

Saving Orchards

In 1839 in the combined parishes of Stoke Abbott, Beaminster, Netherbury and Powerstock there were over 800 acres of orchard. Although we have no way of knowing the condition of the trees, the orchards were productive enough to exact a tithe payment. There are still orchards in these parishes, some are well cared for, some replanted and some have been forgotten but each of them represents the rare and beautiful heritage of the county. This year of research has strengthened the argument for preserving orchards by opening a window on their historical importance. The environmental charity [Common Ground](#) states that 'Orchards can defy easy categorisation within planning and nature conservation policies: they are not quite woodland or farm, pasture or meadowland, hedgerow or copse. In fact orchards can be all these things at once.

This difficulty in fitting orchards into pigeon-holes has meant that clauses for their protection are omitted from policies altogether'. The work of the Apple Project has been to raise awareness as to the value of Dorset's orchards with the aim of saving those that are under threat and where possible involving communities in the care of orchards as communal spaces.

So if you want to save an orchard, be heartened, orchards can and have been saved within the current planning system but you should be prepared to research locally to find out more about the site and the policies that do exist that can protect it.

Estimated acreage of 6 West Dorset parishes in 1839	
<i>Parish</i>	<i>Acres</i>
Beaminster	232
Netherbury	350
Powerstock	132
Stoke Abbott	99
Symondsbury	100
Whitchurch Canonicorum	172
	1085