

Newsletter



Summer 2018, Issue 3

The Survey Progresses!

Tom Williamson

The surveys forms are now arriving in our office in some numbers and, while it is too early to undertake a proper analysis, some interesting patterns are beginning to emerge. The sensible thing would be to wait patiently until we have a more complete picture – but who could resist a quick look, to see what is out there?

Hertfordshire is now reasonably well covered, and is a good county to discuss because of the sharp contrasts in landscape which it displays – in part a consequence of variations in soil and agrarian history, in part because of marked differences in the extent of urbanisation. Such variations are mirrored in our orchard heritage, as an examination of two very different areas - the far north-east of the county, and the south – shows clearly.

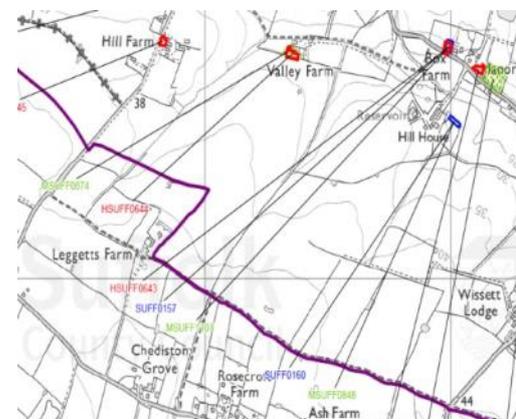
The north-east of the county, largely characterised by fertile boulder clay soils, still remains surprisingly rural, with attractive villages and a scatter of outlying hamlets and ancient farms. This was never prime fruit-growing countryside.

In most parishes, the Second Edition 6" Ordnance Survey maps of c.1900 show only a modest density of orchards, generally between 1 and 2 per square kilometre. Only in a few places – as in the area between Braughing and Buntingford – did large commercial orchards develop in the middle decades of the twentieth century. In general, in places like Walkern, Meesdun or Anstey, the numbers of orchards have held up moderately well. There are generally around half, and occasionally as many as 80 per cent, of the number which existed in c.1900, although most of these survivors are in a degraded state (with only a handful of trees) and the majority have been much reduced in size. But what is also striking is that while there are still reasonable numbers of orchards, this is not because the individual examples existing in c.1900 have survived in significant quantities.

Comparing the survey results with the various revisions of the large-scale Ordnance Survey maps made since c.1900 we can see a pattern of gradual change over time. Some orchards disappeared in the course of the twentieth century but new ones were planted, often on adjacent sites. As a result, there are few parishes in which more than half the orchards present in c.1900 still remain; in most the figure is between 25 and 40 per cent, with orchards planted since 1900 making up the rest of the surviving examples. There are other interesting patterns. One is that surviving orchards tend to be associated with large outlying farms – often now

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A surveyor's map for Suffolk with sites marked in blue (PTES aerial survey), green (modern maps) and red (historical sites)



rather genteel residences – more than with villages, where the pressure to ‘infill’ open spaces with new houses has been greatest.

The south of the county is characterised by soils which are generally less fertile in character, formed in acid sands and gravels or London clay. This district has also experienced a much greater degree of urbanisation. In some parts – especially the south-western corner of the county, beyond Watford and St Albans, but also the far south-east – there was already, by c.1900, a thriving orchard industry. Indeed, the south-west was being noted for its extensive orchards by the eighteenth century.

The overall pattern of development since 1900 is more complex and varied than in the north-east. In some parishes the number of and the area covered by orchards both increased markedly in the first three quarters of the twentieth century. Further large fruit farms and smallholdings came into existence, and large numbers of ‘suburban’ orchards were established, especially in the more affluent suburbs. There were also many large ‘institutional’ orchards, attached to the numerous schools and hospitals which were built in the course of the twentieth century on London’s outer fringes.

But subsequent rates of attrition, over the past four decades or so, have in general been greater than in the north-east. In places like Watford the 58 orchards shown on the Ordnance Survey maps of c.1900 have been reduced to one or two fragments, mainly due to the intensity of development. Countryside has given way to farmland, suburban orchards have disappeared as large gardens have been subdivided into smaller plots. There is, however, much variation, reflecting in part the survival of large areas of open countryside, part of our treasured ‘Green Belt’, amidst the suburbia.

In Aldenham parish for example there are still seven orchards remaining, six of which were in existence in c.1900, when the Ordnance Survey recorded a total of 30 in the parish. But even in semi-rural parishes like this losses can be considerable. Brickendon, to the south of Hertford, now has only 5 per cent the number of orchards shown on the c.1900 Ordnance Survey map. Overall, the numbers of orchards in south Hertfordshire parishes appear to have fallen by between 75 and 100 per cent since c.1900, and many of the survivors are, once again, comparatively new arrivals, planted in the course of the twentieth century.

The survey is also producing other kinds of information, in Hertfordshire as elsewhere. It is, for example, alerting us to the existence of particularly well-preserved orchards, which we are targeting for more detailed investigations – both of fruit varieties present and of aspects of biodiversity. It is also revealing interesting variations in the character of the fruit grown in different areas. Orchards in north-east Hertfordshire are thus characterised by apples, accompanied by significant numbers of pears and, to a lesser extent, plums. In the south, and especially the south-west, cherries are much more prominent.

These are very preliminary results, and other parts of Hertfordshire – the centre of the county, the far north, and the more rural parts of the west – have not yet been sufficiently examined for us to comment usefully on them. But some of the broad patterns highlighted here are apparent elsewhere, especially (and perhaps most obviously) the intensity of urbanisation as a major factor in survival, as for example within Welwyn Garden City, where very few orchards now remain.

In other counties across eastern England, very different patterns of development, and attrition, are emerging, and I will discuss these in subsequent newsletters. But preliminary conclusions will change as more survey forms come in, so watch this space – and keep up the good work!

A volunteer’s view

“Surveying the Orchards has been so interesting and also fun. You never know what to expect. I’ve had to recall childhood skills like crawling under branches and brambles as some orchard sites have been so overgrown!

Owners are as varied as the orchards, some interested in the project and happy to talk for ages, others just wanting to leave you to it.”

Susan Mobbs, Suffolk

If you haven’t yet completed your own survey, now is the ideal time to do so, with the fruit hanging heavy on the trees and the orchards looking beautiful in the late summer sunshine. And if you want to volunteer to do more – just ask Howard! (email: howard.jones@uea.ac.uk)

In the Orchards East May bulletin there was a brief piece about the change in focus of Orchard East's Culinary Project. Last year I attended a number of Apple and other Orchard Days and provided cookery demonstrations with tastings. I had also done so in previous years for Suffolk Traditional Orchard Group, as well as running recipe swaps.

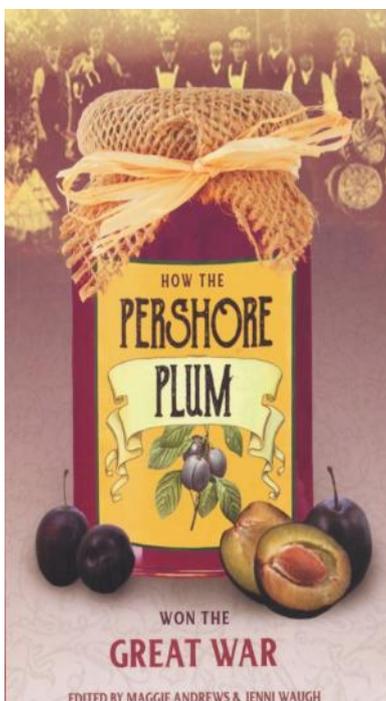
This year, as outlined in the last bulletin, my focus will shift from cookery demonstrations with tastings. However, two will still take place. These are for English Heritage at the Audley End Apple Festival on Saturday 22nd and Sunday 23rd September, and for Orchards East at the Cider and Song event at the Museum of East Anglian Life at Stowmarket on Saturday 20th October.

To date, five hands-on orchard fruit and nut cookery workshops are planned for this season. Two will take place in Hertfordshire, two in Norfolk, and one in Suffolk. The groups involved are a hostel offering temporary accommodation, a project for the homeless, people with mental health issues, and a centre for people with epilepsy and other complex needs. Two of the workshops will be over Half Term so will hopefully include children working with their parents. Of the five workshops four revolve around existing orchard and allotment projects.

Each group will work together to produce a meal for all to share (although this format may vary, depending on the group). Participants will be able to work at their own pace / skills level. The aim is to raise awareness of the versatility and different culinary properties of different fruit and nut varieties. The focus will be on savoury as well as sweet dishes.

Unfortunately these workshops are not open to all. There are some already in the pipeline for next year. However, I would be extremely grateful if you could please let me know of any similar projects you think might be interested. I would be particularly interested in projects in Essex, Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire. Other groups could include young carers, asylum seekers etc.

Many thanks.



Book Review: *How the Pershore Plum won the Great War*, Maggie Andrews and Jenni Waugh

2016, The History Press, Stroud (available on Amazon, on Kindle and softback)

The most widely known plum festival event in the UK is the month long festival in Pershore in Worcestershire, to celebrate the two Pershore plums, one yellow, the other purple, and their contribution to their local jam, canning, and once, a drying industry. This book, smoothly and seamlessly edited by Prof Andrews of Worcester University and Jenni Waugh, is a well-illustrated social history of people, jam, plums, and industries, in and around Pershore during the two world wars, in separate chapters researched and authored by students, the WI, the local history society and local specialists. It isn't about growing plums, more about the effect the two plums varieties had on society. I learnt that plums were also dried as well as canned and bottled and jammed.

The text explains that there were, and are, two Pershore plums but doesn't explain their differences; the delicious purple-black Pershore Purple on the book's cover, and Yellow Pershore, are very different. The latter, once grown all

over England where large old trees remain, especially in the eastern counties where it is called Yellow Egg, is unexciting, bland and rarely eaten raw, but transformed by cooking into plum jam.

There is an excellent bibliography too.

Jen Read was brought up in Palgrave, near Diss, during WW2, where Yellow Egg trees were in almost every cottage, farm garden and allotment. Her winter comfort food was her mother's Yellow Egg Pie!



Yellow Egg also called **Pershore Plum**, is highly productive and branches are often broken by the weight of the crop. It is self-fertile and very reliable, but has a poor flavour. It is best bottled and/or cooked to make delicious jams, crumbles and pies. It was the main ingredient of the troops canned Plum and Apple jam of WW1. "Found by George Crooke in Tiddesley Woods, Pershore as a casual seedling in 1827". Its suckers were used as rootstocks for other plums until the 1940's. Old trees are still seen in East Anglia, some grown out from rootstocks.



Purple Pershore, productive, but not as much as Yellow Egg. It was said to be raised by Walter Martin near Pershore in 1877, and was once known as **Martin's Seedling**. The reported parents are disputed; very similar varieties are known from ancient middens in Europe, where it is considered to be one of the delicious and ancient type of plums known as Quetsche. Its close relatives are the plums used to make the spirit slivovitz in the countries of old Yugoslavia.

Plum and Cobnut Event, Saturday 18th August 2018

Paul Read

Our Plum and Cobnut Event was held on 18th August 2018, at Home Farm, Thrandeston near Eye, Suffolk. where over 40 plum varieties are grown, and (so far) 12 cobnuts.

Apple Days are everywhere, but Plum Days are also not infrequent. Apart from Pershore's event many were organized in the villages of Huntingdon and Cambridgeshire, known for their plum orchards, from around 2006, by Bridget Halford of Huntingdon District Council. The events included a small display of plum and gage varieties, recorded what people grew, and began the process of learning to identify plum varieties.

Later Suffolk Traditional Orchard Group (STOG) began to organise a series of plum days held in various locations: Orchard Barn in Ringshall; the Museum of East Anglian Life in Stowmarket; Home Farm, Thrandeston near Eye; all of these in Suffolk; and Wandlebury in Cambridgeshire where we also added the first ever (we think) display of cobnut varieties.

Plum days, and cobnut days, do not attract as much attention of as apple days held in late September or October. This is partly due to plums “falling out of favour” in recent years. In Diss, neither Tesco nor Morrison's carried any British grown plums, and none of the types of plums, gages or damsons long grown in England. Both supermarkets do carry Asian plums, varieties developed generally in the USA, and plumcots, a cross between apricots and Asian plums, again mostly bred in the USA, Japan and the antipodes. These are far less succulent, and less sweet, than our native plums and gages, but have a *much* longer shelf life. To buy our native produce you need to visit the grower's own farm shops.

Plum Days are also held in mid-August because that's when they are ripe, but school hols and the beach have greater pulling power! So for that reason we don't ever expect the thousands of people who visit apple days! 50 people was just fine and they nearly all came bearing baskets of their own fruit!

Forty-five plum varieties were on display, and about 25 samples were brought to us by visitors for identification. Many of these were from foragers, who are always surprised to find what they think might be very large sloes and plums in hedges, which are wild, or feral, damsons, or highly coloured cherry plums, *Prunus cerasifera*, or, more rarely, real “wild” plums.

Also on display were 45 varieties of cobnuts from local trees and with 33 varieties from the National Fruit Collection (NFC) at Brogdale in Kent. The NFC collection comprises 44 varieties, a large proportion of which are from Germany. The national collection started life in RHS Wisley, was then re-propagated and moved to Brogdale a few years after the National Fruit Trials were started at Brogdale in 1952. English varieties were then added from English nurseries, most notably from Nottcutts in Ipswich, one of the few nurseries (with Hilliers in Hampshire) that propagated cobnuts by taking suckers taken from large stools of each variety, their “mother trees”.



Samples of one third of the national collection of cobnuts grown in Brogdale, near Faversham in Kent. These were picked during the great drought of 2018 in mid-August, and are considered by the professional growers in Kent to be 3 weeks ahead of normal, and already drying. The varieties include Cosford (after the village in Suffolk) and Frizzled Filbert, with Kent Cob possibly the most frequently grown cobnuts in Suffolk.

A cluster of Frizzled Filberts shown on the Fruitid website. The process of drying is already under way – the last stage in the maturity of the nut when the involucre (or “husk”) around the nut opens to allow the nut to separate and fall. Generally by this time squirrels, magpies and jackdaws and others will have already smashed and eaten the kernel. In many cases well before the kernel fills the nut.

Cobnuts in England are today largely grown for a summer market of green nuts still in their “husks”, a great delicacy few have ever tasted! Almost all these are grown in Kent, on the greensand ridge near Tonbridge; most are sold in London’s street markets, by Waitrose, and online; some are shelled for the confectionary market, some pressed for their oil.

The STOG orchard surveyors have found cobnuts widely in Suffolk farm orchards, and Orchard East surveyors are discovering them too. There are over 26 cobnuts in Girton College orchard and over 40 in two rows at Fairfield Park orchards in Bedfordshire. Most are in country house orchards, such as just outside Thornham Walled Garden; in Helmingham Hall’s orchard; and Redgrave Park, all of which are in Suffolk; and outside the walls of Wandlebury, Cambridgeshire.

These plum and cobnut events happen because there is an increasing interest in the identification of cultivated fruits and nuts, and not just apples. The [FruitID website](#), set up to address apples in this respect, has cautiously dipped its toes into pears (a really difficult group to identify), is already quite advanced into plum, and cobnuts are next on the agenda. These meetings do not just introduce the general public to the range of apple, pear, plum, and cobnut *cultivars*, but also brings together Fruitid moderators, editors, participants, and users to discuss how it should be put into action.

Only when the Plum and Cobnut Event at Home Farm was over and the visitors had left was it realized that we had not taken any photographs at all..... other than of the fruit and nuts that had been brought in!



I took this photo after the event to show the venue that we had just tidied up. The displays of plums and cobnuts were in the barn, and Monica had presided over the tasting of plum varieties and a special delivery of green Kent Cobs from Potash Farm in Kent, in the event shelter!

Plum and Cobnut Tastings 18th August

Monica Askay

I would like to add a brief note about the plum and cobnut tastings offered to visitors in the small event shelter pictured above, along with Jen Read who was providing teas and coffees.

I had a range of plums to offer, which I had mainly sourced from 3 Cambridgeshire growers ----- Heath Fruit Farm at Bluntisham, Mannings at Willingham and Cam Valley at Meldreth. It was a rather strange year for plums with a short season. Much to my surprise I had managed to source some Early Rivers and Opal, which, although early, were still in good condition. Paul provided me with some Purple Pershore. Other varieties included Monsieur Hatif, Violetta, Blue Tit and Cambridge Gage.

I also had a couple of early apple varieties ----- Discovery (picked early so retaining crispness and some acidity) and Vista Bella (a really beautiful looking apple but with a soft texture and therefore a disappointment to many).

Although people enjoyed the opportunity to sample the various plums and apples, the real star of the show was the Kent Cob. These arrived from Kent that morning ---- just in time for the Plum and Cobnut Day!

Although people are familiar with dried hazelnuts bought from the supermarket, few had come across cobnuts. They were intrigued at the prospect of eating them green. The cobnuts sparked a lot of discussion about how they could be eaten. Traditionally in Kent they would have been eaten on their own. A while ago for Suffolk Traditional Orchard group I experimented with green cobnuts and concluded they are best eaten as they are at the end of a meal, possibly with cheese, crisp apple, and fresh dates.



A collection of cobnuts photographed at a Plum and Cobnut day on 31 August 2015, a year with more 'normal' weather.

The nuts have not started to dry yet; most are ready to eat green as the kernel has just swelled to fill the nut.

A few, such as Mogulnuss, a German late cropper, will not be ready yet.

Leigh-on-Sea Allotments Orchard (aka the Essex Varieties Orchard)

Martyn Davis, OE Survey Volunteer

Situated within the bounds of the Leigh Allotments is a gem of a conservation project, dedicated to preserving Essex top fruit (apple and pear) varieties.

Currently, roughly a quarter acre (four allotment plots) in extent, the orchard is surrounded by a native species hedge. As well as the tree plantings, the orchard contains a wildlife pond and a large compost heap. The position of the orchard within the context of Leigh Allotments and the contiguous Manchester Drive Allotment site, encourages a wild variety of wildlife as well as providing the setting for the specialised Essex top fruit varieties collection.

The project commenced in 2003 and continues to be managed, maintained and funded by an informal group of plot holder volunteers known as the Leigh Allotments Orchard Group. The Group forms working parties for the larger maintenance tasks such as the annual grass cut of the meadow surrounding the fruit trees in autumn. This latter approach ensures that the seeds of wild flowers and the many grasses mature to provide the following years show.

Important local initiatives such as these are conceived of and driven forwards by inspiring people without whom our lives would all be the poorer. In this case, David Hammond and his late wife Janet, Ron Bates and others. Their great concern for the drastic loss of English orchards and the fruit varieties from which they were formed since World War II, lead them to approach Leigh-on-Sea Town Council for permission to start a small orchard. Two plots, largely compromised for normal allotment use by two willow trees were designated and later two adjoining plots were rented.



Leigh-on-Sea Allotments Orchard

Apple trees constitute the majority of the plantings now forming a collection of 35 all Essex varieties. This represents a complete set of Essex varieties currently available and is believed to be the **only** complete collection other than at Brogdale, the National Fruit Collection based near Faversham in Kent. This is indeed a considerable achievement of which the Group should be justifiably proud!

The Essex Apple Varieties Collection (all on dwarfing rootstocks)

Acme, D'Arcy Spice, Discovery, George Cave, Monarch, Pearl, Queen, Braintree Seedling, Chelmsford Wonder, Rosy Blenheim, Seabrook's Red, Maldon Wonder, Ruby (Thorrington), Ruby (Seabrook), Topaz, Sturmer Pippin, West View Seedling, Doctor Harvey, Edith Hopwood, Excelsior, Tun Apple, Flame, Opal, Amber, Sunburn, Eros, Garnet, Montfort, Nolan Pippin, Woodford, Grey Pippin, Francis, Stanway Seedling, Rosy.

In addition to apple trees, Essex pear varieties are also being acquired. There are far fewer of these to form a possible collection.

The Essex Pear Varieties Collection (on Quince A rootstock)

Improved Fertility, Johnny Mount Pear

Reservoir of Biodiversity

As has now been belatedly recognised much more widely, established orchards, managed in a sustainable manner are significant reservoirs of biodiversity. As a consequence, the orchard provides a haven for a wide variety of fauna and flora.

The identified fauna range from foxes, slow worms, frogs and many invertebrates including a good number of butterflies including Meadow Browns, various Whites, Peacocks, Skippers and the nationally scarce, Marbled White. The Marbled White prefers unimproved grassland, which is rarely cut, such as the meadow environment of the orchard. This latter species is on Southend Council's list of flagship species for special protection under the Essex Biodiversity Action plan, which is supported by Leigh Town Council.

With regards to the flora, species identified on the site over time, (largely initially by Janet Hammond) include the following:- Bird's foot trefoil, Common nettle, Common vetch, Cowslip, Creeping buttercup, Creeping jenny, Dandelion, Dropwort, Field geranium, Forget-me-not, Garlic mustard, Greater bindweed, Herb Robert, Hoary Plantain, Knapweed, Lady's smock, Lesser celandine, Meadow buttercup, Meadowsweet, Native daffodil, Ox-eye daisy, Primrose, Ragwort, Red campion, Red clover, Salad burnet, Scarlet pimpernel, Smooth tare, Teasel, Three cornered leek, White clover, Winter aconite.

The native hedgerow surrounding the allotment includes the following species:- Blackberry, Blackthorn, Cherry plum, Dog rose, Field maple, Field rose, Hazel, Hawthorn, Holly, Hornbeam, Oak, Sea buckthorn, Sweet briar rose, Rowan.

On 15th August, Ron Bates (another local OE Survey Volunteer) and I, together with David Hammond, who manages the orchard, conducted a Parish Orchard Survey at the Leigh Allotments Orchard.

In summary

The forgoing underlines the great significance of the Orchard in its multiple roles of preservation, conservation and community enjoyment of a wide variety of species, which may well otherwise become much rarer, both locally and even nationally, were it not for the far-sightedness of the founding members of the Leigh Allotments Orchard Group.



Ron Bates (left) and David Hammond (right) at the entrance to Leigh-on-Sea Allotments Orchard. Photo: Martyn Davis

In the last newsletter I wrote about old English orchard fruit recipes with links to Christmas and feasting. I just gave you the original recipes and promised translations of the first 2, both from *Forme of Cury* from the Court of Richard II around 1390. I originally planned exact word for word translations but have decided to also change the grammar where necessary.

Sawse madame. Take sawge, persel, ysope and saueray, quinces and peeres, garlek and grapes, and fylle the geese therewith; and sowe the hole that no grece come out, and roost hem wel, and kepe the grece that fallith therof. Take galyntyne and grece and do in a possynet. Whan the gees buth rosted ynowh, take hem of & smyte hem on pecys, and take that that is withinne and do it in a possynet and put therinne wyne, if it be to thyk: do therto powdour of galyngale, powdour douce, and salt and boyle the sawse, and dresse the gees in dishes & lay the sewe onoward.

Sauce Madame

Take sage, parsley, hyssop and savory (I'm guessing winter savory as geese were traditionally eaten at Michaelmas i.e. 29th September, and Christmas), quinces and pears, garlic and grapes and stuff the goose with them. Sew up the cavity to retain the cooking juices. Roast the goose well, keeping the cooking juices. Mix the juices with galyntyne (a mix of finely grated breadcrumbs, galingale, cinnamon, ginger, salt and a little white wine vinegar) and place in a small saucepan. When the goose is roasted, joint it. Take the stuffing and put it into a saucepan, adding some white wine if it is too thick. Add ground galingale, powdor douce (a medieval spice mix of sugar and ground spices such as coriander and cinnamon) and salt. At this stage I'd add the juices and galantine which would act as a thickener. Simmer. Place the jointed goose on a dish and spoon on the sauce. Serve.

Notes: The sauce is sweet and sour, a taste much loved in the medieval period.

The recipe is a little confusing in places with repetitions and omissions. Recipes until comparatively recently were aides memoires, assuming a lot of culinary knowledge. Recipes in the format we are currently familiar with owe their existence to Eliza Acton, writing in the mid C19th. Eliza Acton has links to our region, having been brought up in Ipswich.

Another recipe from *The Forme of Cury* is for pears (these would have been wardens, hard cooking pears) in red wine, a version of a recipe we are familiar with today.

Peeres in confyt. Take peeres and pare hem clene. Take gode rede wyne & mulberies, other saundres, and seeth the peeres therin, & whan thei buth ysode take hem up. Make a syrpp of wyne greke, other vernage, with blanch powder, other white sugur and powdour ginger, & do the peres therin. Seeth it a lytel & messe it forth.

Pears in Red Wine

Use warden type hard cooking pears if possible. Wash and peel the pears. Simmer the pears in good red wine and mulberries (black mulberries which confusingly are a dark purple red and exude a lot of juice) or red saunders (a red food colouring derived from cedar). Simmer the pears and remove them from the liquid when cooked. Take Greek wine or vernage (a sweet Italian white wine, although it could also be an unsweetened spiced wine, colour unspecified), add blanch powder (another medieval spice mix, this time of light coloured spices), or white sugar and ground ginger. Place the pears in this liquid and simmer briefly. Serve.

Notes: I do a modern-day version of this recipe. I keep the pears whole and with the stalk attached, cutting a thin slice off the bottom so that the pears will stand upright when served. I poach them very slowly in the oven, first on one side, then for an equal amount of time on the other. My preferred wine is an Australian shiraz, both for its deep purple colour, and its spicy flavour. I will include the recipe in full in one of my winter recipes of the month which can be found with the blogs on the Orchards East website.

You can see from the list of ingredients for both dishes that the wealthy had access to many imported ingredients which we would regard as "exotic".

The story of Justin Brooke's fruit farms in Wickhambrook

Paul Read

Justin Brooke and his wife Edith moved from Devon in May 1928, buying Clopton Hall and its 150 acre farm and progressively many other local farms until, by 1960, they farmed over 2,000 acres. The farms were originally dairy cattle on grassland, but their intention was to grow some fruit.

They initially intended to have a small farm and a small fruit enterprise, but on seeing the unemployment and appalling rural poverty of the agricultural depression, they altered direction to create an organization principally aimed to provide local jobs. So depressed was farming that they initially bought land at just £5 an acre. From a farm with 10 men, Justin Brooke Ltd expanded to over 200 employees, with many additional seasonal pickers and day labourers, including gypsy pickers in summer (with whom he and the local community had sometimes troubled relationships).

WW2 saw the end of unemployment, the War Ag (War Agricultural Executive Committee) insisting on the ploughing of almost all the grassland to arable, the loss of the dairy cattle, and a disastrous fire at Clopton Hall, but the fruit continued. After the war, the fruit growing expanded rapidly with help from their own tree nursery (also with retail sales), planting up to 100 acres a year from 1944.

The very first 1928 plantings were soft fruit, strawberries, gooseberries and black currants, followed by inter-rows of apples, then to a wide range of tree fruit by 1939. All these trees were what we would call 'traditional' today, propagated onto large growing rootstocks (Type II for apples, and Myrobalan, i.e. seedling and rooted cherry plum, *Prunus cerasifera*) for plums, apricots and greengages, seedling peach for peaches) and they were large trees. There are no records of rootstock for the 1,000 Conference pear trees. However, none of these trees were standards; some were low half-standards and were kept relatively low as wide multi-stemmed bushes.

Apart from the peaches, nectarines, apricots and figs, the majority of the Clopton crop were routine commercial fruit varieties; Bramley, Worcester, Cox, Conference, Victoria. The company (by 1950 renamed Clopton Hall Farms Ltd) brought to the market two new apple varieties they grew commercially: Clopton Red (about 1961) and Honey Pippin (this last sent to the NFC about 1970, well after Justin Brooke's death in 1963), but his books have no reference to these varieties. It has been assumed these were produced during the tree nursery period of 1945-55 when apple seed was sown for rootstock production. Another possibility is that as he was supplied with trees by Jack Matthews of Thurston, near Bury St Edmunds, a very active collector of fruit and a fruit tree nurseryman always on the search for casual seedlings in orchards. Jack Matthews discovered Discovery about that time, and was known to have encouraged the later Braiseworth introductions, Winter Wonder and Suffolk Pink.

Justin Brooke profoundly altered the landscape in and around Wickhambrook, not simply by converting nearly 1,000 acres of the land from dairy farmed grassland to orchards by 1949, and another 1,000 acres of grassland to arable, but because he was one of the earliest enthusiasts for removing hedges and hedge trees to increase field size. This was in part, he writes, his feeling of oppression at coming to a countryside with so many small fields and huge hedges that cut out the views, but also his insistence that hedges and trees harboured a multitude of small birds that fed on his fruit trees' flower buds in spring. He expressed his huge relief when all the hedges were gone, and the poplars and elms that he felt harboured the silver leaf disease that effected his plum and greengage trees, cut down. (He also admitted to shooting, accidentally, one of his employees while ridding a hedge of blue tits, his worst enemies!).

Justin died in 1963 and Edith continued the business expansion until by 1977, when she retired, the estate was 3,800 acres. Today, Wickhambrook's farmstead still has some fragments of old traditional orchards that predate Justin Brooke; the only obvious trace of plantings of his time are a double avenue of cherry plum trees along Gifford's Lane.



Justin Brooke circa 1960 (courtesy wickhambrook.org)

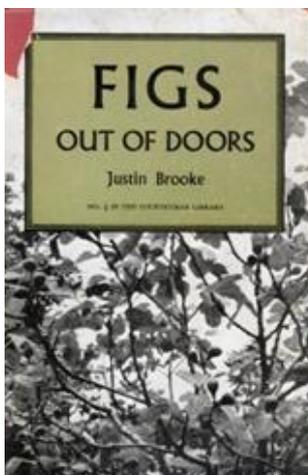
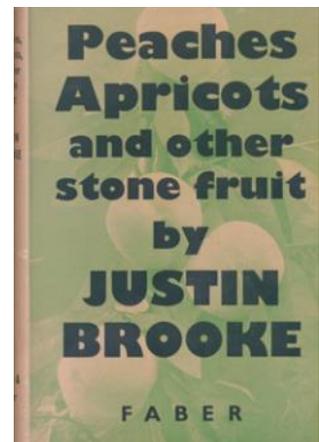
Justin Brooke's background wasn't as a farmer or scientist, as he himself said, but little seems to be known about his life before Wickhambrook. In his writing, he mentions WW1 and a life in Vienna around 1910. His father, George, was the Victorian tea trader, founder of Brooke Bond tea; perhaps that background gave him the supreme confidence to learn everything he could about his new role as a farmer. His sources of information were the most up to date available – the reports of the relatively new government fruit and farming research stations of Long Ashton, East Malling and Rothamsted, and as consequence he embraced all the latest pruning techniques, the suggested chemical sprays (DNC winter wash, nicotine, colloidal sulphur, and arsenates), clonal apple rootstocks, while also listening to the local men who told him about growing greengages on their own roots, and carrying out his own experimental growing techniques.

His land was probably dotted about with many experiments on pruning, propagation, fruit thinning, mulching, ground cover management, home-made fruit crop grading machines, and of course spraying..... He grafted 50 acres of peach seedlings with peach scions *in situ*. He also tried out a range of local old wife's tales as well. This included a technique for totally eliminating fungal silver leaf from plum trees by making long deep slits annually in the trunks and main branches, which he reported was a huge success, completely curing some trees in two years. It was never recognized by the authorities (and still isn't).

Justin Brooke was a very interesting, very active, man; his writings give us insight into the last time extensive commercial orchards in the region were planted on large growing rootstocks and his attempts to make them work and pay (albeit with a terrifying range of toxic sprays). By the time of his death in 1963 apple rootstocks like MM106 and M26 had been introduced and were changing the face of fruit growing. Clopton Hall Farms Ltd's orchards continue, but with the new aim of growing the same crops on less land and with fewer men. Today the estate is managed by Justin Brooke's grandson for cereals, beans and oil crops.

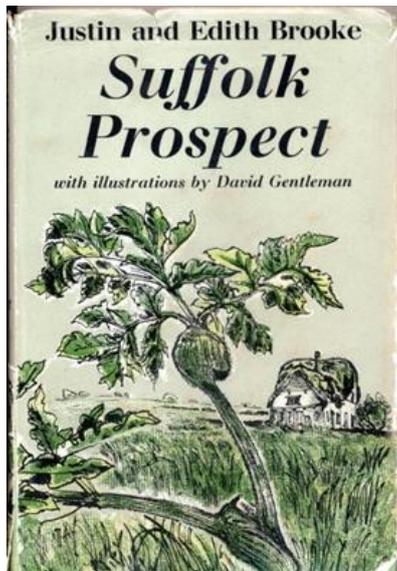
Justin Brooke's Books

Justin Brooke's first book was ***Peach Orchards in England***, a short text published in 1949 and describing his 1930's first experiences in growing a few experimental commercial peach trees. Later, post WW2, by which time he had over 50 acres of peach trees, he extended this publication to ***Peaches Apricots and other stone fruit***, Faber, in 1951. The other stone fruit dealt with are principally greengages, Justin Brooke's favourite fruit. He considered plum growing to be unprofitable due to the low price because "every garden grew their own plums".



Figs out of doors was a slim volume published in 1955 or '56. His fig plantation in the 1949 annual return was 1½ acres, probably about 30 trees. It is implied that there were considerably more by 1956, and figs continued to be grown and sold until at least the 1960's.

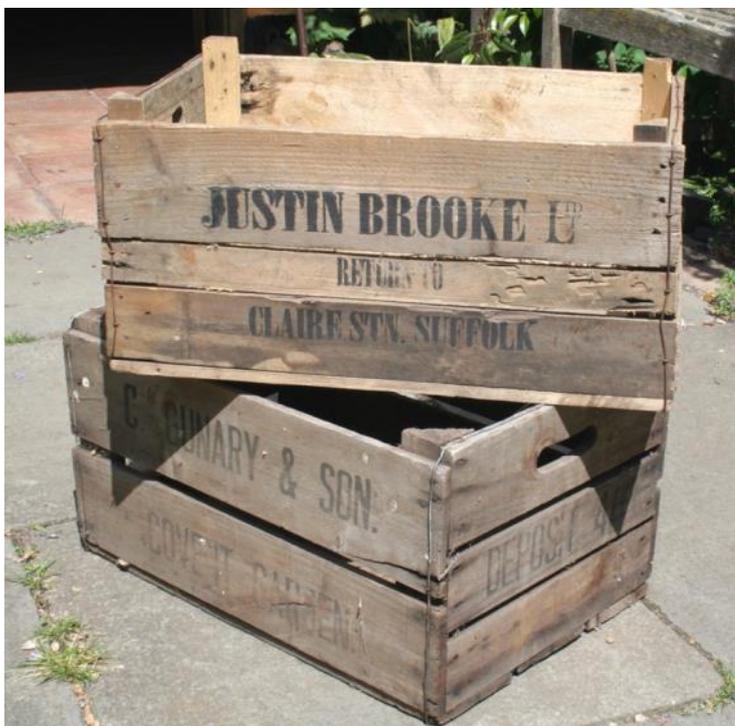
Suffolk Prospect was published in 1963, very shortly after Justin Brooke's death. He describes the early days in 1928 when he and Edith came from Devon to buy land and set up the fruit and farming enterprise in and around



Wickhambrook and Stradishall. *Suffolk Prospect* highlights his interest in rural Suffolk's folk songs ([Gerald Finzi the British composer](#) and fruit enthusiast, was a friend), an involvement in, and perhaps an acceptance of, local ghosts, magic and witchcraft.

He was a local district and county councillor, although intolerant of local government bureaucracy, to the point of establishing an independent village school in Wickhambrook and a local fire service, and was regarded as the *ipso facto* squire of Wickhambrook.

It is widely thought his principle enterprise was as a fruit farmer, but as *Suffolk Prospect* reveals, his estate was more than half dairy and pigs, with milk rounds as far as Cambridge until the outbreak of war in 1939, then arable and fruit farming, so that by 1949 half of the much increased 2,000 acres was half fruit, the other half arable. He also returned to pigs but never to dairy.



The top box is a railway bushel box used by Justin Brooke Ltd in the 1950's for shipping fruit to London customers and to Covent Garden from Clare, the nearest railway station. The boxes were returned when empty to Claire Stn, Suffolk (note: Clare is misspelt!).

The railway company (British Rail by this time) recorded the shipment and invoiced the box owner. The deposit charge stencilled on each box (5/- in this case) was added to the invoice from the fruit shipper to the customer and deducted on its return from the next invoice.

The lower box was owned by Cunary and Son, one of several Convent Garden-based fruit wholesalers, and used by smaller fruit growers whose deposit payment (4/-) and railway shipping cost was deducted from the grower's invoice for the fruit before payment by the wholesaler!

Boxes were frequently damaged and these boxes shows the repairs made by replacing broken boards. Boxes could be stacked 12 high if they interlocked; only 5 high if they didn't (like the bottom one). Some old boxes were converted to interlocking by lengthening the corner supports when they were repaired (as in the Brooke box above).

This distinctive design, kept together by its wire and staples, dates from about 1920. Before that, special heavy duty baskets called "fruit flats" of the type used for display on market stalls were made to stack following a special design used throughout the country and were replaced by boxes as being more robust. Justin Brooke described several other shipping boxes and containers of his own design that he used for delicate fruit such as figs and peaches, and being a man of great energy, also set up his own motor transport organization to avoid some of the hazards and delays of railway shipping.

Jubilee Celebrations at Clopton Hall Farm—Amateur film 1935 (7 minutes)

“There are jubilant preparations at Clopton Hall Farm in Wickhambrook, Suffolk as fruit grower Justin Brooke, friends, and fellow workers celebrate the 25-year reign of King George V 1935. A huge three-tier bonfire stack is created, the Union Jack flag is flying, a ‘God Save the King banner is raised, and the assembled workers cheer and raise their hats. A truly memorable occasion for all in attendance.” [BFI Player Jubilee celebrations at Clopton Hall Farm >](#)



Justin Brooke's workforce 1930

Albert Mould, Bill Day, Alf Brown, Harry Mott, Arthur French, Freddie Johnson, Unknown, Unknown, Bill Gooch, Bob Nunn, Les Offord, Cyril King, Bill Cockle, Ted Argent, Fred Nunn, Tom Coe, Alf Hicks, Mrs Brooke, Justin Brooke, George Mills, H McCartney, Ted Hicks



Justin Brooke's workforce about 1959

Including full time staff and part time office staff, the workforce comprises about 84 people.

Photograph taken in winter and excludes day labourers, packers and pickers.

References

Wickhambrook Parish website (One-Suffolk) - www.wickhambrook.org/justin-brooke/

Genealogy websites

Justin Brooke's books: Figs out of Doors (1954), Suffolk Prospect (1963), Peaches, Apricots and other stone fruit (1951)

Companies House - www.gov.uk/government/organisations/companies-house

King's College Biography website - www.kings.cam.ac.uk/archive-centre/college-archives/tour/biography/index.html

Apple Days and Events 2018

22/23 Sep	11.00 am - 5.00 pm	Audley End Apple Festival, 1 mile west of Saffron Walden on B1383 (M11 Junction exit 8 or 10)
22 Sep	11.00 pm - 5.00 pm	Elmswell Apple Day, Lukeswood, Suffolk see http://elmswild.onesuffolk.net/about-lukeswood/ for details
29 Sep	12.00 pm - 5.00 pm	Fairfield Orchard Apple Day, behind Fairfield Community Hall, Kipling Crescent, SG5 4GY
29 Sep	10.30 am - 4.30 pm	Oxburgh Hall Apple Day, Oxborough, King's Lynn, Norfolk, PE33 9PS (EEAOP)
30 Sep	12.00 pm - 4.00 pm	Potton Apple Day, St Mary's Church Hall, Hatley Road, Potton, SG19 2RP (EEAOP)
6 Oct	10.00 am - 4.30 pm	Stamford Apple Day, Stamford Arts Centre, PE9 2DL (EEAOP)
6 Oct	10.00 am - 3.00 pm	Rivers Orchard Apple Day, Sawbridgeworth
6 Oct	1.00 pm - 5.00 pm	Northaw Community Orchard, Welwyn Hatfield, Herts
7 Oct	12.00 pm - 4.00 pm	Suffolk Wildlife Trust Foxburrow Farm Apple Day, Saddlemakers Lane, Melton, Woodbridge, IP12 1NA
7 Oct	10.00 am - 4.00 pm	Jeacock's Apple Day, Jeacock's Orchard, Cow Lane, Tring
7 Oct	12.30 pm - 4.30 pm	Tewin Orchard Apple Day, Upper Green, Tewin
7 Oct	11.00 am - 4.00 pm	Wragby Apple Day, Louth Road, Wragby, Lincs, LN8 5PU (EEAOP)
13 Oct	10.00 am - 4.00 pm	Eye Autumn Fair, Eye Town Hall, Broad Street, Eye, IP23 7AB
13 Oct	10.00 am - 4.30 pm	Burwash Manor Apple Day, New Road, Barton, CB23 7EY (EEAOP)
14 Oct	10.30 am - 3.00 pm	Suffolk Wildlife Trust Redgrave Apple Day, Redgrave and Lopham Fen, Diss, IP22 2HX
14 Oct	10.00 am - 5.00 pm	Norfolk Rural Life Museum, Gressenhall, East Dereham, NR20 4DR (EEAOP)
14 Oct	11.00 am - 4.00 pm	Cressing Temple Apple Day, Witham Road, Braintree, CM77 8PD (EEAOP)
14 Oct	11.30 am - 4.00 pm	Bromham Mill Apple Day, Bridge End, Bromham, Bedford, MK43 8LP
19 Oct	7.00 pm - 11.00 pm	Museum of East Anglian Life Cider and Song Festival. Stowmarket, Suffolk, IP14 1DL
20 Oct	10.00 am - 11.00 pm	Museum of East Anglian Life Cider and Song Festival. Stowmarket, Suffolk, IP14 1DL
20 Oct	10.00 am - 4.00 pm	Ely Cathedral Apple Day, Cathedral Centre, Palace Green, Ely, CB7 4EW (EEAOP)
21 Oct	10.00 am - 4.00 pm	Cambridge University Botanic Gardens Apple Day, 1 Brookside, Cambridge, CB2 1JE (EEAOP)
28 Oct	11.00 am - 3.00 pm	Huntingfield Apple Day, Huntingfield Hub, Huntingfield, Halesworth IP19 OPP

[EEAOP = East of England Apples and Orchards Project](#)



ORCHARDS EAST

RECORDING CONSERVING CREATING

Orchards East (OE) aims to discover, and understand, the past, present and future of orchards in the east of England. We are surveying and recording orchard sites (old and new) across the east of England, as well as researching the social, cultural and economic history of fruit and nut growing in the region.

Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and based in the School of History at the University of East Anglia, the project extends initiatives already developed by Suffolk Traditional Orchard Group, the East of England Apples and Orchards Project and individual county orchard groups.

Volunteer Opportunities

We are always happy to hear from people who would like to :

- Survey orchard sites in their parishes
- Undertake historical research with the guidance of the University of East Anglia
- Get involved with the oral history project
- Tell us about individual orchards

Training and support is provided.

Please get in touch if you would like to find out more

Howard Jones (Project Manager) email howard.jones@uea.ac.uk tel: 07854 701363

Gen Broad (Survey Coordinator) email g.broad@uea.ac.uk tel 01473 264308

About Orchards East

OE is chaired by Tom Williams, Professor of Landscape History, University of East Anglia and Paul Read, Orchard specialist and Chair of Suffolk Traditional Orchard Group.

Our work is guided by an Advisory Board comprising representatives of each of the county Local Environmental Record Centres, regional and county and orchard groups, [Fruit ID](#) and [People's Trust for Endangered Species](#).

Website: <https://www.uea.ac.uk/orchards-east>

Twitter: [@orchardseast](#)

Instagram: www.instagram.com/orchardseast

Facebook: www.facebook.com/orchardseast/