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Orchards in the Landscape: A Norfolk Case Study

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Orchards were an important feature of the English landscape throughout medieval and post-medieval times yet they have received relatively little attention from historians. This article presents the results of recent research in the county of Norfolk. It briefly examines the place of orchards in local cultures and economies, their form and spatial organisation, and aspects of their location and distribution.

KEYWORDS orchards, Norfolk, fruit, gardens, regional variation, nurseries

Introduction

Recent decades have seen increasing interest in traditional fruit varieties and orchards on the part of horticulturalists, natural historians, and the general public (Sanders 2010). There is a widespread concern to conserve old varieties of apples, and to a lesser extent other fruit, especially those deemed to be characteristic of particular localities (Hunter 2010; Masset 2012). Such 'traditional' varieties have been eclipsed by a growing standardisation of taste since the 1950s, in part encouraged by large supermarket chains. Conservation of 'heritage varieties' thus forms part of a wider agenda, associated with groups like Common Ground, which embraces wholesome food, small-scale production, and a 'sense of place' (King and Clifford 2011). In addition, traditional orchards are important for biodiversity, as Natural England has recently recognised: both in terms of the genetics of individual trees, and also for the habitats that old trees, and the orchards themselves, provide (Maddock 2008).

Yet in spite of such widespread interest, orchards have been largely neglected as part of the historic environment. Moreover, much of what has been written about their history has arguably been embedded in nostalgic notions of an unchanging 'traditional' past. In 2010 a research project was initiated by the Landscape Group at the University of East Anglia, with funding from the Norfolk County Council, into the history of orchards in Norfolk. This article provides a brief summary of its findings. We are not primarily concerned with the origins, early history or genetic character of different kinds of fruit, which have been dealt with in some depth by

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FIGURE 1 A typical example of a surviving 'traditional' orchard in Norfolk (Photo: authors).

others (Roach 1985; Juniper and Mabberley 2006), but rather with orchards as landscape features, and with their place in local and regional cultures and economies, matters which have only recently begun to attract the attention of researchers (Rotherham 2008). The documentary evidence relating to orchards is uneven, biased towards the wealthier elements in society and to the period after the mid-seventeenth century. Early maps provide important information about size and location, but can be schematic in character and their details on occasions hard to interpret. In spite of such problems, some useful light has been shed on the history of orchards in Norfolk which may contribute to a wider understanding of the subject, in England as a whole (Figure 1).

The word orchard derives from the Old English words *ortgeard*, *orcerdleh*, and *orcyrd*, indicating that specialised areas for fruit growing have existed from at least the Anglo-Saxon period (Clark Hall 2000, 269). In a local context, there are references to orchards in the confirmation of the 1089 foundation charter for Castle Acre Priory and in the foundation grant of Wymondham Abbey of 1107

(Blomefield 1805, II, 498-54; VIII, 356-7). Thirteenth- and fourteenth-century extents frequently mention them: one for Langley Abbey Manor in Heckingham, drawn up in 1289, describes the manor house with the 'Apples in the orchard, valued at 6s. 8d. per ann.'; while another from Hetherssett, from 1305, refers to the 'manor-house, gardens, and orchard . . . ' (Blomefield 1806, V, 23). Such references are by no means confined to elite residences. In 1386 John Coppyng granted William Draper a 'Messuage and 12a., with buildings, orchard, hedges . . . ' in Hockering (Norfolk Record Office (hereafter NRO) EVL 396/2, 461X4); at Great Melton in 1391 there is a reference to a tenement with 'orchard and garden and 1r' (NRO EVL 189, 455X1); while at Long Stratton in 1505 there was a property called '. . . Geryesgardine lately planted with fruit trees' (NRO MC 44/63, 500X3). Orchards were found in urban as much as rural locations and the tenement in St Stephen's in Norwich described in a grant of 1466, 'with an orchard, a little house and a small piece of land', was typical (NRO DCN 45/37/13; see also NRO KL/C 50/520).

Orchards were thus common in medieval Norfolk but it is only in the post-medieval period that we learn much about their character. Members of the gentry appear to have taken a particular interest in their fruit, part of a wider enthusiasm for domestic production which was probably equally present in, but remains less well documented for, the Middle Ages. Documents also reveal that the 'middling sort' were likewise enthusiastic fruit growers, while a scatter of evidence suggests that such passions were shared by small farmers and – insofar as space would allow – cottagers. Indeed, landowners and clergy often provided fruit trees for the local poor, as for example in 1736 when the agent of the Marsham estate bought '6 aple trees & 2 cherry trees to set in Ann Watsons yard & 2 apel trees in Jexes orchard at 8d a piece' (NRO MC 602/53). Orchards were regularly provided for institutions like almshouses and hospitals, such as St. Giles Hospital in Norwich in the eighteenth century (Blomefield 1806, IV, 64-120). Fruit and nut trees were even sometimes planted in churchyards for the good of the poor, as at Briningham in 1750 (NRO PD 646/1). Orchards, in short, formed part of the daily experience of most if not all of the population, rich and poor, urban and rural, throughout the medieval and post-medieval periods.

Types of orchard fruit

One problem with an emphasis on the 'traditional' character of orchards is that it conveys a misleading impression of long-term stasis. In reality, orchards were embedded in wider economic and social structures, and developed in complex ways over time. One important aspect of this was the change which occurred in the relative proportions of different kinds of fruit grown within them. Today we mainly associate orchards with apples, but while these were always the most common orchard fruit, pears feature prominently in early records and significant numbers of plums, gages, cherries and bullaces were also grown. It was only from the late eighteenth century that apples came to massively predominate over other fruit.

Apples and pears were thus grown in broadly similar proportions in the orchards of Norwich cathedral priory in the fifteenth century (Noble 1997), while the fruit ordered for the gardens at Ryston Hall in 1672 included 24 apple trees but as many

as 18 pears. In 1784 the orchard at Quebec Hall in Dereham contained 22 apples but also 11 pears, along with 15 cherries, 12 plums, and 3 filberts (NRO Mf/Ro 218/7; NRO BUL/16/230/1). In a sample of 13 sources from the period between 1632 and 1800 there were 366 apple trees, but 143 pear trees, 55 plums, 63 cherries, 3 quince, and 34 walnuts. Not only is the high proportion of pears striking: so too are the varieties cultivated. Most were principally for drying, baking and stewing rather than for eating raw. Dessert pears were grown (Green Beurré, Hampden's Bergamot, and Lewis at Ryston in the 1660s and 70s; Caillot Rosat, Echassery, Summer Rose, Beurré Blanc, and Verte Longue at Thwaite in 1734) (NRO Mf/Ro 218/7; 219/11; 220/1; NRO BRA 926/ 121 and 122, 373X2), while no less than 11 different varieties of bergamot pear are referred to in documents between 1660 and 1817. However, most early pears were of the 'warden' type. These were large and not particularly flavoursome, but provided a valuable source of starchy carbohydrate before the widespread cultivation of potatoes. They could be stored throughout the winter, then stewed or baked with other ingredients or fed to livestock in place of turnips or mangols.

Plums were the third most numerous fruit after apples and pears, and were especially prominent on smaller properties. A lease of 1632 from King's Lynn instructed the lessee to 'preserve the plum or fruit trees, except those in a little yard in the occupation of John More used as a nursery' (NRO KL/C 51/72). In contrast, in the fruit collections of the gentry and nobility plums were usually less important than peaches, nectarines, and apricots, 50 different varieties of which are recorded in the county in the period before 1790. At Heydon a list of fruit trees required for the gardens, compiled in 1755, includes 16 peaches, 19 nectarines, and 5 apricots, but only 11 plums (NRO BUL 4/140, 610X6); while the bills for fruit trees purchased between 1797 and 1801 mention 17 different varieties of peach (NRO BUL 11/89). These were high-status fruit because they required walls for shelter and warmth, together with a considerable amount of management: they were fruit of walled gardens, rather than orchards. When the new kitchen garden was constructed at Shottesham in the 1780s the plan – by the architect John Soane – specified the position of four varieties of nectarine, four of apricot, eight of plum, nine of cherry, and fifteen of peach (NRO FEL 1115, L5). This said, prosperous farmers and clergymen sometimes cultivated such tender, labour-intensive fruit. Thomas Ripingall listed four nectarines, four apricots, and four peaches in his collection in 1817, but only two plums and two cherries (NRO MC 120/45; see also Winstanley 1984, 78-9).

Cherries were also widely grown (featuring for example in Norwich Cathedral Gardeners' Accounts for 1483-4) (Noble 1997), although often in separate enclosures. A lease for land in Shelfhangar from 1695 thus describes the *Cherryegrounde moate* (NRO MC 257/6, 683x3), while an undated eighteenth-century map of Hethel Hall shows the 'Cherry Ground' lying within a courtyard adjacent to the hall (Private Collection). The tall and spreading habit of cherries may have led them to out-grow other trees in mixed orchards, making separate cherry grounds a better option where land was available. Walnut trees were likewise sometimes cultivated in separate 'nut grounds', as at Buckenham Tofts in 1700 (NRO Petre Box 8), but they were planted in orchards and also, on occasion,

away from the house, in private pastures or meadows. An orchard owned by the Dixon family in Thwaite in the 1730s contained five walnut trees, but a further 23 grew in their Home Meadow (NRO BRA 926/ 121 and 122, 373X2). In 1817 Thomas Ripingall similarly recorded the sale of walnuts grown in his meadows (NRO MC 120/45). Filberts – that is, the larger cultivated variety of hazelnut – were also common, prized for their superior size and quality. At Thwaite in 1734 Mary Birkhead described how she had 'set Filberts they came up and made trees much sooner than from suckers but they all proved nutty, some as bad as hedge nuts, some as good as Filberts, one I call the cluster nutt I value very much, it is a round large nutt, grows on a cluster frequently some 11, one 15' (NRO BRA 926 122, 373X2). The 1784 lease for Quebec Hall mentions 'philberts' growing in both the orchard and garden (NRO BUL/16/230, 1784) and the catalogues produced by Lindley's nurseries in Norwich in 1796 lists red, white and Spanish filberts, along with two varieties of cobnut (NRO COL 9/96). Mulberries, medlars, quince, and service trees are also mentioned occasionally in the sources and orchard trees were sometimes under-planted with soft fruit. A lease for land in Heigham in Norwich from 1684 described it as being 'in form of a triangle planted with 60 fruit trees and 200 gooseberry and currant bushes' (NRO COL 1/39).

It is thus clear that while apples were the most common fruit in Norfolk orchards before the late eighteenth century, other fruit formed a significant component, amounting to nearly 40 per cent of the total recorded. In the nineteenth century the proportion of pears to apples mentioned diminishes markedly, and other fruit become less common. Fruit trees other than apples make up only 13 per cent of the total recorded in the period between 1790 and 1900. There were changes, too, in the varieties of pears grown, with a decline in the popularity of warden or pound pears, perhaps indicating the greater availability of cheap forms of starchy foods such as potatoes and bread. They were replaced by cooking or dual-purpose apples such as the Baxter's Pearmain, Emneth Early, or Norfolk Beauty.

Orchards in the domestic landscape

Whatever the precise balance of fruit grown in Norfolk orchards, what is particularly striking is the sheer diversity of varieties present. The 37 apple trees planted in the Dixons' orchard at Thwaite in the 1720s, for example, included no less than 21 different varieties (in addition to six of pear). A valuation of Kettlestone Rectory from 1800 recorded a total of 90 trees, with 35 different varieties of apple and seven of pear, along with cherries and plums (NRO PD610/22/2). Such diversity was partly a consequence of the fact that apples (and to some extent pears) were consumed in a variety of ways; partly due to the fact that owners desired an extended fruiting season; and partly because much of the fruit was stored or preserved for use throughout the winter, either on the tree (as with some types of pippin) or in a cool store room, where varieties such as the apple Winter Majestin could be left to improve through the winter months. Varieties less likely to survive storage were dried, bottled, preserved as chutneys and jams, or used to make cider and perry.

The fruit from small orchards may have been used entirely within the household but larger farms produced a surplus that could be sold, either at market or to individuals like Robert Fox, who bought the Felbrigg walnut crop in 1719 (NRO WKC 5/277/2), or Mary Bone who purchased quantities of apples and walnuts from Thomas Ripingall of Langham in the early nineteenth century (NRO MC 120/45). The wider importance of fruit in the local economy is clear from the fact that it featured in rental payments not only in the Middle Ages (as at Wood Norton in 1290: NRO DCN 44/128/3) but also, on occasions, into the eighteenth century: in 1701 part of the payment for a piece of land in Downham Market comprised '3 lbs. potatoes and the fruit of three fruit-trees each year to Thomas Buckingham and his wife for their lives' (NRO SF 431/19, 308X5).

Except in the northern Fens, in the district called Marshland, the majority of orchards lay close to the house. This preference was partly dictated by practical and security considerations – fruit was a valuable but vulnerable crop – but also reflects the fact that owners derived pleasure from blossom, fruit, and birdsong, as writers like Gervase Markham and William Lawson emphasised, the latter stating that 'whereas every other pleasure commonly fills some one of our senses, with delight; this makes all our senses swim in pleasure, and that with infinite variety . . .' (Lawson 1618 (1982), 87). Until the nineteenth century a gentleman's fruit collection was an important part of the social landscape, a mark of status, and much correspondence was devoted to plans, varieties, and suppliers. Gifts of fruit or fruit trees were often sent over considerable distances to family and friends, or to impress social superiors. At such social levels, orchards – like many other aspects of the productive landscape, from fish ponds (Currie 1990) to rabbit warrens (Williamson 2007, 155-76) – were at once practical *and* aesthetic features, and in many early gardens there was a fine line between the orchard and the wilderness, or woodland garden. At Stiffkey Hall in the 1570s the orchard was 'pared' to create *allées* with paths of sifted gravel (Taigel and Williamson 1991, 97): while at Stow Bardolph in 1712 the wilderness 'quarters' were planted with '14 pears, 14 apples, 14 plums, 7 cherries all for standard trees' (NRO HARE 5531 223 X 55). Sir Thomas Dereham's orchard at West Dereham could be viewed from the terraced walk raised 3 m above it (Dallas 2007, 192).

Orchards also served a number of additional, practical functions. The placing of hives or skeps within them insured both pollination of the fruit and the production of significant amounts of honey and beeswax. Orchard grass provided a valuable hay crop, the income from which is recorded in the medieval Norwich priory accounts and also in later tithe payments, as at Shotesham in 1649, where George Gooch paid a shilling for tithe hay in his orchard (NRO FEL 476, 10). That orchards were worth mowing implies that the fruit trees were relatively widely spaced, as the canopy of closely-planted trees would have cast significant amounts of shade. Orchards might also be grazed by small stock such as sheep, but not by cattle or horses, which would have harmed the trees. Pigs would also cause problems and, while there are references to their presence – in 1612 a property in Diss was conveyed 'with part of an orchard or hogs' yard' (NRO MC 257/55, 684X3) – the animals were probably kept in styes and fed on windfalls, rather than being allowed to root freely. Geese and other poultry would have done little damage

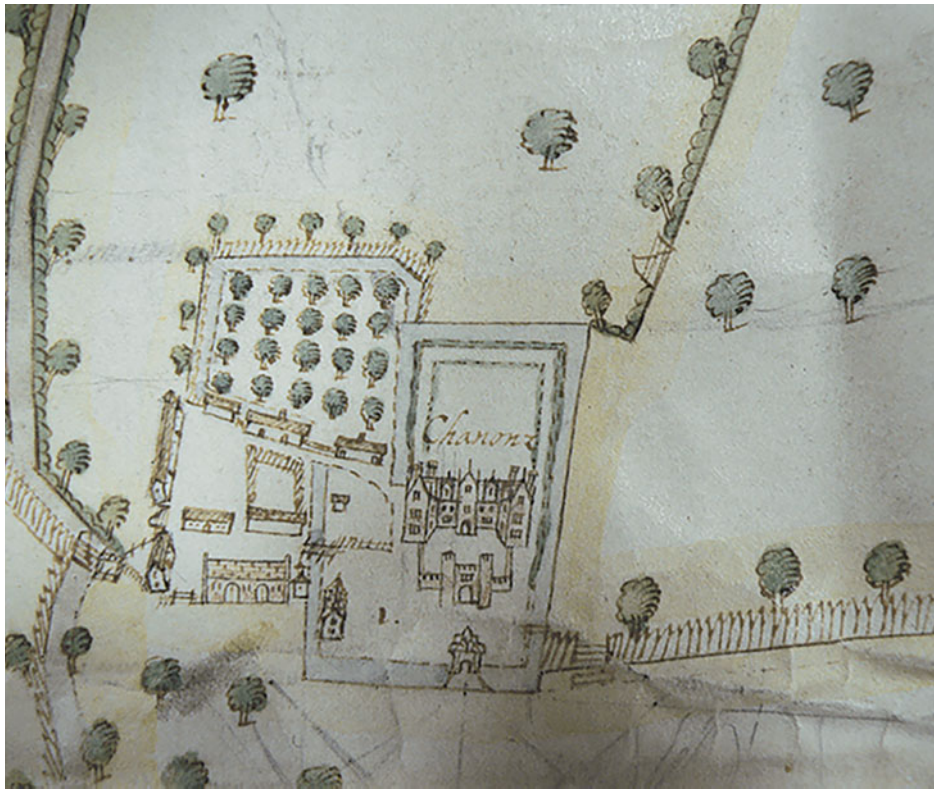


FIGURE 2 Channonz Hall in Tibenham, south Norfolk, in 1640.The secondary moat was occupied by an orchard, probably a typical arrangement (Source: NRO MC 1777/1).

and their presence may explain the ponds often shown within orchards on early maps. The larger orchards, especially in Marshland, might even contain small areas of arable, according to the tithe awards of the 1830s and 40s, and some degree of cultivation likewise appears to be indicated on maps showing cottage orchards in Denton and Alburgh in 1752 (NRO MC 1744/1). Orchards thus have many parallels with other multiple-use environments, throughout Europe, such as the olive groves in Spain which were traditionally valued for grazing, and as a source of fodder and fuel, as much as for the olives they produced (Infante-Amate 2012).

Lawson (1618 (2003), 47) recommended surrounding the orchard with ditches or a moat which 'will afford you fish, fence and moisture to your trees; and pleasure also . . . '. At Channonz Hall, Tibenham in 1640 the orchard lay within a substantial secondary moat (Figure 2) whilst at Swanington Hall it was bounded to the west by the main moat around the house and on the remaining three sides by wide ditches (NRO MC 1777/1, 1640; NRO FX 115, 1808). That at Shelton Hall was still bounded by a moat in the 1880s, and a rectangular moated site in the grounds of St. German's Hall, Wiggenhall St German's contained an orchard of 0.8 acres, accessed from the hall garden (First Edition 1:10560 Ordnance Survey, 1886). Even when not truly 'moated', orchards were frequently bounded by ditches on three or four sides, especially on heavier land.

FIGURE 3 A reconstruction, based on details recorded in her notebook of 1734, of the orchard planted by Mary Birkhead at her daughter's house in Thwaite St Mary ten years earlier. All varietal names and spellings are as written in NRO BRA 926/122.

We have noted already the dangers of seeing orchards as the product of an unchanging local culture, and in Norfolk elements of their planning seem to have been influenced by published texts, such as Lawson's *A New Orchard and Garden* of 1618. This suggested that 'the form most men like in general, is a square', and advised that 'trees should be well spaced', at a distance of 20 yards. It also recommended enclosing the orchard within a hedgerow planted with filberts (Lawson 1618 (1982), 45). Gervase Markham in contrast, writing in 1613, thought that the trees should be planted just twelve feet apart, 'sufficient enough for their spreading', and in 'such arteficiall rowes that which way soever a man shall cast his eyes yet hee shall see the trees every way stand in rows making squares, alleyes and divisions . . . ' (Markham 1613 (1969), 34). When, in 1734, Mary Birkhead laid out a new orchard for her daughter in Thwaite St. Mary she appears to have followed Markham (or some text derived from him), describing how 'The orchard is an acre of land very near square. The trees planted in rows look which way you please' (NRO BRA 926/121, 373x2; 1734).

But she inclined more towards Lawson's advice as to the distance between trees, allowing '36 foot one way and 26 the other' (NRO BRA 926 122). More interesting is the fact that the inside of the perimeter fence was planted, not just

FIGURE 4 Robin pears in the orchard at Threxton House, Norfolk (Photo: authors).

with filberts as Lawson recommended (and Austen in his 1665 *Treatise on Fruit Trees*), but also with a diverse range of other fruit – several sorts of plum, quinces, barberries, and unspecified 'nuts'. On one side – probably the north – there was a single row of six walnut trees. Moreover, instead of merely planting filberts towards the edges of the plot Birkhead also placed a filbert bush between the trees in the grid formed by offsetting rows of odd and even numbers of trees. In all, this one-acre orchard contained 44 fruit trees, together with the filberts and the six walnut trees, and had a wide assortment of stone fruit and berries set around its margins (Figure 3).

Mary Birkhead described a second orchard in her memoranda books, probably at Church Farm in Thwaite. This was larger and less regular in shape, with eleven rows of varying length, each containing from 10 to 20 trees – 152 in all. Here the pear trees were interspersed within the rows of apple trees, but filberts, walnuts, cherries, and plums were again consigned to the margins. Whether such an arrangement was normal in the county is uncertain. Certainly, the plan published by George Lindley in Norwich in 1796 has only filberts on the edges, with plums, cherries, quince, medlars, and mulberries included in the main body of the orchard (Lindley 1796 and NRO COL 9/96; 1796). Covering an acre and a half (0.6 hectares) and containing 77 trees, spaced 9 yards apart east-west and 16 yards north-south, Lindley's orchard would have allowed more space between the trees than that at Thwaite. The spacing suggested by both sources, however, implies that the trees were expected to grow tall and to spread widely, rather than being heavily pruned or grown on dwarfing root stocks (Figure 4).

Varieties of apples grown before 1900

The kinds of orchards just described, containing a wide range of fruit varieties, continued to be maintained and even occasionally created into the late nineteenth century. Benjamin Stimpson of Sall Moor Hall, for example, established a new orchard of 2.5 acres (*c.* 1 hectare) as late as January 1890 and recorded how it was planted with thirteen rows of either seventeen or eighteen trees (NRO MC 561/87). An order was placed with a Dereham nursery for 219 apple trees, 29 varieties in all; and for 10 plums, in 5 varieties. The apples included both varieties considered to be local (Striped Beefin, Adam's Pearmain) and ones popular throughout the country (Cox's Orange Pippin); ancient varieties (Gravenstein, Nonpareil) and ones only developed during the previous few decades (Lord Grosvenor), as well as a substantial proportion which are unknown, in the sense that they fail to appear – under that name, at least – in the standard reference works: some, such as Holkham Red, were clearly of local origin.

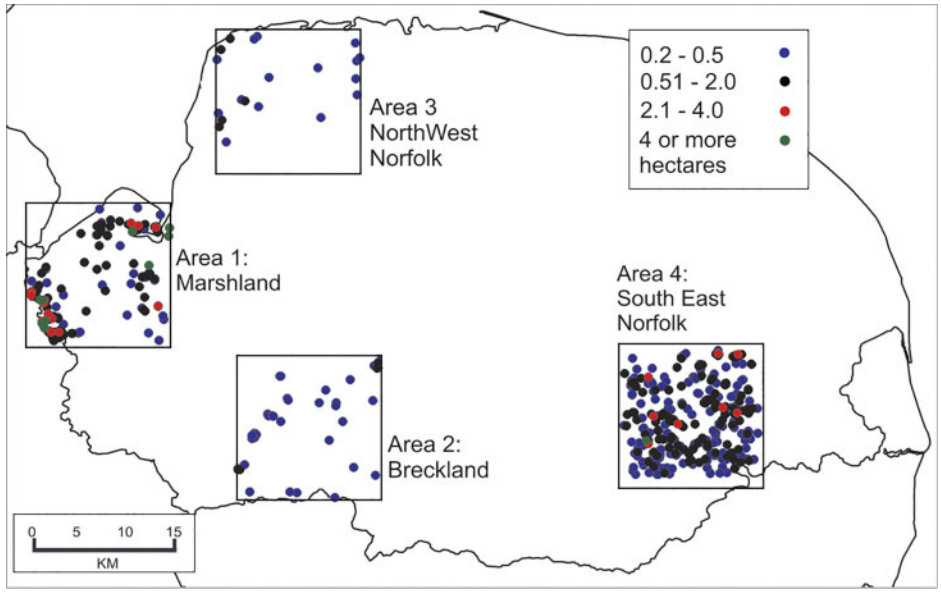
In all, no less than 933 varieties of apples and pears are recorded in the county in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. However, detailed examination reveals that many varieties were, in fact, known by more than one name, or changed their names over time. Examples can be identified using a range of sources, including the *Guide to the Orchard and Kitchen Garden* . . . published by George Lindley of Eaton near Norwich in 1831. This publication was one of those consulted by Robert Hogg when compiling his own volume *British Pomology* in 1851. Hogg also produced a similar volume for other types of fruit, *The Fruit Manual* (1860). Using these works, and other more recent sources, it is clear that in reality some 253 varieties of apple and 140 of pear were cultivated in the county in the post-medieval period (see Postscript). It is true that this figure is inflated by the large number of apple varieties listed in Lindley's catalogue of 1796; conversely, it is based on a comparatively small numbers of sources, and the discovery of a single new one might serve to inflate it significantly. Mary Birkhead's notebooks list no less than 57 different varieties of apple, many otherwise unrecorded locally.

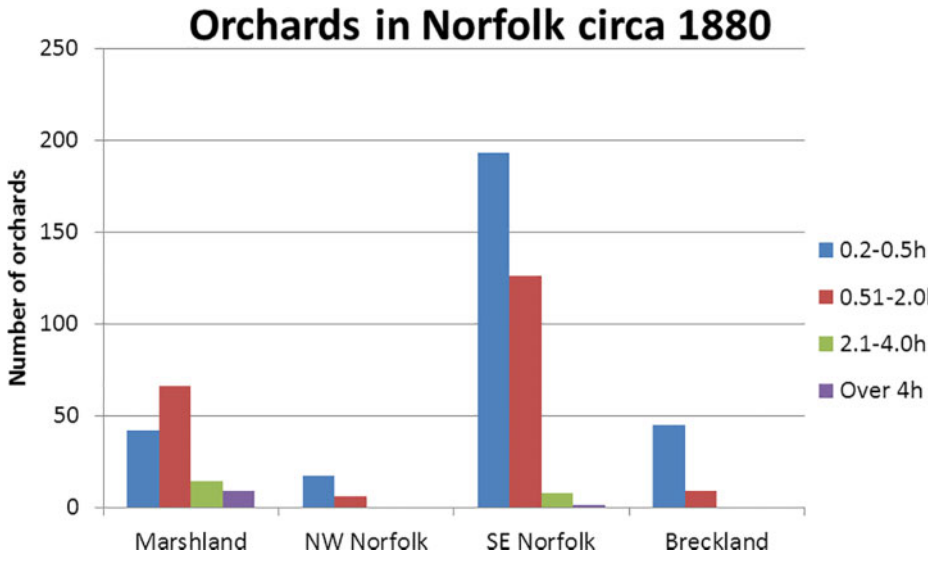
Norfolk can probably boast the earliest reference to a particular type of apple, a deed from Runham, dating to 1204-05, describing how Robert de Evermere held the manor for, among other payments, a render of '200 pearmains' (Blomefield 1806, II, 241-6) (a broad term for a pear-shaped apple, rather than a specific variety). In the same year Walter de Evermue paid a similar debt to the Exchequer for lands in Rackheath Magna (Blomefield 1809, 446-51), and similar references are found throughout the medieval period in documents referring to dues and payments made to the Crown (for example, on 14 July 1489: Ledward ed. 1955, 81-98). But while particular types of apple were named and recognised from an early date, we must be careful not to over-emphasise the locally specific character of recorded or surviving varieties. Identical or very similar types of fruit were grown in widely separated areas, often under different names; and it is clear that varieties were exchanged across the country, acquired from distant sources by gift or sale. In the 1690s Roger Pratt of Ryston thus ordered fruit trees and other plants from the London nurseries of John Alcocke and Leonard Gurles, while Mary Birkhead acquired many of her trees from the Brompton Park nursery of Henry Stevenson, as did the Cubitts of Honing Hall in 1754 (NRO Mf/Ro 220/1; NRO BRA 926 122;

Garden Accounts, Honing Hall, Private Collection). Birkhead also noted that some of her fruit came 'from France', while in November 1696 Richard Godfrey lamented that frost was preventing the delivery of fruit trees he had ordered from Holland (NRO Y/C 36/15/18). The regular exchange of trees between members of the gentry, already referred to, likewise ensured long-distance migration of particular varieties. In 1807 the Reverend William Gunn of Smallburgh thus despatched to Thomas Hearn of Buckingham 'some beefing plants, Ribstone pippins, and another non-pareil called the Summer, with instructions for planting' (NRO WGN 5/3/10).

In part, people obtained fruit trees from distant sources because large commercial nurseries did not yet exist. There were some nursery businesses in Norwich as early as the seventeenth century, but they mainly supplied flowering plants and seeds and larger concerns – capable of supplying quantities of forest trees, ornamental shrubs, and fruit trees – only really developed, as in other parts of England, in the course of the eighteenth century (Williamson 1998, 170-3; Harvey 1973). One of the earliest was that established by William Aram at Lakenham, just outside Norwich, which was advertising fruit trees in the *Norwich Mercury* by 1760 (*Norwich Mercury* 6 May 1760). The business became Aram and Mackies in the 1770s: the famous diarist Parson Woodforde visited the establishment in May 1780 and 'Walked in the garden and paid … a bill for Fruit Trees &c' (Winstanley 1984, 84). Other important businesses included that of William Griffin, based at Mundford, which operated from the 1760s until 1809, when it was taken over by William Kedie; Charles Marshall's firm at Kings Lynn, which operated during the 1770s and 80s; and George Fitt's at Hoveton, which ran from the early 1770s until 1793, the closing down sale featuring 20 000 'fruit and forest trees' (Williamson 1998, 170-3; *Norwich Mercury* 11 February 1793). Other major concerns included Fifes at Thetford and George Lindley's at Catton, established in 1796. The proliferation of regional nurseries may have increased the tendency for specific local varieties to be propagated, but against this we should note the more general tone of nursery advertisements, which show that while proprietors sometimes emphasised the local origins of particular varieties, they also focused on the exotic and foreign – or on the standard and the familiar.

Some of the varieties recorded in our sources, or surviving today, probably were first developed in Norfolk. There seems little reason to doubt the story that *Vicar of Beighton* was raised by the Reverend Fellowes of that parish in the later nineteenth century, or that *Beauty of Norfolk* was developed by Mr Allen, head gardener on the Gunton estate, at the start of the twentieth. Many more local cultivars are known from the twentieth century, as a result of the greater volume of records: and it is also clear that many genuine local cultivars from previous centuries have been lost, appearing only by name in early lists and diaries, including the *Thwaite, Free Thorpe*, *Halvergate*, and the *Oxnead Pearmain* apples noted by Mary Birkhead in the 1730s, the last of which was presumably raised in the orchards of the Earl of Yarmouth at Oxnead Hall. All this said, it is clear that local names were sometimes applied to fruit varieties with a wide geographical distribution, and which bore other names elsewhere. The *Norfolk Pippin* was also known as *Adam's Pearmain* or, in Herefordshire, as the *Hanging Pearmain*.





FIGURES 5 and 6 Location, numbers and areas of orchards within four sample areas in Norfolk c. 1880. (Source: Ordnance Survey First Edition 1: 10560).

The *Norfolk Beefing* is one of the most celebrated of the county's apples, famously used to make dried sugar-coated 'biffins'. But early forms of the name, *Biefen* and *Beaufin*, have Continental connotations, and the counties of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire also lay claim to it. Specific stories of local origins can prove mythical. The *Golden Noble* is said to have been found growing on the Stow Bardolph estate in West Norfolk and was exhibited at the Royal Horticultural Society by the

head gardener, Patrick Flanagan, in 1820. But the variety was offered for sale in 1769 by Yorkshire nurseryman William Perfect and by George Lindley in Norwich in 1796 (NRO COL 9/96). Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century nurserymen sometimes emphasised the 'local' origins of varieties, but in ways which hint at a more complex reality. Lindley thus stressed that Hubbard's Pearmain was 'a real Norfolk apple, well known in Norwich Market; and although it may be found elsewhere, it's great excellence may have caused it's removal hence' (Hogg 1851, 113-14).

Orchards in the wider landscape

Orchards were not, at least by the nineteenth century, evenly distributed across the Norfolk landscape: their average size in different areas also displayed much variation. Unfortunately, the earliest period at which these matters can be investigated is the 1880s and 90s, using the First Edition 1:10,560 Ordnance Survey maps: the tithe award maps of the late 1830s and early 1840s are inconsistent in their treatment of orchards and for much of the county provide only partial coverage. Even using the OS 6" maps a number of problems remain. While the surveyors mapped orchards as a particular category of landscape feature, the line between a garden closely planted with fruit trees, and an orchard, must have been a fine one; while small collections of trees in cottage gardens will, because of the scale of the maps, not normally have been included.

All orchards shown on the First Edition OS 6" were mapped for four sample areas, each covering 150 sq km, selected according to their soils and landscape character (Figure 5). Area 1 lies within the northern Fens, or Marshland: a district of silt soils which, unlike the peat fens to the south, was largely reclaimed – and intensively settled – during the Middle Ages (equivalent to Roberts and Wrathmell's EWASH1 (Roberts and Wrathmell 1998, 98). Area 2 comprises the central part of Breckland, an area of poor sandy soils which contained extensive areas of heathland even after the reclamations of the 'Agricultural Revolution' period, and which throughout the post-medieval period was characterised by large and medium-sized landed estates (EWASH 3). Area 3 lies within the 'Good Sands' district in the north-west, likewise an area of dry, sandy soils, late-enclosed and dominated by large landed estates like Holkham and Houghton, but less agriculturally marginal than Breckland and more completely transformed by – indeed, the acknowledged heartland of – the 'Agricultural Revolution' (EWASH 2). Rather different is Area 4, within the boulder clay district of south-east Norfolk – classic 'ancient countryside' (*sensu* Rackham 1986, 1-4), early-enclosed, and with a settlement pattern which, unlike those in Areas 2 and 3, was highly dispersed in character (extending across Roberts and Wrathmell's EANGL 4 and 5). In sharp contrast to Areas 2 and 3, but in a similar manner to Area 1, this was a district in which large numbers of freehold, owner-occupied farms survived into the nineteenth century. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the claylands had been cattle-farming country but by the late nineteenth century, like almost all of Norfolk, the district was largely geared towards arable production (Wade Martins and Williamson 1999, 49-52).

Figures 5 and 6 reveal clearly the scale of variation within the county. In part, such regional differences have straightforward economic explanations, and were probably of no great antiquity. The Marshland parishes in Area 1, for example, contained large numbers of orchards (131, or around 0.9 per sq km), many of significant size. Sixty-six covered between 0.5 and 2 hectares and 14 between 5 and 10 hectares, with two examples in excess of 10 hectares. These were often located away from settlements, interspersed with agricultural land. The First Edition 6" maps capture Marshland at the point when, together with the adjacent parts of Cambridgeshire, it was beginning its career as one of England's prime apple and plum-producing districts, as local farmers diversified production in the face of agricultural depression, benefiting from the ease of access to urban markets in the Midlands provided by the new rail network. By the 1930s there were vast areas of commercial orchards in the district (Mosby 1938, 183). Yet the emergence of this fruit-growing area was not entirely a development of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The tithe apportionments show that many extensive orchards already existed in the district, interspersed with farmland, by the 1840s: indeed, some parishes – such as Terrington St. Clement – actually had more land devoted to orchards then than in the 1880s (16 hectares compared with 13.5 hectares) (DE/TA 27, 1841; First Edition 1:10560 OS, 1886). Some had dual uses, examples in Walsoken being described by the tithe commissioners as '*orchard and pasture*' or even '*orchard and arable*' (DE/TA 33, 1843). Prior to the advent of the railways it is likely that produce was shipped along the inland waterways connected to the River Nene or around the coast via Sutton Bridge.

Elsewhere in the county orchards were located, almost invariably, immediately beside residences and while they often produced fruit for the market they formed only a minor part of the farm economy. Marked differences in the size and numbers of orchards in Areas 2, 3, and 4 were thus not simply the consequence of the scale of market production, but have more complex explanations. Area 4 in the southern claylands was characterised by very large numbers of small and medium-sized orchards: some parishes, such as Hempnall, Brooke, or Seething, had examples behind almost every farm, and beside many other residences. There were some larger commercial concerns. The area around Hollies Farm, Morningthorpe boasted four orchards totalling over 10.5 hectares; the parish of Bramerton contained five orchards of over 0.5 hectare and one of 2 hectares; while Rockland St. Mary had eight orchards including one of 2.5 hectares. Some of these presumably catered for the Norwich market, a few kilometres to the north, while others may have supplied the cider factory established by Gaymers at Banham and later at Attleborough. Most fruit production, however, was evidently small-scale and domestic. The situation was very different in Area 3, within the Good Sands region in the north west of the county. Here there were far fewer orchards, and none covering more than 2 hectares. Orchards were, moreover, largely to be found within the principal villages, and almost never on the farms which had been established on outlying sites following the enclosure of open fields and heaths in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Even within villages, they were generally absent from the larger farms. Area 2, in Breckland, falls between these two extremes, but in terms of both numbers and size of orchards is closer to Area 3 than to area 2.

Although difficult to quantify with any accuracy, these same broad patterns were in place when the tithe maps were surveyed in the 1830s and 40s. They almost certainly reflect underlying tenurial and social differences between the districts in question. Breckland and north-west Norfolk gradually developed, in the course of the post-medieval period, as classic areas of great estate landscapes, with large mansions, extensive parks and plantations, and with large tenant farms which might extend by the early nineteenth century over 1000 acres or more, and which were occupied by well-to-do 'gentleman' farmers. The south-east of the county in contrast, as we have noted, remained more 'peasanty' in character, with many small or medium-sized farms, often owner-occupied. Wealthy tenant farmers in the late nineteenth century were evidently little interested in their orchards, either as a commercial sideline or as a source of domestic fruit. Many such individuals were in effect industrial grain and (to a lesser extent) meat-producers; moreover, as they often held their farms on relatively short leases they had little incentive to establish orchards, which took many years to mature. The smaller farmers in the south-east, in contrast, had a greater interest in economic diversification, and were probably more rooted in habits of domestic production; many were also freeholders, and thus willing to make the longer-term investment which orchards required. Orchards thus display the same general pattern of variation as a wide range of features of the cultural landscape, including early vernacular buildings and pollarded trees, both of which were generally more common in the south and east of the county than in the north and west (Barnes and Williamson 2011).

Conclusion

Domestic orchards, in Norfolk as elsewhere, are not timeless elements of a lost 'traditional' landscape but have complex histories. Most were multi-use environments, often valued aesthetically as well as for the many practical benefits they provided. In early post-medieval times they were planted with a wide range of fruit, the overwhelming dominance of apples being a development of the nineteenth century. Numerous varieties, of apples especially, were generally grown, the intention being to produce a small amount of dessert and culinary fruit to eat or sell in late summer and autumn, together with a significant quantity suitable for preserving or storing for use throughout the following winter and spring. The extent to which the varieties cultivated were strongly regional in character, passed down through the generations as part of local culture, remains uncertain: the available evidence suggests that while particular local types did emerge, long-distance exchange of trees from an early date lessened any regional genetic distinctiveness. England has long been, in economic and social terms, highly interconnected. Further research is continuing on these and related matters, including the extent to which the character of orchards and the varieties grown within them, in Norfolk and beyond, was related to soils, climate, and other aspects of the natural environment, as well as to social and economic factors.

There has been a steady decline in the number of domestic orchards in Norfolk, as across much of England, in the course of the twentieth century, although its scale is difficult to quantify. To judge from a preliminary examination of modern aerial

photographs, and based on a sample of over 400 sites, only around 20 per cent of the orchards shown on the First Edition 6" Ordnance Survey maps still survive in some form, and of these considerably less than half exist in anything like an intact or functioning state, the remainder surviving in only relict, derelict or partial form. The progressive 'infilling' of villages with new housing accounts for the highest proportion of losses; but large numbers have also been converted to pasture closes and gardens, while a significant proportion have been incorporated within adjacent arable fields or are now occupied by farm buildings or yards. The last five or 10 decades has thus seen the effective extinction of an element in the landscape which for centuries occupied a central place in the lives and experiences of the overwhelming majority of the population.

Postscript

Full details of all apple and pear varieties recorded in documentary sources from Norfolk, and their likely identification, can be accessed online on the website of the Landscape Group, University of East Anglia: http://uealandscape.wordpress.com/links/orchards.pdf.

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