

**Suffolk Parks – what tithes can tell us. Rosemary Hoppitt**  
**Summary by the author of a talk given to SIAH on 10<sup>th</sup> March, 2018**

19<sup>th</sup> century tithe maps and awards provide a great deal of useful information to historical researchers – about places, processes and about people.

In the context of researching parks, they can provide plans of the landscape of then-extant parks (e.g. Theberton and Hoxne), but they also provide important clues in the way of field boundaries and field names which help in locating and identifying the extent of parks long-gone from the landscape. Examples include Pond Hall in Hadleigh and Huntingfield.

Additionally, the patterns of tenure of the land can also be plotted on maps, which can point to blocks of, for example, demesne land, enclosed farms as well as small parcels of unconsolidated glebe lands and former common fields. Where there is other supporting evidence some of these blocks may be identified with former parks fossilised in the landscape. Examples illustrated were at Wetheringsett (Lodge Farm) Rishangles Lodge in Thorndon and the area of Kelsale park in Yoxford. All these are early parks dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> century and before.

Grigor, in writing an account of trees in Norfolk parks asserted that the ‘real definition’ of a park was that is tithe free. As a result of this and as a number of former parks in Suffolk indicated areas of tithe free or tithe-exempt land this assertion was examined more closely. At Redgrave some 500 acres of the former park were entirely tithe-free; this a former park of the Abbot of St Edmunds. However, it is clear that parks *per se* were not tithe free. Where exemptions occur they appear to relate to former areas of monastic demesne, or areas where an agreement, modus or composition had been made between the Rector and the landowner.

Examples where these arose included an unusual composition of the late 14<sup>th</sup> century between the prior of Stoke by Clare priory and the Rector or Stradishall over tithes arising from the early parks of Middle Park and Broxtedhay in Hundon. In particular the evidence shed light on the land uses within the park, and arrangements for agistment of the cattle of Stradishall parishioners in the parks in Hundon.

Charters recorded in the Eye Priory cartulary provided good detail of the land uses in the park at Eye helping with the reconstruction of the medieval landscape there, as well as the problems encountered and the resolutions put in place to deal with the uncertainty of income when taking tithes in kind. Tithes were valuable income, and represented a marketable asset for the institutions which at times rented out the tithes that they had been granted.

Much evidence arises from disputes over tithes, where rectors were either losing out when parks were created, or seeking to re-establish tithe payments from former parklands once the land came back into tillage or out of ecclesiastical ownership. Examples used to illustrate these processes were:

**Wetheringsett** where the bishop of Ely complained about his loss of fees and wood from Wetheringsett park after it been taken into Crown hands, and then an action by the rector against the lessee Anthony Gosnold; a modus of 6s 8d was subsequently agreed, which was still ‘live’ in the 1840 tithe apportionment.

**Hawstead**, where the park established in about 1509 by Robert Drury paid a modus to the rector of a buck and a doe (later a sum of £7) in *lieu* of tithes from the now-enclosed demesne lands.

**Bradfield, Monks Park**, a former park of the Abbey of St Edmunds occurs in a 17<sup>th</sup> century dispute over tithes of wood. It appears that the park was most probably tithe free as monastic property, but the rector, 'in strait' for lack of wood for firing had appealed to the owner. The dispute related to the status of the wood given – whether tithe or a gift from the owner's bounty. Monk's Park wood was tithe free in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by prescription 'as part of the old wood'.

**Lavenham Park**, originally in the hands of the earls of Oxford was the subject of an interesting dispute in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century with the Rector Henry Copinger, who on his appointment was told that the tithes of the park (900 acres of land) would not be paid to him. A dispute ensued, which cost Copinger £1600 to recover £20 *p.a.* tithe payment. The park was later sold to Sir Thomas Skinner of London who disparked the park and the issue of tithes arose again in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century when his widow, one of the landholders of the disparked park was about to default in paying tithe, leading to the potential for the other two landowners of the former area of the park to be liable for reversion to payment in kind instead of the *modus* that had been agreed during the Copinger dispute.

**Long Melford** had three early parks, and one park established in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. All had been the subjects of disputes. The evidence for one was examined here, that of the park of Elmsett (Melford Park), another early (12<sup>th</sup> century) park of the Abbey of St Edmunds. The dispute over its tithes provides evidence for the date and process of disparking as it was converted to pasture and broken up for tillage in the period after 1580. Tithes in this case were being withheld from the rector by the Sir William Waldegrave in his capacity as guardian to the heir of Kentwell Hall and the depositions recorded by the people interrogated in the dispute tell of the bully-boy tactics employed by Waldegrave's men as the tithe gatherers attempted to load hay onto the rector's cart.