Laying a landscape bare

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Lost Norton Park – Laying a Landscape Bare

Mapping through time

- GIS mapping can give us the current landscape today and we can clearly define the area of study. Using tools within the software, we can first geolocate historic maps, creating 'layers' which allow us to go back through time to discover landscape changes and better understand them. It also helps inform us how we have arrived at the landscape today.

- Starting with the landscape of 2019, we can first travel back to the mid-19th century, thanks to the first series of 6” Ordnance Survey maps. Immediately obvious is the absence of housing and any sort of development. Indeed, the area around the park is distinctly rural, with local habitation being around Little Norton and Norton Hall itself.

- In 1849, areas were divided into sale plots, being allocated lot numbers. It is worth noting that a number of features familiar today are present, having survived changes in ownership and use. These include Cobnar Wood, the three ponds in the park and the nursery garden, for example.

- The last reliable map suitable for georeferencing is from 1775, of the Norton Hall estate and its boundary. The London Road turnpike forms a definite western boundary and the woods in the middle of the park are very much in evidence, as are the three ponds. What this does show are fields, tracks, boundaries and buildings no longer in existence; in this case the old Norton Hall.

The botanical evidence

- An aspect of historic landscapes is the botanical evidence for helping to identify an old landscape. A number of plants - 'indicator species' - can help to interpret the longevity of a feature, in this case the woods across the park. A number of these indicator species are evident, many in some quantity, within the woods themselves. They can also be used to suggest where a woodland once stood, or to help age boundaries. In this case, Dog’s Mercury (Mercurialis perennis) is present on a number of the park’s boundaries.

Information derived from old maps

- Old maps are a valuable source of information and details can be extracted using GIS. This can be to pinpoint certain features and highlight them more prominently on the map. In this example, bodies of water from various eras are combined on one map. Some remain and others, such as the Serpentine, are now lost but we can ‘reinstate’ them into the modern landscape.

- Other features such as wells, troughs and water pumps, were all important local resources in a pre-industrial landscape. Many of these survived for many decades into the industrial era but are now lost after falling into disuse and to 20th century development. Similarly, the development of the local buildings can be traced and located.
Information derived from fieldwork and survey

- Information from the study of maps can inform and guide fieldwork. Surveys of humps, bumps and lines can be plotted and their relationship to old maps compared. Often we can see that some features have survived for some considerable. In other circumstances, plotting features in the field and comparing to maps can perhaps identify features. The plotting of significant trees is also useful as many old large-scale maps are accurate enough to show them. Again, this can be used to confirm their existence over a sometimes lengthy time-span.
Finding Lost Norton Park

Lost Norton Park Study Area

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Example Botanical (ancient woodland species) Field Survey Data

- Enchanter’s Nightshade
- Dog’s Mercury
- Wood Anemone
- Ancient Woodland
- Buildings
- Graves Boundary
- 10 Metre contours

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Using digital mapping, fieldwork and original maps, it is possible to plot the location of landscape features, in this case trees, and compare the result.