

CONSERVATION IN THE VILLAGE

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A THE PARISH

1. Basic information for village projects

- a) Get a 6" map, preferably pre-1940
- b) Measure the mileage of field boundaries on this map
- c) Measure the approximate acreage of woodland, heath, fen, pits, commons, gardens and houses, and the mileage of roads, verges, green lanes (drifts).
- d) Count the number of ponds
- e) On the same map, indicate the present day hedgerows and compare with those shown on the map
- f) Measure the mileage of the existing hedgerows: compare with above
- g) Measure the approximate acreage of ^{existing} woodland, heath, fen, pits, commons, gardens and houses, and the mileage of roads, verges and green lanes; compare these with above, c), on the map
- h) Count the number of ponds still existing: compare with above, d), on the map

also

- i) Mark on the map the various types of land use (arable, grassland, orchard, fen/marsh, woodland, heath, verge (if wide), open water)
- j) Inform yourselves on the law relating to footpaths, highways and verges, common land, trees and woodland, boundaries.

2. Special points to notice

- a) What is the acreage of the parish ?
- b) How many miles long is the parish boundary ?
- c) What length of the parish boundary had a hedge before 1940 ?
- d) What length of the parish boundary is now hedged ?
- e) Make use of the County Record or Archivist's Office for information about the parish. For example, the Tithe Map of about 1840 will show the number of farms, their boundaries and the field boundaries.

B. INTERPRETING THE INFORMATION.

1. Historical value of landscape features

- a) Woodland Much of the woodland of Suffolk is in small blocks lying on or near the parish boundaries. It is probable that much of this woodland has been wooded since the end of the last cold phase of the Ice Age, about 10,000 years ago, and could be the oldest living feature in the landscape. This point needs to be verified, as far as possible, for each wood. Advice can be obtained through the Nature Conservancy. However, any woodland should be retained because so little remains. It is important as a visual feature; it can be an amenity for walking and educational use; it can often act as a windbreak for villages and hamlets.

Because of their lack of cultivation, woodland and old pasture (q.v.) preserve ancient earthworks such as boundary banks, sites of cottages and the moats of former houses.

- b) Hedgerows Hedgerows are often prominent local features. Some were part of our landscape well before 1066. The early hedgerows probably grew up on the banks alongside the ditches dug to make the boundaries of parishes and farms. Later hedges were used to separate arable and grazing land and later still to enclose land during the Parliamentary Enclosures of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They are still being planted along new roads, in gardens and around orchards.

How to estimate the age of a hedge

- i) Some parishes and manors have large-scale maps from the 17th or 18th centuries or earlier. The County Record Office has copies or knows of them if they survive. They usually show field boundaries and often indicate hedges where they existed.
- ii) Most parishes have Tithe Maps of the early 19th century. These may be in the County Record Office or in the parish records. Copies may be obtained from the Tithe Redemption Office, Barrington Road, Worthing, Sussex. These show farm and field boundaries.
- iii) Documents from pre-Conquest times onwards often refer to boundaries in hedges. These can be sought at the County Record Office. For example Manor Court Rolls and Highway Surveyors' Accounts.

- iv) There is a simple method of finding the approximate age of a hedge:-

for any particular hedge measure out a 30 yard length, then count the number of different types of trees and woody shrubs. The age of the hedge in hundreds of years is roughly the same as the number of different species of trees and shrubs. For example, if the 30 yard length contains the five species oak, hazel, hawthorn, elm and maple, the hedge is probably 500 years old, certainly between 400 and 600 years. Check this for two or three 30 yard lengths of each hedge until you are convinced that the relationship between the number of species and the 30 yard length is fairly consistent.

This illustrates a useful general point. Old hedges, old woodland, old pastures, old verges usually contain a greater variety of wildlife than new hedges, woods, pastures and verges. The ancient hedgerows will probably be those on the parish boundary, along manor and farm boundaries or along footpaths, green lanes and highways. They are often sinuous and massive. These hedgerows are extremely valuable for continuation of the history and wildlife of the village.

- c) Roads, green lanes (drifts) and footpaths These have evolved mainly since Anglo-Saxon times to serve the hamlets, fields and wastes of the parish. All routes are part of the fabric of the parish and the countryside. Green lanes in particular are worth close attention; they are often the remaining parts of formerly important roads - Roman roads, drove roads and highways. The current series of 1" to 1 mile Ordnance Survey maps show the definite footpaths and other public rights of way.
- d) Commons, greens, heaths, fens. Formerly, villagers often had common rights over this sort of land. Many of these rights have lapsed and the land has been enclosed. The former boundaries frequently still exist and add another feature to the landscape. Where they still exist, find out as much as possible about the legal aspects of the commons, particularly on the security of the land as a wildlife habitat.
- e) Old Pasture At the present time much permanent pasture in the intensively arable areas is either enclosed former greens or the home meadow of farms. They are the remnant of the more extensive pastures of the days of mixed farming. They are often rich in wild flowers. Occasionally, they are on the sites of former farms and houses of the Middle Ages: this feature is often indicated by the sharply irregular surface of the pastures.

2. Wildlife in the Countryside

All wildlife needs somewhere to live. Through the millions of years in which life has evolved the different plants and animals have become associated with various types of land or habitat. So if a wide variety of wildlife is to continue to exist in the countryside a wide variety of land types or habitats must be maintained. This means keeping most of the remaining woodland, hedgerows, verges, grassland, fens and marshes, heaths and ponds, and if possible creating new areas too.

C SUGGESTIONS FOR POSITIVE ACTION

The chief requirements in these suggested activities are determination and co-operation. Advice can be obtained on difficult points through the Nature Conservancy.

1. Protection and conservation

Discuss the management and future of woodland, heaths, fens, greens, ancient hedgerows and meadows, green lanes, footpaths and verges with their owners. Explain their historical and wildlife importance and ask that these remaining features be left. If the owner feels he must remove them in the interests of income ask him to work out the precise financial benefits he will receive. If it is a low figure, consider paying him an annual or lump sum compensation for this (the 1968 Countryside Act enables local authorities to do this); or offer to manage the hedge or path or verge for him; or ask the parish council to raise a parish rate for these purposes.

2. Nature Reserves If an owner is willing to co-operate, it might be possible to make a formal agreement to have some land set aside as a nature reserve. An area of a quarter of an acre upwards will do, depending on the type of land it is and where it is.
3. Planting Although the protection of what remains is important, it is also necessary to do what our ancestors have done and plant hedgerows and trees. This might be done along well used footpaths, in the centre of the village or, by agreement, on farmland. If enough trees are planted, grants can be obtained and tax-relief accrues to the owner.
4. Footpaths Footpath and bridleway maintenance could be taken on by voluntary labour in co-operation with the landowner.
5. Schools' Requirements With the amalgamation of schools it is necessary that those villages and small towns having schools should be able to provide a good range of historical and wildlife features for the children to study. Liaison with school teachers and landowners can lead to use being made of many of the important features being protected.
6. Churchyards Churchyards often have some of the best mature trees in the parish and provide many sheltered corners for birds and mammals. Make sure that they are managed in the interests of wildlife as well as tidiness. In particular, the churchyard walls, tombs, and the walls of the church itself, are a suitable habitat for ferns, lichens and mosses.
7. Study of wildlife Make a detailed study of the wildlife of one or two small areas in the village - a wood, pond, verge, meadow, pit or hedge would do.
8. A publication One way of bringing together the historical and wildlife interests of the parish is to compile a booklet of notes and maps showing how the shape of the present village has evolved over the past 1000 or more years, and also describing the chief habitats and their wildlife. This could be printed and put on sale in the church and other public places.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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