

**Object(s):** Apple Grader

**Object Number(s):** STMEA:A.4250

**Researcher details:** Hannah White, Volunteer

### **What is an Apple Grader?**

An apple grader is used to sort or 'grade' apples so that they can be organised by size, type, and condition before passing onto the buyers or wholesalers. This grader is made from wood, iron and canvas.

### **Where was the apple grader used?**

This machine was used by the donor at Long Furlough Fruit Farm, for a period of 3 to 4 years until he ceased apple growing, owing to him finding it unprofitable. Since he only had a relatively small number of trees, the grader was operated using only one side, the other being against a wall.

The grader was bought from Mr Stott of Dove Fruit Farms, North Walsham. Mr Stott himself only used the machine for some 3 years before parting with it. This was on a farm he purchased from the Dove family at North Walsham (Brick Kiln Farm) (**Figure 1**), and the grader was purchased along with the buildings.



**Figure 1.** Brick Kiln Farm, Trunch, North Walsham<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> North Walsham & District Community Archive. Photograph of Brick Kiln Farm [Internet]. Available from: <https://www.northwalshamarchive.co.uk/photo/brick-kiln-farm-trunch> Accessed 05.03.2021. Public domain

When used at Mr Stott's, two people fed the machine, placing an apple in each cup manually, and four were employed on packing, taking the apples from the sprung trays, wrapping them in tissue, and putting them in boxes. All the workers stood at their work. Mr Stott believes that the grader is of common type, known as a 'cutlass'. He also believes that it would never have been hand-cranked.

We believe that this apple grader is a belt driven Cutler grading machine of American origin and probably manufactured between 1910 and 1920<sup>2</sup>. Originally the grader would have been powered by electricity. American equipment runs from a 120-volt supply, whereas the UK supply is set at 240-volts, which would be the most likely reason that this grader was manually operated.

The grader has fittings for a 'return belt' at the lower end (namely two rollers) but the belt itself is missing. At neither of the above farms was the belt in use, but the idea of it was to lay rotten fruit on it, which would then be taken down the wooden shoot and dropped into a separate box. There are several rough stands, made from old wooden boxes, which were used for supporting the apple boxes which were being emptied or filled. Adjustment of the weights into which the apples were sorted is by means of bags of lead shot and small pockets into which coins were inserted to increase tension. The lighter apples were graded into the first compartments and the heavier into the latter.

### **A Brief History of Apple Growing**

We know apples were gathered in Europe in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages, but these would not have borne much of a resemblance to the fruit we think of as apples today. Archaeology suggests that they were smaller, more in line with the *Malus sylvestris* breed: what we think of today as a crab apple. This scientific name translates as 'forest apple', and far from the sweeter taste we enjoy, we can imagine that they would have tasted very acidic.<sup>3</sup>

The earliest known mention of apples in England was made by King Alfred in AD 885, in his English translation of 'Gregory's Pastoral Care'.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> County T. Cutler Grading Machine, 1913 | Historic Hood River | images from The History Museum of Hood River County [Internet]. [Historichoodriver.com](http://historichoodriver.com/index.php?showimage=545). 2021 [cited 17 March 2021]. Available from: <http://historichoodriver.com/index.php?showimage=545>

<sup>3</sup> English Heritage. The First Bite of the Apple [Internet]. Available from: <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/learn/conservation/gardens-and-landscapes/orchard-conservation/> Accessed 05.03.2021

<sup>4</sup> A Brief History of Apples in the UK | British Apples & Pears : British Apples & Pears [Internet]. [Britishapplesandpears.co.uk](http://britishapplesandpears.co.uk). 2021 [cited 17 March 2021]. Available from: <https://britishapplesandpears.co.uk/about/a-brief-history-of-apples-in-the-uk/>

During the 11<sup>th</sup> century at the time of the Norman Conquest, improved varieties of apples were introduced from France. Orchards were developed in the grounds of monasteries and the raising of new varieties was undertaken by cross pollination. The orchards of the monastery at Ely were particularly famous.<sup>5</sup>

Specially cultivated apple varieties spread across Europe to France, arriving in England at around the time of the Norman Conquest in 1066.<sup>6</sup> Between 1455-1485, the War of the Roses, repeated droughts and the Black Death led to a decline in the production of both apples and pears in England.<sup>7</sup> Henry VIII successfully managed to reverse the decline when he instructed the fruiterer, Richard Harris, to establish the first large scale orchards at Teynham in Kent.<sup>8</sup>

The development of new varieties of apples peaked during the Victorian era when nurserymen and amateur gardeners started experimenting as well as giving new names to varieties that had already been around for many centuries.<sup>9</sup> However, by the late 20<sup>th</sup> century the UK fruit-growing industry was in decline.<sup>10</sup>

The domesticated apples that we eat today come from central Asia, and sweeter tasting fruit nearer to what we would recognise appeared in the Middle East around 4,000 years ago. It was the development of a process known as 'grafting' that allowed the growing of trees with especially flavourful fruit helping to increase disease free larger yields. The varieties passed to Europe and were adopted by the Victorians who were always enthusiastic horticulturalists keen to create new varieties.<sup>11</sup>

### **Growing Apples in East Anglia**

Apples arrived in Britain with the abbey and East Anglia proved a natural nurturing ground. As long ago as the 12<sup>th</sup> century, orchards described as paradises "filled with apple-bearing trees" were reported at the abbey at Thorney and Ely in Cambridgeshire<sup>12</sup> and fruit trees

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid (5)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid (5)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid (5)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid (5)

<sup>9</sup> East Anglian Daily Times. Could you help search from the traditional orchards of East Anglia? [Internet]. Available from: <https://www.eadt.co.uk/news/traditional-orchards-orchards-east-apples-pears-2505888> Accessed 03.03.2021

<sup>10</sup> Ibid (10)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid (3)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid (5)

bearing apples, pears, plums, and cherries have been part of the Norfolk landscape since the Norman Conquest.<sup>13</sup>

The country's earliest record of fruit orchards appears in the foundation charter of Castle Acre Priory of about 1089, and the earliest mention of a named apple variety in England is recorded in a 13<sup>th</sup> century document from the Broadland parish of Runham, when a tenant farmer paid his annual rent with, "200 pearmaines, and four hogsheads of wine, made of pearmaines".<sup>14</sup>

In 1662, Thomas Fuller described Norwich as, "either a city in an orchard, or an orchard in a city, so equal are houses and trees blended in it", fruit growing was widespread, enjoyed by even the smallest households who, where space permitted, planted a few fruit trees for their domestic needs, while larger households enjoyed fruits from their own small orchards.<sup>15</sup>

Large-scale commercial orchards arrived with the coming of the railways in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These were concentrated in two areas of the county, in the west, centred on the town of Wisbech, and in the east, on the Broadland Rivers of the Waveney, Bure and Ant. Gaymers Cider Works in Banham, and later Attleborough, was also a large consumer of Norfolk apples.

The East of England has one of the most prolific fruit growing areas of the United Kingdom. Often overlooked in favour of the South East, West Midlands or the West Country, the region has a rich history of fruit growing with orchards being a familiar part of the landscape.<sup>16</sup> At one point Suffolk had around 6,000 traditional orchards-virtually every farm and country house would have had one-but as land has been sold, they have gradually disappeared.<sup>17</sup>

### **What products can apples be made into?**

Apple juice created with English apples, has a distinct flavour and it is produced by pressing the apples.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid (5)

<sup>14</sup> Great British Life. Norfolk Apples and Orchards [Internet]. Available from: <https://www.greatbritishlife.co.uk/food-and-drink/norfolk-apples-and-orchards-6994650> Accessed 05.03.2021

<sup>15</sup> Ibid (15)

<sup>16</sup> Bittern Books. Orchard Recipes from Eastern England [Internet]. Available from: <https://bitternbooks.co.uk/product/orchard-recipes-from-eastern-england/> Accessed 05.03.2021

<sup>17</sup> Ibid (10)



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Cider can be manufactured from cider apple varieties, these are harvested and pressed, and yeast, malic acid and sugar are added to juice to create the right environment for fermentation to occur. Some varieties of apple, often with higher acid and tannin contents than dessert apples, are grown especially for hard cider production. The fermentation of apple juice to produce an alcoholic beverage dates to at least 2000 years, and cider is recorded as a common drink during the Roman invasion of England in 55BC. In the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, St Jerome used the *term* “*sicera*” to describe drinks made from apples; this may be the word from which cider is derived. Significant commercial cider production began in the UK in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>18</sup>

Preservatives can be made from dried apples, these can include apple jam, cooked down in sweet and savoury dishes or made into compote.<sup>19</sup>

**Related objects:**

STMEA:A.2591 Apple Grader (Museum of East Anglian Life Collections)

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid (3)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid (3)