

History of hedgerows.

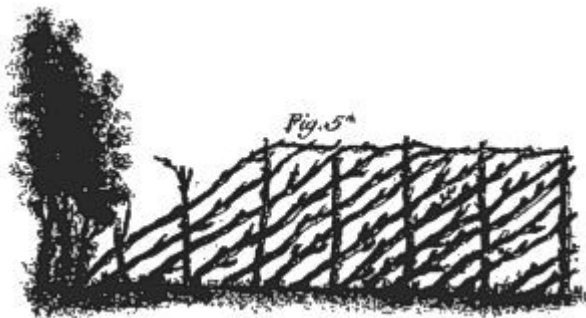
Although many of our hedgerows were planted in the 18th and 19th centuries during the enclosure of fields and development of agriculture, there were undoubtedly hedgerows planted much early. We are now rediscovering the true value of hedgerows and the National Hedge Laying Society is playing its part in ensuring their long term future.

Early settlements would almost certainly have required some kind of boundary fence to prevent unwanted animals straying into the area and also as a defensive line in the event of attack. Sooner or later our ancestors would have developed the knowledge to create hedges by planting saplings or perhaps by using existing lines of shrubs and trees, and clearing woodland around the settlement.

In 55BC Julius Caesar recorded the fact that the “Nervi” tribe in Flanders, *“Cut into slender trees and bent them over so that many branches came out along the length; they finished this off by inserting brambles and briars, so that these hedges formed a defence like wall, which could not only not be penetrated but not even seen through”*

The word “Hedge” is in fact ancient English *hege* or Anglo Saxon *haga* and refers to hedges that were planted as boundary markers, shelter, and fences to keep animals in, or out and even for defensive purposes.

As farming developed hedgerows became an essential part of agriculture, not only marking field boundaries and creating stock proof fences, but they also served as a source of fuel for the fire and timber for construction. Hedges abound in food both for livestock and man in the form of fruits and berries. The same hedges and berries also provided a suitable habitat for birds and mammals which have also been exploited by the farmer as a source of food.



Thomas Hale 1757

In the twentieth century hedgerows began to be neglected, two world wars depleted the agricultural labour force and the economy demanded the intensification of food production. The introduction of Barbed wire at the end of the 19th century reduced the need to make hedgerows stock proof.

In the 1950's machines were developed for cutting hedges but by the 1960's the demand for intensive food production led to many hedges been destroyed. In 1997 legislation was introduced to protect hedgerows and the decline was halted. With the introduction of European wide agri-environment schemes hedges once again began to be looked at as an asset. Modern farming practices recognise that



hedgerows can have many beneficial uses and there is a developing science in their understanding and management. Hedgerows also make an important contribution to the scenic beauty of our landscape and thus help to bring income to the tourist economy.

The National Hedge Laying society works with both Government and other countryside conservation agencies to identify the best methods of hedgerow maintenance and ensure that many of the traditional skills required to achieve this are encouraged to the highest standards.

For further reading the following books:
The Making of the English Landscape by W.G. Hoskins
The History of the Countryside by Oliver Rackham

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