A history of hedgerows

The Bronze Age. Widespread adoption of agriculture in Britain, some Bronze age hedge systems still seen in parts of Devon.

2500 BCE

800 BCE

Romans leave Britain

410 CE

The Saxon era. Open field system adopted towards the end of the Saxon era, so fewer hedges needed.

Battle of Hastings

1066

Domesday book commissioned

1085

1235

Early enclosure The 1235 Statute of Merton, gave Lords the power to enclose common grazing land.

During the Tudor era, a significant rise in enclosure, loss of common rights as common land hedged off, largely for sheep grazing. Land was enclosed by force, which resulted in great hardship.

1509

Henry VIII crowned King

1549

Rebellion against enclosures, led by Robert Kett. Thousands of peasants tore down the hedges that had enclosed their once common land, prompting an army of 13,000 to retaliate, killing and injuring 3000 peasants.

1564

William Shakespeare is born

1607

The Midland Revolt saw 1000s of citizens pull down hedgerows, they were known as the Levellers.

1651

Charles II hides in an oak tree after Civil War defeat

1750

1820

Peak time for enclosure – 200,000 miles of hedge planted; mostly single species, straight hedges. Some ancient woodland cleared for post and gate construction.

1831

Charles Darwin sets sail on *The Beagle*

1876

Commons Act ruled that enclosure should only take place if there was some public benefit.

1914

World War I

1939

World War II

Agriculture act passed, followed by decades of hedgerow loss (up to a half), as a political goal for food independence saw widespread incentivised hedge removal.

1947

1950

Forestry Commission assessment shows 1,000,000 km of hedgerow.

1970

Dutch Elm disease wipes out majority of our mature elm trees. Hedgerow elm becomes the best remaining stronghold of the species.

1993

Stubble burning, known to damage and destroy hedges, banned.

1997

Hedgerow regulations act restricted the removal of hedges.

2006

Hedgerows are listed as a **habitat of principal importance for biodiversity conservation**.

2007

Countryside survey shows reduction in hedge removals, but sadly less than half of remaining hedges in good structural condition.

An optimistic future. The environmental, economic and ecological benefits of hedgerows are more widely recognised. Grants are available to replant hedges, and there's a growing interest in sustainable management for a future of healthy hedgerows.

people's trust for endangered species