

HEDGE DATING AT RINGMER PARK

by

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Introduction

The fields surrounding Ringmer Park Farm, to the west of the parish church, occupy the site of a deer park which belonged to the Archbishops of Canterbury for at least 300 years prior to the 16th century. It was part of the manor of South Malling, which had been confirmed to the See of Canterbury by King Egbert in 838 A.D. (1).

Heneage Legge's comments and Monica Maloney's article on Ringmer Park history, in the preceding pages of this issue of "Ringmer History", provide an insight into the Ringmer Park of bygone days. It appears to have been disparked during the latter half of the 16th century, converted into farmland and become a private agricultural estate by the end of the century (2,3).

Geology

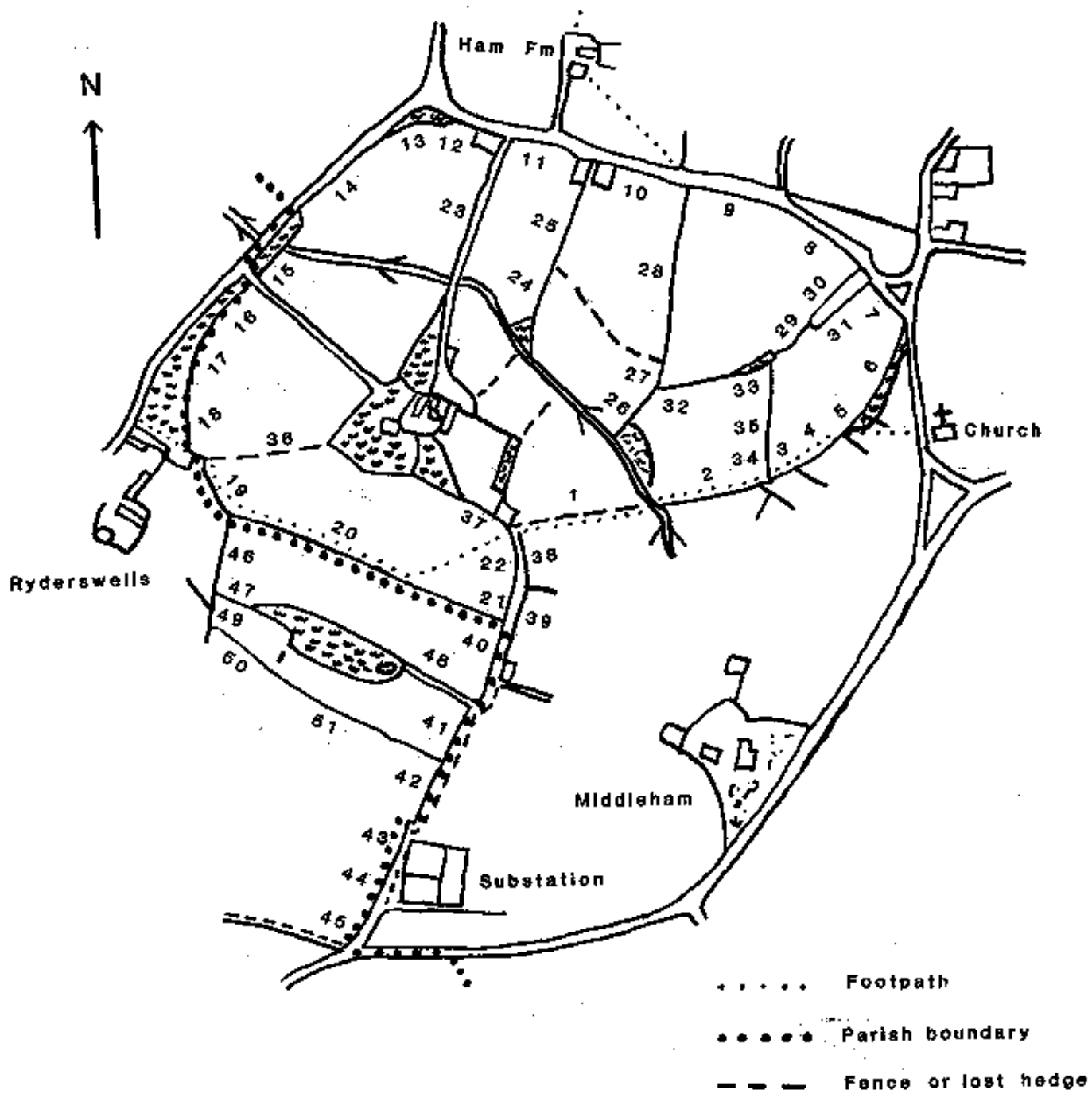
The park lies mainly on Gault Clay with some Head (drift deposit of loam) towards the south-east and alluvium along the stream (4). The altitude varies from about 100 feet O.D. near the east corner to some 30 feet O.D. in the valley, where the park is traversed by a small stream.

Hedgerow History

A Manor Court Roll of 1270-71 indicates that part, at least, of the park perimeter was hedged (2). At the time of disparking hedges would almost certainly have been planted to divide up the land into fields, as was the normal practice at that time (5). The park is roughly oval, a typical shape for a deer park (6). Its acreage appears to have fluctuated about 170 ± 50 acres, peaking in mid to late 17th and 18th centuries (3). It is bounded to the west and north by roadways, running roughly north-eastwards from Malling along the Uckfield Road (A26) and south-eastwards along Ham Lane, respectively. Furthermore, there are still copses at the south-west corner and on the east side near the church. Thus exchanges of land probably took place along the southern and south-eastern borders. The parish boundary may have been realigned between 1702 and 1731 (7).

Although the external boundaries agree with those on the Ringmer Tithe Award map of 1840, the shapes of many of the fields within have changed more than once,

RINGMER PARK



as shown on the 1873 and 1963 O.S. 6" maps. Only a proportion of the internal hedges remain today as on the 1840 Tithe Map.

Theory of hedgerow dating

Max Hooper devised a method for dating hedges by counting the number of woody species in a 30 yard stretch, and considering each one present to represent 100 years in age (9). In some cases we have followed his system, but usually we have modified his method by counting the woody species present at one metre intervals. This method has enabled us to determine the composition of the hedge and the distribution of species along it with greater accuracy (10).

The Park Boundary Hedges

Ringmer Park is at present bounded by roadside hedges, copse edges and on the south side hedges, or fencing, between fields. Most of the hedges are cut to about 1.5 metres, except in the region of the copses and the line of trees along B2.

1. Roadside Hedges

Hedges along roadsides tend to have a high number of woody species (11, 12), partly as they may follow ancient pathways. This could be true of both the Uckfield Road and Ham Lane. However, even new hedges along roadsides may have a high number of species (10).

Nearly all the roadside hedges forming the park boundary appear to have Hawthorn as the dominant shrub. The exception is hedge B12 which has a preponderance of Blackthorn and Dogwood (Table 1). This hedge, however, adjoins both a copse and an orchard. Hedges B7 - B9, along Ham Lane, have only 4 or 5 species per 30 metres. Hawthorn is the dominant shrub with Rose, Blackthorn, Privet and Dogwood as the most frequent accompanying species (Table 1 & Fig.3). Thus these hedges reflect the composition of many of the internal hedges (Table II & Fig.3). Hedges B10 - B12 have a greater number of species including Field Maple (Table 1). In addition they have a number of woodland herb indicator-species present, including Dog's Mercury, Bluebell and Primrose. These hedges may well have had a woodland origin, particularly as in the map of 1873 there is an indication of copse along Ham Lane eastwards as far as hedge B9.

The hedges along the Uckfield Road, B14 and B15, are quite unlike those of Ham Lane. They either adjoin or border on copses and reflect their composition

PROJECT B TABLE I RINGMER PARK BOUNDARY HEDGES

Hedge Number	HAW LANE						A26	Between fields					Lane	
	7	8	9	10	11	12	14	2	19	20	3	4	21	22
Date	Pre 1763													1763-1840
Hedge length m.	96	150					127	163	47		47	89	39	20
Species/30 m.	5	5	4.4	7.2		7	6.2	6	8	1.5	8	4.8	4	1
Frequency % of counts														
Hawthorn	93	xxx	xxx	xxx	x	30	75	42	70	100	53	73	82	100
Blackthorn	3	x	x	x	x	54	10	14	24	-	13	1	13	-
Rose	34	xx	xx	x	x	17	11	47	16	x	22	30	-	-
Elder	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	x	17	-	-	-
Dogwood	14	x	x	x	xxx	46	2	4	24	-	9	-	41	-
Privet	52	xx	xx	x	x	11	18	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Spindle	3	-	-	-	-	4	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ash	-	-	-	x	-	-	11	26	4	-	19	1	-	-
Elm	-	x	x	-	-	-	54	-	-	-	-	27	-	-
Field Maple	-	-	-	x	x	28	11	58	32	-	15	56	5	-
Oak	-	-	-	-	-	-	29	21	6	-	21	-	-	-
Beech	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hazel	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	4	28	-	11	-	-	-
Holly	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Horsechestnut	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	-	-	-	-	-	-
Wayfaring tree	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Wild Plum	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	13	-
Total Species	8	6	6	9	7	7	11	10	8	3	9	6	5	1
Ditch	roadside shallow								outsd	none	outsd	shall		
Height m.	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	2.0	2.0	Unm.	3	1.5	Not recent			1.5
Comments				D., B., P., present			E. & H. hedge	Patchy distr.			Trees, patchy distr.			

PROJECT B TABLE II RINGMER PARK INTERNAL HEDGES

Hedge Number	25	28	27	32	29	35	24	26	34	37	30	31
Date	Pre 1783	On 1873 Map		On 1963 Map		On 1873 Map	On 1963 Map		Pre 1783	On 1873 Map	On 1963 Map	
Hedge Length m.	60+	100		34	111		107	90	79			
Species/30m.	5	4		4	4.5		6.8	5.5	5.4			
Frequency % of counts												
Hawthorn	x	95	x	xxx	30	89	60	94	66	x	xxx	xxx
Blackthorn	x	16	xxx	xx	50	33	55	12	21	-	-	-
Rose	x	68	x	xx	9	21	59	78	20	-	x	xx
Elder	-	-	-	-	-	4	1	-	1	-	-	-
Dogwood	-	-	-	-	-	-	21	1	-	-	-	-
Privet	x	20	x	xx	-	9	36	7	-	-	x	x
Spindle	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Ash	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	3	24	-	-	-
Elm	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Field Maple	-	-	-	-	6	-	39	-	20	-	-	-
Oak	T	2	-	-	-	1	1	3	1	-	-	-
Holly	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	-	2	-	-	-
Hycamore	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	21	-	-	-
Wild Plum	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Species	5	5	4	4	4	8	10	7	9	2	3	3
Ditch	Shallow							On E. l.m.				
Height m.	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	2.0		2.0 m.	12	2.0	1.5	1.5
Comments	Double			(a) Gappy			Adj. copies by stream		(b)	(c)	Gardens	

PROJECT B TABLE III COPSES

	Nr. Church	Ham L. A26	A26	Ryders-wells	Nr. Pond
Hawthorn	x	x	x	x	x
Blackthorn	-	x	x	x	x
Rose	x	x	x	x	x
Elder	x	-	x	x	-
Dogwood	-	x	-	x	-
Privet	x	x	x	x	x
Spindle	-	x	x	x	-
Ash	x	-	x	x	x
Elm	x	-	x	x	-
Field Maple	x	x	-	x	x
Oak	-	-	-	x	x
Beech	-	-	-	x	-
Cherry	x	-	-	x	-
Holly	x	-	-	x	-
Hornbeam	-	-	-	x	-
Horsechestnut	-	-	-	x	-
Laurel	-	-	-	x	-
Poplar	-	-	-	-	x
Snowberry	-	-	-	x	-
Sycamore	x	-	-	x	x
Wayfaring tree	-	x	-	x	-
Wild Plum	x	x	-	-	-
Willow sp.	-	-	x	x	-
Yew	-	-	-	-	x
Comments	No hedges	Marshy			

PROJECT B TABLE IV HEDGES ALONG COPSES

Hedge Number Date	A26 Ryderswells			Nr. Pond
	15	16	17	
Hedge length m.	93	47		55
Species/30m.	4.2	5.0	6.0	8.0
Frequency % of counts				
Hawthorn	42	4	37	98
Blackthorn	19	14	82	67
Rose	4	10	37	74
Elder	2	-	-	-
Dogwood	6	-	-	-
Privet	26	6	22	45
Spindle	-	2	2	-
Ash	8	-	-	58
Elm	4	6	2	-
Field Maple	-	-	49	14
Oak	-	2	10	64
Hazel	-	-	3	-
Hornbeam	-	100	-	-
Poplar	-	-	-	57
Sycamore	-	-	-	5
Wayfaring Tree	-	2	-	-
Yew	-	-	-	4
Total Species	8	9	9	10

Notes

D.	Dogs Mercury
B.	Bluebell
P.	Primrose
E. & H.	Elm and Hawthorn
(a)	2m wide. Line of staw?
(b)	2m wide. Near trees, unmanaged
(c)	Along lane, degenerate
Unm.	Unmanaged
x	Present
xx	Occasional to frequent
xxx	Dominant Species

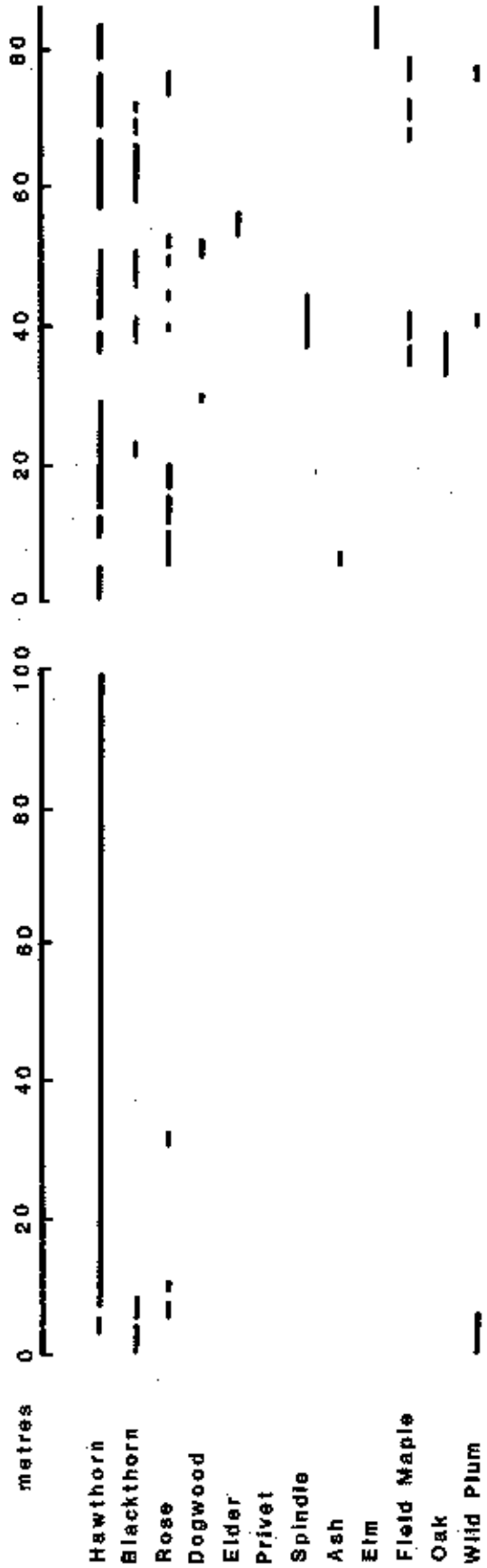
Scientific Names of Species

These are as in Ringier History Vol.1, page 62, except as below:

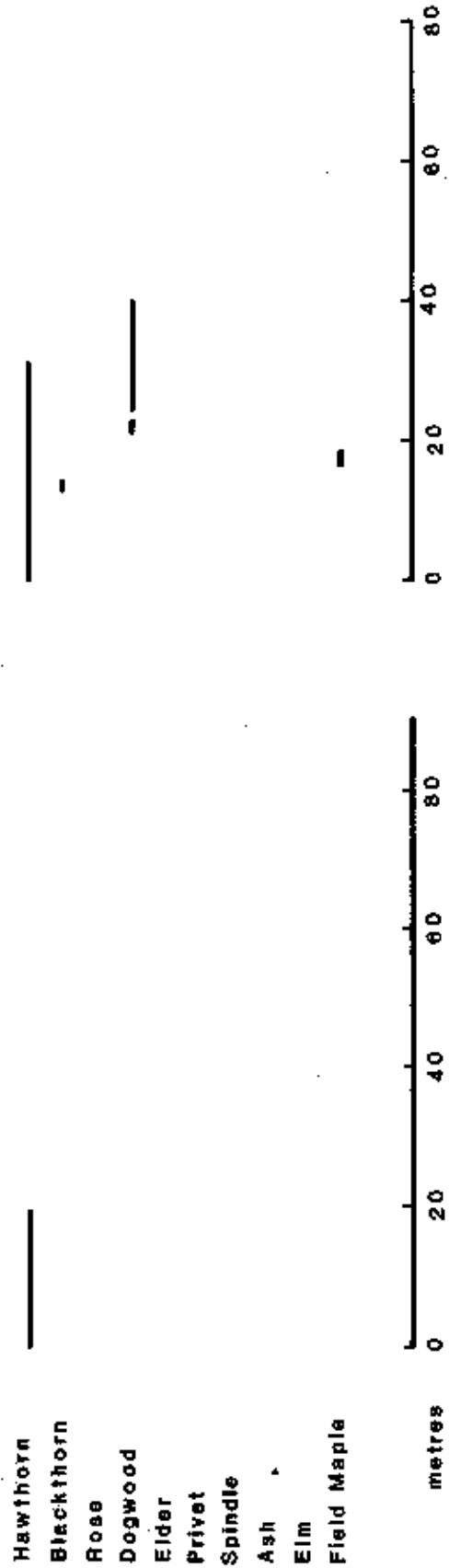
Beech	<u>Fagus sylvatica</u>
Guelder-Rose	<u>Viburnum opulus</u>
Hornbeam	<u>Carpinus betulus</u>
Horse-Chestnut	<u>Aesculus hippocastanum</u>
Laurel, Common	<u>Prunus laurocerasus</u>
Poplar	<u>Populus sp.</u>
Snowberry	<u>Symphoricarpos albus</u>
Wayfaring-Tree	<u>Viburnum lantana</u>
Willow, Grey	<u>Salix cinerea</u>
Yew	<u>Taxus baccata</u>

FIGURE 2

Hedge B20 Southern boundary E-W Hedge B51 Old parish boundary E-W



Hedge B22 Substation lane N-S Hedge B21 Substation lane N-S



(Tables I, III & IV). In addition, there is a bank with mature trees, B14. A similar bank with a variety of trees is also found on the south-east corner of the park, hedge B2. (Table I & Fig.3). Both these "hedges" could be remnants of an old park boundary.

2. Copses

A number of copses form sections of Ringmer Park boundary, including B5 and B6 near the church, B13 at the corner of Ham Lane and Uckfield road and B15 near the stream. From the driveway to Ringmer Park Farm the park boundary curves away from the road, along the edge of a copse associated with Ryderswells. A short stretch, B16, is bordered by Hornbeam. This species used to be planted and coppiced at woodland edges and in the 16th and 17th centuries used in formal gardens (8). Hedge B17 is composed mainly of Blackthorn, Hawthorn, Maple and Privet (Table IV), but near Ryderswells the Beech-dominated copse appears to have no hedged edge.

3. Hedges adjoining fields

Two hedges, B19 on the south-west corner and B3 on the south-east side, have a remarkably similar composition with high numbers of woody species (Table I). These hedges may possibly be of woodland origin, particularly as they are near or adjoining copses. They may be older than most of the other park hedgerows.

The present hedge B20 along the apparent southern park border appears to be modern. It lies along the same line as on the 1873 6" map, but there is no indication of a ditch. By the 19th century it had become customary to plant hedges flat with neither bank nor ditch. Furthermore, our botanical investigation has shown that whereas hedge B20 is a monoculture of Hawthorn, the adjoining hedges, B19 to the west and B21 to the east, have a higher number of species (Table I) indicating greater age. Thus hedge dating supports documentary evidence, suggesting realignment of hedge B20.

Hedges B22 and B21, at the northern end of the sub-station lane, are good examples of hedges reflecting history. Both hedges have a basis of Hawthorn (Table I & Fig.2), but at the top of the lane, where it has been realigned since 1783, hedge B22 is of Hawthorn only. However the adjoining hedge B21, still on the same line as the 1783 map, contains several woody species including Field Maple (Table I).

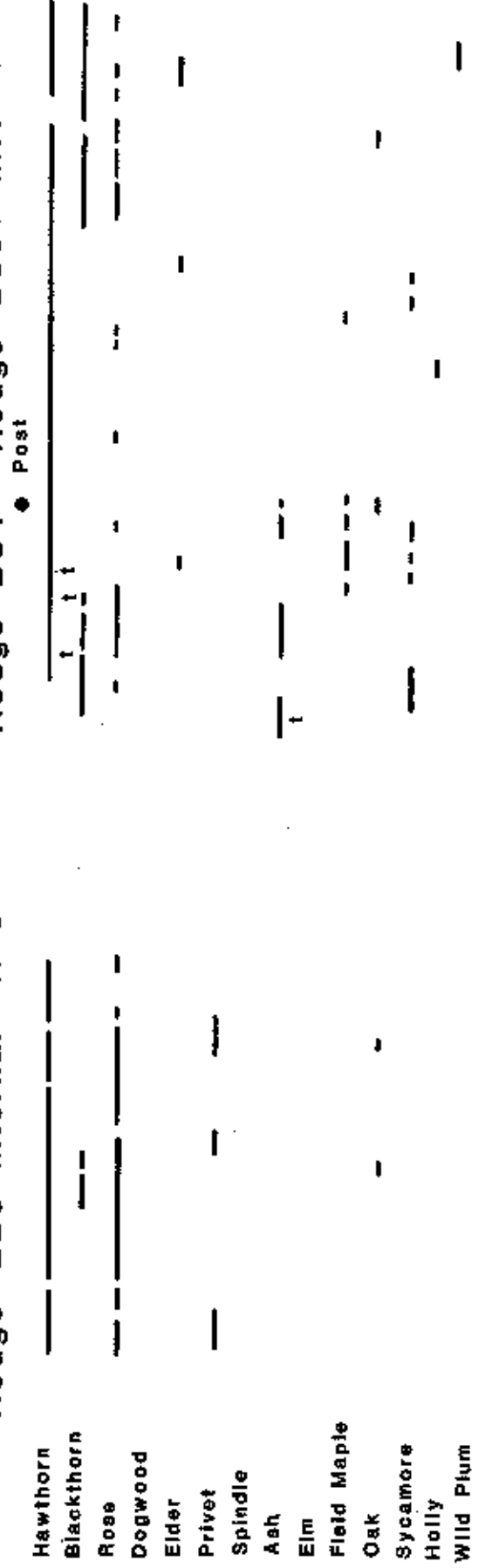
One boundary hedge, B1, is now only represented by a fence. It is of interest to note that Privet is absent from all hedges along the southern boundary from

FIGURE 3

Hedge B9 Ham Lane E-W Hedge B2 SE Boundary NE-SW



Hedge B34 Hedge B35 internal S-N



Internal Hedges

Some seven internal hedges of Ringmer Park appear to have been lost since those shown on the 1840 Tithe Map. By 1873 (O.S.map) the park appeared to consist of a few large fields, but by 1963 (O.S.map) there were additional field boundaries. All of these that have survived are now fences with the exception of hedges B34 and B35. Rather unexpectedly these hedges appear to be of similar composition to the other, presumably older, internal hedges. The relatively high number of species in B34 could be related to its proximity to the adjoining hedges B3 and B2, all three hedges having Elder, Ash, Field Maple and Oak (Table I). B35 could have been planted with Hawthorn, Blackthorn and possibly Privet to conform with the other internal hedges. Rose is a common coloniser of hedges, and Privet may have been bird-dropped from its relatively high incidence in neighbouring hedges.

The shapes of the fields converging on the south-west corner appear to have been altered several times. The internal hedges off Nam Lane, B25, B28 and B29, are remarkably consistent in their composition, being mainly of Hawthorn, with some Blackthorn, Rose and Privet and an occasional other tree or shrub (Table II). This indicates an age approximating to 400 years, which is in accordance with disparking in the 16th century.

Hedge B32 presents something of an enigma. It is indicated on the Tithe Map by a shaw, although the position is not consistent with later maps. It is certainly continuous with a copse surrounded by a pond. Nevertheless, although much wider than most of the park hedges, it contains similar species to other internal hedges. Hedges B24 and B26, adjoining the stream with its copse border, had higher counts of woody species (Table II). This would have been expected as the damper soil would have been conducive to greater woodland growth.

Conclusions

The proximity of copses enriches nearby hedges producing high species counts. This shows some similarity with the effect of roadways on hedge composition.

The pre-1783 internal park hedges, apart from those adjoining copses, were found to have 4 or 5 species per 30 metres. Bearing in mind that there may not have been a clear distinction between Hawthorn and Blackthorn at the time of planting, these hedges would be around 400 years old, according to Hooper's

method of estimation. This tallies quite well with the disparking in the 16th century. However, hedges B34 and B35 look like old hedges despite their appearance only on maps post 1873.

It is of interest to note that woodland indicator herbs were only found in hedges associated with copses. Maple, which appears to indicate a hedge age of about 400 years (13), occurred in most of the park boundary and internal hedges that were near copses or of possible woodland origin. On the other hand Spindle, usually associated with older hedges of at least 600 years (13), was far less widely distributed.

Hedge dating appears to corroborate documentary evidence for a boundary change along the southern border, and also at the northern end of the sub-station lane.

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