctantly and really wanted one that would be legal and at the same time would not rule out the acquisition of plots by the "blistered hands, fustian jackets, and unshorn chins." He appealed for ideas to members of the National Land Company. "I beg of you—and you are not fools—to set your genius to work in every locality to devise some means by which we may get rid of the ballot without imposing a bonus that will operate against the more speedy location of the poor." The *Northern Star* records no answer to his appeal and the bonus system was adopted by the land conference in October. The amount of the bonus would be deducted from the capital value of the plot on which as a perpetual lessee the settler would pay ground rent at 4 per cent to the freeholder, the National Land Company.¹

From the summer of 1848 to the spring of 1849 roads were built and land cleared at Dodford, and forty four-acre plots marked out and their accompanying cottages built; £6,000 had been spent on this work of preparation by November 1848 and no doubt the total was higher finally. The bonus method was used to select thirty-six tenants for the new settlement in June 1849; they paid bonuses of between £55 and £150. There were no plots available for members who had subscribed less than £55 and the return of their bonuses was promised. Three other members were given plots without bonuses because they were still unlocated after winning four-acre plots in the National Land Company's ballot of May 1847. One plot had already been sold by O'Connor.² 'Location Day' was 2 July 1849. This event was not celebrated in the *Northern Star* as the location days of the other four estates had been. No doubt the omission was due to the disappointment of the settlers, which clearly existed even though allowance must be made for the exaggerations of a hostile newspaper. "One man with a wife and six children, who came from Glasgow, was so disgusted with the prospect before him that he left immediately, to make the best of his way home, and the best of his unfortunate bargain."³ The settlers' complaints were listed in the *Northern Star*: their children would fall down the open wells; there were no pumps to raise the water; no wheat had been planted; above all, the seeds that the company had sown for them promised a miserable crop. O'Connor replied: the wells would be covered; the pumps would be installed immediately (they were not); he did not want the settlers to grow wheat, and the

¹ *Sixth Report of the S.C., loc. cit.*, Conclusion; *Northern Star*, 12 August, 30 September, and 4 November 1848.

² *Ibid.*, 11 November 1848 and 23 June 1849.

³ *Worcestershire Chronicle*, 4 July and 18 July 1849.

plants were unadvanced because the great shortage of money that the land company was suffering from had prevented the sowing of the ground until the bonus money had been paid in June.¹

The rapidly declining rate of subscription to the National Land Company from the summer of 1848 onwards can clearly be traced in the *Northern Star*. In the summer of 1849 O'Connor asked for subscriptions of £13,500 to enable him to complete the purchase of land at Mathon near Malvern, where he planned a sixth settlement with plots of between one and eight acres.² It is plain from the *Northern Star* that the response was inadequate. Registration of the company was made impossible, finally, by a judgment of the Court of Queen's Bench in April 1850, but dwindling support and lack of funds already foretold the death of the land scheme. Dodford was the last Chartist land settlement. Lack of money was probably responsible for the curtailment of the original scheme to prepare at Dodford fifty four-acre plots, ten of three acres, and ten of two acres.³ Possibly to earn money to prepare the settlement, ten acres were sold in March 1849 for £400. After Location Day another ninety-four acres and Dodford Priory were sold for £4,000. The Priory was sold with twenty-one acres and there were two plots of ten acres each and one of eight; the rest of the land was sold in plots of six or four acres. In only one case a bonus payer bought a plot of four acres to enlarge his holding; perhaps significantly, he was a pawnbroker, James Topp. These sales, therefore, did not materially alter the structure of Dodford as an area of smallholdings. The sales were listed and confirmed in the second schedule of the Act of 1851 that dissolved the National Land Company.⁴

The 1851 Act gave power to the Court of Chancery to refer to a Master in Chancery the winding up of the company; those receiving allotments were confirmed in their plots as perpetual lessees and the ground rents they were to pay were to be determined by the Master.⁵ Master Goodchap fixed the ground rent at 4 per cent of the capital value of the plot and house, and valued the plots at Dodford at between £25 and £40 an acre, and the houses at £120 each, so that the average value placed on each plot and house was £275; the amount on which ground rent was paid was reduced by the size of the entry bonus, so that ground rents at Dodford were lower than at the other settlements. At four of the settlements the ground rents were bought by W. P. Roberts, the solicitor to the National Land Company. At Dodford, alone among the settlements, lessees were permitted to redeem their ground rents

¹ *Northern Star*, 7 July 1849.

² *Ibid.*, 23 June 1849.

³ *Ibid.*, 11 November 1848.

⁴ Local and Personal Acts 14 and 15 Vict. 1851, c. cxxxix.

⁵ *Ibid.*, paragraph ix.

at twenty-five years' purchase, but few did so because they would have had to borrow at 5 per cent to redeem a debt of 4 per cent.¹

In 1851 the families of twenty-five of the thirty-six bonus payers were still living in Dodford. The departure of the others probably reflects the difficulties of life in the settlement's early years. Six cottages were uninhabited. About fifteen other families at Great Dodford comprised settlers who had bought land from O'Connor, the successors of the bonus payers who had left, and perhaps also the three participants in the ballot of May 1847. The names of the members of the last two groups cannot be discovered; in addition, some of those in the first group were not in residence in 1851, probably because they had resold or leased their plots. It is thus impossible to distinguish the several categories; but when the census schedules for 1851 are examined it is clear that the non-bonus payers, taken together, came, like the bonus payers in the list on p. 37, from many parts of Britain. Their birthplaces, with those of their children, where they were different, in brackets, were: Northumberland (villages in Yorkshire, Gloucestershire, and Devon), London, Wootton in Warwickshire, Bristol (Shoreditch), Shropshire, Bath, Manchester, Stafford, Kent, Northampton, Newark, Sheffield, and Hanbury in Worcestershire. The entries relating to birthplaces in the census schedules are ambiguous in several ways, but when this list is studied in conjunction with that for the bonus payers it appears that fewer than half of the settlers had moved to Dodford from large industrial towns.² But in one respect the facts speak more clearly and eloquently than rhetoric. The size of the bonuses, the differing nature and wide dispersal of the settlers' places of origin, and the remoteness of many of them from Dodford, reveal the widespread and deep longing in Britain for the life of an independent smallholder. It may be gauged from the life of Ann Wood, who moved to Dodford from Scotland at the age of 60, with two daughters, another woman, and a granddaughter, after investing £150 in a four-acre plot which one of her daughters was still farming in 1875.³ The land plan was psychologically a stroke of genius; the disappointment of the hopes it had aroused perhaps exceeded that at the failure of the Chartist movement for the franchise.

It is admittedly difficult to decide from which social class the Dodford settlers came. So many of them covered their tracks in 1851 by describing themselves as farmers or market gardeners. But the one bonus payer in this

¹ Birmingham Reference Library: C. D. Sturge Collection of newspaper cuttings relating to land tenure: vol. 2, pp. 120 *et seq.*, C. D. Sturge, 'The National Land Company', c. 1880, p. 122.

² P.R.O.: H.O. 107/2047: Census Schedules for Bromsgrove.

³ *Bromsgrove Almanac and Directory*, 1875.

LIST OF THE DODFORD RESIDENTS OF 1851 WHO HAD BEEN
AMONGST THE 36 ALLOTTEES OF 1849, OR WHOSE PARENTS OR SPOUSES HAD BEEN ALLOTTEES

(Names and bonuses of allottees printed in the *Northern Star*, 23 June 1849:
other information from the 1851 census schedules.)

Name	Place of birth	Place of birth of children, where different from that of parents; if it was the same, entry is marked thus —.		Occupation	Bonus
		No children, space left blank.			
William Ash	Newton, Staffs.	Cheadle, Cheshire	Farmer of 4 acres	£56	
Stephen Baker	Kent	London	Farmer	£57 5s.	
John Bucknole	Lyme Regis, Dorset	Devon	Gardener	£55	
Thomas Bungay	Wiltshire	London	Farmer	£59 10s.	
William Burridge	Shaftesbury, Dorset		Grocer	£100	
Peter Burton	Leigh, Lancs.		Agric. labourer	£105	
James Cameron	Scotland	—	Hatter	£120	
John Coggill	Newark, Notts.	Leeds	Farmer of 4 acres	£100	
John Crane	Spratton, Northants.		Farmer of 4 acres	£110	
Nathaniel Dewhurst	York		Farmer of 4 acres	£101 15s.	
James Finlay	Northumberland	—	Stone mason	£75	
William Foster	Souldern, Oxon.		Gardener	£91	
Henry T. Green	Chesterton, Cams.	Leicester	Gardener	£60 10s.	
William Hodgkiss	Cork, Ireland	Dudley, Worcs.	East India Co. Pensioner	£120	
James Johnson	Peterborough		Agric. labourer	£118 3s. 4d.	
Ann Lawes	Salisbury	—		£102	
John Orrell	Bermondsey		Plumber and painter	£84	
William Robinson	Malton, Yorks.		Farmer of 4 acres	£93 9s. 5d.	
Alexander Shaw	Scotland	—	Carpenter	£90	
William Topp	Middlesex		Pawnbroker	£64	
James Town	York	—	Gardener	£65	
John Wallace	Hertfordshire		Gardener	£101	
Hannah Ward	Yorkshire			£85	
Robert West	York	—	Farmer of 4 acres	£65	
Ann Wood	Scotland	—		£150	

group whose previous status it is possible to discover, John Wallace, had been a landscape gardener employing several men.¹ Of the 'farmers' of 1851 who had not been bonus payers, Jeremiah Golding had been a bootmaker and William Hackett a 'gentleman'—though since Golding had bought

¹ *Worcestershire Chronicle*, 31 July 1850.

twenty-one acres and the Priory, and Hackett ten acres, they cannot be regarded as typical of the settlers.¹ On the other hand, one cannot even be sure that the 'agricultural labourers' of 1851 (two of whom were bonus payers and three not) had come from this class and had returned to it; it seems possible that they had been forced into it by the hard early years at Dodford. The non-agricultural occupations given for the settlers not in the list on p. 37, were those of mason (3), hatter, stone-miner, shoemaker, and brick-maker. They further support the impression that the settlers were artisans or from the lower middle class. This, one presumes, is what the *Worcestershire Chronicle* meant when it described them as "intelligent looking men, clean in person, and well-conducted in manner." Thirty years later the education, which the settlers had given to their children in Dodford, where there was no school till 1877, was commended.² The bonus system naturally operated to the disadvantage of the poor—as O'Connor had foreseen.

In the years immediately after 1851 many of the families recorded in the census schedules seem to have left; by 1865 only nineteen, fourteen of whom were allottees, are recorded in the local directory, though these figures may be an underestimate, since they take no account of the possible survival in the female line of families whose surnames were extinct. But in the years after 1865 the directories record a lower rate of departure: in 1876 seventeen of the 1851 families were still there, twelve of them allottees; there was a gradual drop thereafter and in 1905 the corresponding figures were five and five. These figures from an age of great geographical mobility probably reflect the undoubted prosperity that the Dodford settlement, alone among the land colonies, possessed from the 1860's to the First World War.³

II

In the 1880's and afterwards the five Chartist settlements were visited by several trained observers, whose detailed reports make it possible to trace their fortunes from the 1860's onwards. By 1880 the first settlement, O'Connorville at Herringsgate, near Rickmansworth, had largely ceased to be agricultural in nature and was "undergoing conversion to a town of suburban villa residences," for which the cottages had been altered and enlarged; tradesmen, city clerks, and retired people lived in them. In the one-time schoolhouse lived W. P. Roberts's widow. The minority of smallholders who remained were prosperous; the new suburb gave them a market for their fruit and vegetables and employment as servants. But the other four

¹ Local and Personal Acts 14 and 15 Vict. 1851, c. CXXXIX, Second Schedule.

² *Worcestershire Chronicle*, *loc. cit.*; F. Impey, *La Petite Culture*, 1883, p. 17.

³ *Bromsgrove Almanac and Directory*, 1865-1905 (annual volumes).

settlements were still agricultural, and three of them were decidedly poor. Between 1865 and 1875 the settlers at Snig's End had been fairly prosperous and there had been some demand for plots; newcomers had bought leases, mortgaging their plots to raise the £70 or £80 needed. But the smallholders' position was precarious and the coming of the agricultural depression hit them badly. They were too far from Gloucester for easy marketing, especially since, owning few horses, they had to hire carts. The soil was stiff clay, in need of draining. Fruit trees did not flourish. Pigs were kept, but the plots were too small for cows or sheep. "Contrary to O'Connor's calculations and expectations, it has been found impracticable to grow sufficient produce to feed them. They have a proverb there to the effect that four acres would starve a cow but fat a pig." The settlers were chronically short of manure, and though a lot of wheat was grown, it was valued chiefly for the straw. The staple crop was *Magnum Bonum* potatoes. The ground was prepared with a borrowed plough, or by a spade or a special two-tined fork. "In reply to our question as to the difference in the crop after ploughing or digging, he replied that 'the difference was very little.'" In the early 1880's the most sanguine observer, C. D. Sturge, estimated the gross yield of a four-acre plot at £40 a year, and the net income from it at 11s. 6d. a week, including 1s. 6d. for the value of the cottage; local farm labourers were paid between 10s. and 12s. a week. Twelve of the plots had fallen into the hands of the mortgagees of the ground rents or the leases; they could not find tenants and the plots were vacant. About twelve smallholders were doing quite well still, but the two examples that Sturge quotes had other jobs as well: one was a weaver and the other a farm labourer, who regarded his plot merely as a supplement to farm work, which was hard to obtain. Andrew Doyle, gloomier than Sturge, put the number of unoccupied plots at twenty and emphasized the need for supplementary employment and the small size of the families who said they were doing well. "No one wholly dependent on a single allotment has succeeded in maintaining a family of children in anything like comfort." The reports from Lowbands a few miles away were very similar: the need for other employment in farm work, glovemaking, and weaving; the growing of potatoes; the poverty and the unoccupied plots. "Of those few who have struggled on for some time, it was generally the case that they had but small families. In reply to our questions one of them said, 'We live as hard as we can—can't see nohow that we can live nearer; that pig you see hanging there is for sale', and this was said with a tremulous voice and quavering of the lip which at once carried conviction of its truth."

At the Charterville settlement at Minster Lovell near Witney many freeholders and perpetual leaseholders had sold out their rights in the recent

past, in "the good times," to those whom Sturge called 'investors'. Smallholders rented plots from them on short leases; when the yield and price of potatoes had been high, for example in 1872, they had been willing to pay £14 a year for a four-acre plot and cottage, plus tithe at 5s. or 7s. an acre. But in the 1880's the yield of potatoes dropped owing to the blight, and the price dropped too. The lack of cows and sheep led to a shortage of manure and impoverishment of the soil, which gave poor yields of coarse wheat and barley; this was unsuitable for malting even if it could have been delivered to the warehouse. Minster Lovell was remote from good markets. The soil was tilled with a hired plough or a breast plough. In the 1880's the smallholders lived worse than those at Lowbands or Snig's End. Harwood gives details of the annual balance sheet of a perpetual lessee of a four-acre holding:

RECEIPTS		£	s.	d.
Wheat, 1 acre—3 qrs at 43s. 6d.		6	10	6
Potatoes, 1 acre—40 bags at 7s. 6d.		15	0	0
Beans and peas, $\frac{1}{2}$ acre—3 qrs at 40s.		6	0	0
Garden produce, etc., $\frac{1}{2}$ acre		5	0	0
Barley, 1 acre— $3\frac{1}{2}$ qrs at 30s.		5	5	0
Profit on pigs and fowls		5	0	0
		<hr/>		
		£42	15	6
		<hr/>		
PAYMENTS		£	s.	d.
Ground rent		9	10	0
Tithe, rates, and taxes		1	10	0
Hire of plough—4 acres at 15s.		3	0	0
Hire of drill—2 acres at 6s.			12	0
Help at harvest time		1	8	0
Repairs to premises, etc.		1	10	0
Seed		3	10	0
Interest on purchase of lease at 5% on £50		2	10	0
		<hr/>		
		£23	10	0
		<hr/>		

The smallholder earned about 7s. 6d. a week and had a cottage. If he had owned his lease outright his weekly income would have been about 1s. more. Sturge quotes a balance sheet for a good year but his smallholder still earned only 8s. a week, plus 1s. 6d. for the value of the cottage, though he paid the high rent of £15 10s. The allotment holders at Minster Lovell found it hard to supplement their incomes because of the lack of demand for labour. "The style of living is evidently wretched. On our suggesting to one of the most prosperous of them that occasionally he indulged in a joint of butchers' meat,

he replied with emphasis, 'By gom, no! A butcher is never seen in this place'.¹

In his summing up on the land scheme Sturge argued that misfortunes that O'Connor could not have foreseen had combined to vitiate its merits: the blight had caused a drop in potato yields and the railways had failed to approach the settlements closely. The collapse of the land company had meant that the schoolhouses it had built were not used for education and the settlers were deprived of agricultural advice. "Consequently, the system of cultivation recommended by O'Connor has never been carried out, viz, a system of using the produce of the land for feeding purposes, and acquiring income by the sale of milk, sheep, and pigs, instead of by the produce itself." This passage is special pleading, since Sturge does not ask whether the potatoes and cabbages that O'Connor recommended as the chief food for the stock would in fact have been a satisfactory diet for them.² But Sturge admits the unsoundness of much of the scheme, and in particular the error of making the plots too small. Seven acres would have been a more suitable size: and on such a plot the rent of the cottage would not have formed so high a proportion of the rent. The Rev. H. C. Ripley, Vicar of Minster Lovell, argued that "four acres is far too small a piece of land for a man to get a living off, whilst it is too large for a man to unite with regular daily work, supposing the work could be had, but it cannot." The most severe critic of the land plan was Andrew Doyle, assistant commissioner to the Royal Commission on the Depressed Condition of the Agricultural Interests. His attitude is reminiscent of J. S. Revans's before the select committee of 1848. "Smallholdings are obstacles to the progress of scientific agriculture;" the land scheme furnished "no reasonable ground of encouragement for projects of a similar character."³ But Doyle, significantly, did not go to Dodford, which would have shed a bright gleam over the sombre reports of Sturge and Harwood. Here was a Chartist settlement where in the 1880's men were making a moderate living from four acres. At Dodford, Doyle would not have been able to dismiss the land scheme as an entire failure.

III

In north central Worcestershire are areas of light soil which have proved very good for market gardening. Though Dodford lies very near these areas, its soil is very different—a stiff red clay derived from Keuper marl, very

¹ C. D. Sturge, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-3; Sturge Coll.: vol. 2, pp. 4 *et seq.*, Alfred Harwood, 'Peasant Farming in England', Spring 1882, pp. 5-14; *Report of the Royal Commission on the Depressed Condition of the Agricultural Interests*: C. 3375—III, H.C., 1882, xv, p. 72.

² F. O'Connor, *A Practical Work on the Management of Small Farms*, 3rd ed. 1846, pp. 153-4.

³ C. D. Sturge, *loc. cit.*, Harwood, *op. cit.*, p. 14; C. 3375—III, p. 73.

difficult to cultivate.¹ Local residents describe it as being like bricks in summer and a swamp in winter. Soil augerings reveal that it is very much leached and has only a shallow layer of humus.² To turn the heavy soil smallholders still use a 'Dodford digging fork' with three thick tines, first made for the Dodford settlers in the last century in Stourbridge.³ Before O'Connor bought the estate it had been held by a tenant farmer at the low rent of 14s. an acre; he failed to prosper. The first year at Dodford was very hard for the settlers: one of them, John Wallace, said that they had had only dry bread to eat. For some years afterwards they did badly too, growing cereals and potatoes. Many supported themselves at their old trades, at home or in Bromsgrove, and hired labourers to work their plots. Sturge calculates the yield of a four-acre plot at about £28 in the early years, "and when ground rent and taxes (about £8) were deducted, the occupier found himself in the condition of a labourer, living rent-free and receiving about 7s. 10d. a week. To this must be added, in most cases, a fat pig at Christmas, and a quantity of vegetables all year round."⁴

John Wallace realized that with careful treatment the heavy soil was suitable for the cultivation of strawberries and other market-garden crops: early in the 1860's their growing was begun at his suggestion. From then until about 1920 strawberries were the staple crop at Dodford; 'Joseph Paxton' was the favourite variety. "The land is very undulating, and on the high ground and in little vales between, and whatever the aspect of the slope—north, south, east, or west—strawberries are grown. From the high ground one can see acres of strawberries in full bloom." Gillyflowers were grown between the strawberries and were supplemented for the market with wild flowers collected by the children from the woods nearby. There were many fruit trees and bushes. Early peas, beans, and shallots were also grown, and for a time some garlic. This was sold to Lea and Perrins as an ingredient of Worcester sauce, but the other crops were sold in Birmingham, about thirteen miles away. The proximity of Birmingham and the Black Country was the great advantage that Dodford enjoyed over the other settlements. The strawberry crop was picked during July, with the help of domestic nail-makers and their families from the nearby villages of Sidemoor and Bourn Heath; about 1900 the pickers were paid 2s. 3d. for a nine-hour day. "On

¹ K. M. Buchanan, *Worcestershire*, 1944: part 68 of the *Report of the Land Utilization Survey of Great Britain* (ed. L. D. Stamp), pp. 483, 572.

² I am very grateful to Mr D. J. Davis of Bordesley Day College of Education for this information and for his advice in the preparation of this paper.

³ Information from Mr J. F. Dolphin of Dodford.

⁴ F. Impey, *loc. cit.*; *Worcestershire Chronicle*, *loc. cit.*; C. D. Sturge, *loc. cit.*

summer evenings one may see a procession of loaded carts making for the Midlands metropolis. Some of the people have their own horses, others keep their own carts and hire horses for a month or two in the summer, and some combine with their neighbours in getting to market. The produce picked in the day—the strawberries packed in oblong wooden boxes conveniently carried, as many as a hundred dozen pounds going on one cart—is started off about eight o'clock in the evening. The buyers are met in Birmingham market in the early hours of the morning, and the grower returns with the price of his produce—for all transactions are 'cash'—and gets to bed when the rest of the world is waking up." Between 1880 and 1910 the earliest fruit of the season fetched 10d. or 1s. a lb.; the price dropped to 2½d. later. On the second Sunday in July, when the best fruit had been picked, the growers held their 'Strawberry Wake', opening their plots to visitors, who were allowed to eat as many strawberries as they liked for 6d. each; there was trouble if they tried to carry any away.¹

Even at the end of the century almost all the plots were separately farmed; there had been few amalgamations. Few smallholders mortgaged their leases. Alfred Harwood, a cautious observer, found that the cottages he entered "exhibited a degree of comfort that almost amounted to luxury." To some extent this prosperity was the result of the other occupations with which the smallholders supplemented their incomes: some made nails; one made gunlocks for the Birmingham trade; another employed several assistants making bonnets; Alexander Shaw kept a grocer's shop and William Robinson made peg tops. The smallholders complained that their plots were too small. They needed six acres to keep a horse comfortably; not many kept cows and there was room for only a few pigs. To get a good strawberry crop from the heavy soil the smallholders usually spent large sums on manure, which had to be carted along bad roads for eight or more miles; one man spent at least £26 a year on manure. Some growers used large amounts of artificial fertilizer instead. Nevertheless, when all the qualifications are made, it is clear that after they turned to market gardening the Dodford smallholders earned higher incomes from their plots than those at the other settlements. About 1880 Sturge calculated the average gross income from an acre of strawberries, peas, or garlic at about £30, and the average net income for a four-acre plot, after all outgoings, at £45. When the

¹ Harwood, *op. cit.*, p. 8; *Bromsgrove Messenger*, 21 July 1900, 'The Dodford Settlement—the Garden of the Midlands'; Birmingham Reference Library: Cotton Collection of material relating to the history of Bromsgrove: vol. 62, p. 199, newspaper cutting (1885); H. E. H. Icely, *Bromsgrove School through Four Centuries*, 1953, pp. 98–9; Information from Mr S. Bird of Dodford.

leases of the plots were sold, they fetched £300 or £400 in the 1880's and in one case £500.¹

The prosperity of Dodford and the moral qualities that independence had allegedly brought to its smallholders were held up by Jesse Collings and his Birmingham associates in the 1880's to show that the extension of peasant holdings was desirable. Dodford was a weapon in the battle for three acres and a cow. Collings argued that Dodford kept twenty people in poverty in the 1840's and 200 in prosperity in the 1880's: "these small cultivators are only acquainted with poor rates from the fact that they have to pay them. What I want to see, and what the working classes, if they are wise, will insist on securing, is that there should be three or four thousand Great Dodfords in England." Dodford also figured greatly in *La Petite Culture* (1883), one of the many pamphlets and articles on the land question written by Frederic Impey, the first Secretary of the Allotments and Small Holdings Association. This association was established in 1883, with its head office at 95 Colmore Row, Birmingham. Jesse Collings was its first President. At the Conservative dinner in Bromsgrove during the 1885 election campaign several speakers attacked Collings's plans as a plot to encourage Radicalism. To this Alexander Shaw replied that the settlers were proud of their Radicalism: "at election times the great majority marched under a banner with the inscription 'Dodford Independent Electors. Ready? Yes, Always Ready'." They had campaigned against church rates. "For this and suchlike doings they were dubbed by a neighbouring parson as the 'rag, tag and bobtail'."²

Early in this century all the Chartist settlements were visited by L. Jebb, collecting information for the Co-operative Small Holdings Association. Herringsgate was "entirely residential", Snig's End and Lowbands unprosperous. The men at Minster Lovell were doing better than they had done in the 1880's; they mostly grew potatoes and barley for sale and some produce was sold in Bristol. Ten acres were, however, regarded as necessary for a full living, except for those few settlers who were growing market-garden crops for sale in Witney. A few years earlier M. Sturge Henderson had also found Minster Lovell prosperous as compared with former times. Jebb evidently regarded Dodford as the most successful settlement but thought its future uncertain. In recent years many of the plots had been

¹ *Bromsgrove Messenger*, *loc. cit.*; C. D. Sturge, *loc. cit.*; Harwood, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9; *Bromsgrove Almanac and Directory*, 1875; Sturge Coll.: vol. 1, pp. 131-2, letter from F. Impey (1882); Cotton Coll.: vol. 62, p. 198, letter from Jesse Collings (newspaper cutting, 1885); Information from Mr J. F. Dolphin.

² Cotton Coll., *loc. cit.*; and vol. 62, p. 279, letter from Alexander Shaw (newspaper cutting, 1885); F. Impey, *Small Holdings in England*, 1909, pp. 2, 5.

bought by "Birmingham manufacturers, as a speculation." They were mostly letting them to smallholders at higher rents, £5 an acre being usual, than the ground rents paid by the original lessees. No doubt this was partly a reflection of the profitability of the plots: but "there were many complaints about the low prices paid for strawberries as compared with former times." Dodford had never faced competition from strawberry growers in Evesham and the south because their seasons were largely over when Dodford's began. In the 1890's, however, Worcestershire County Council began allotments for unemployed nailmakers at Catshill, two miles north of Dodford; strawberries were the major crop at Catshill; grown on lighter soil, they reached their peak slightly earlier than Dodford's and forced the price down. Ironically, the inception of the Catshill allotments was a result of the smallholdings movement whose arguments had drawn strength from the success of Dodford.¹

The Dodford growers were prosperous again during the war, when the greatest part of the strawberry crop was sold to Cadbury's for jam for the army; Dodford residents like to believe that the jam was reserved for officers. After 1918, however, the old economy collapsed; the last Strawberry Wake was held in 1922. There were many reasons. Many plots were bought as rural retreats by Birmingham people uninterested in strawberries. The use of artificial fertilizers produced by 1920 a decline in the quantity and quality of the crop. For several seasons viruses attacked the plants. The death of domestic nailmaking meant the disappearance of the picking force. Above all, the opening of Austin's motor factory at Longbridge, only nine miles away, meant that the Dodford men could earn there a minimum of 25s. a week as against the 16s. paid to labourers on the plots and the little more earned by the smallholders themselves.² Many of the inhabitants of the Chartist bungalows at Dodford work at BMC today. The fruit trees remain but there is only one quarter-acre of strawberries and the plots are largely uncultivated: though the caravans on one provide a belated vindication of O'Connor's claim that it is possible to live like a prince on the product of four acres.

¹ L. Jebb, *Small Holdings in England*, 1907, pp. 124 *et seq.*; pp. 350 *et seq.*; M. Sturge Henderson, *Three Centuries in North Oxfordshire*, 1902, p. 176; Jesse Collings, *Land Reform: Occupying Ownership, Peasant Proprietary, and Rural Education*, 1906, pp. 213 *et seq.*; R. C. Gaut, *A History of Worcestershire Agriculture and Rural Evolution*, 1939, pp. 368-9; Information from Mr J. F. Dolphin.

² Information from Mr S. Bird and Mr J. F. Dolphin.