

# National Trust Press Release

## Ghost of 'lost' blossom endures through street and place names, according to new research from the National Trust

- **Despite blossom declining across our landscapes since 1900, the number of place names linked with blossom has doubled**
- **While we have more place names linked with blossom today, the place names are increasingly generic – indicating a lost connection with the individual varieties of apple and other fruit and nut trees**
- **Over half of 'orchard-related' place names on maps today do not have any connection with a current orchard, and instead appear linked with the historic orchards lost during the 20<sup>th</sup> century**
- **Several cities in the SW have seen increases in the proportion of place names linked with blossom including Gloucester, Cheltenham and Bristol**
- **The South West has seen an increase in place names linked with blossom by 2.4% since 1900**

With the National Trust's Blossom Week about to bloom (20-28<sup>th</sup> April), new research published by the charity has revealed the significance of historic blossom in all its different guises in influencing the street and place names that still exist today.

By analysing modern and historic maps[1], and matching these results to the orchards research undertaken by the Trust using artificial intelligence in 2022[2], the new research - supported by players of People's Postcode Lottery - has been able to paint a picture of blossom over time across more than 90% of England and 30% of Wales[3].

The detailed analysis of place names found that the number of place names associated with blossom[4] has doubled from 3% (23,000 of the 700,000 place names examined) in 1900 compared to 6% (51,000 of the 912,000 place names examined) in 2023 – despite the loss of blossom from our landscapes[5].

This pattern was reflected broadly when comparing place names in cities and rural locations[6].

One of the strongest correlations observed was the link between declining areas of traditional orchards and increases in place names associated with blossom. Across all counties surveyed, over 70% evidenced an increase in blossom-related place names alongside a decline in the presence of traditional orchards; and for cities the figure was even higher, with over 80% following this pattern.

Professor Matthew Heard, Head of Environmental Research & Data at the National Trust says: "Over the last century, blossom has been disappearing from our landscapes. "Since 1900, half of our traditional orchards – and their blossoming trees – have been lost across England and Wales. But despite this, we clearly haven't lost our connection to them – their memory is something we seem to want to keep alive.

“How many of us know of an Orchard Close, or a Chestnut Avenue in our towns and cities? Place names can point to our values, beliefs and shared stories – they help us navigate cultural memory as much as they do the landscape itself. They can also provide us with clues about the changing nature of the world around us.”

#### ‘Blossom related’ place names - results in more detail

Counties with the biggest declines in proportion of place names associated with blossom were Berkshire (12% of all place names in 1900 to 9% in 2023) and Hampshire (16% in 1900 to 11% in 2023).

Regionally, London and the South-East was the only region with a proportional decline in ‘blossom-related’ place names since 1900, from 7.2% (the highest of any region or country) to 6.7%. Despite this proportional decline, the region has still seen an overall doubling of place names linked to blossom (from 7,754 in 1900 to 13,682 in 2023) and is second only to the South-West where 7.1% of all place names today (7,896) are associated with blossom. Setting aside these few exceptions, it appears that despite the declines in the presence of blossom in our landscapes, the use of words linked to blossom in our place names has increased.

#### ‘Orchard related’ place names

The increase in current place names adopting ‘orchard-related’ terms has increased despite a loss in orchards of 56%[7], with just 4,017Ha left growing today – equivalent to an area slightly larger than the Isle of Wight[8].

The relationship between ‘orchard-related’ place names and orchards was established by placing a 500 meter buffer around the orchards’ datasets (showing orchards present in 1900, lost since 1900 and present today) produced as part of the research in 2022.

Matt continued: “What’s especially interesting is that 52% of current place names with the word ‘orchard’ in them are within 500 metres of an orchard that has been lost since 1900, but are more than 500 metres from an existing one. In other words, these names are acting as ‘fossil blossom’ – they are like imprints of the past.

“This ‘fossil blossom’ is an important part of our cultural memory – and might point the way for action to bring back blossom.”

When digging deeper into the more regional and country variations of place names in 1900 compared to today, there appears to be a dilution in the more individual characteristics of certain types of blossom across the regions.

Tom Dommatt, Head of Historic Environment at the National Trust, said: “When analysing the ‘orchard-related’ terms in place names today compared to 1900, it appears that our blossoming landscape – or at least the way we name it – has become more homogenous, less distinctive and less diverse – with less use of specific varieties as part of these naming conventions, such as Perry in the South West.

“It’s possible that the proliferation of more generic orchard related terms in current place names reflects a combination of the perceived importance of historic blossom sites, and simultaneously a loss of local history and character.”

Annie Reilly, Programme Manager for the National Trust said: “As part of this year’s Blossom Week celebrations we want to encourage more people to just start to notice and consider the places names that surround them and how these names could be rooted into the cultural history of the area.

“Through our Blossom programme, our aim to bring blossom back to as many cities as possible through various projects including the blossom gardens in London, Plymouth, Newcastle and Nottingham.

“We’re aiming to incorporate 4 million blossom trees as part of our ambitions to plant and establish 20 million trees across England, Wales and Northern Ireland by 2030.

“Where we can, we want these plantings to reflect the cultural history of the area through the use of traditional varieties, helping the connection between people, blossom and place to endure, as well as benefitting nature.

There are hundreds of opportunities to get involved with blossom themed events happening at National Trust places and in towns and cities across the country during Blossom Week including a picnic in the orchard at Crook Hall Gardens in Durham, discover blossom trees by following Manchester’s Bloomtown trail, the immersive Blossom themed display at the Outernet in central London and a blossom procession ‘Gwel an Bleujenn’ (view of the flowers) at Cotehele in Cornwall with poetry and dancing. The Trust’s Blossom campaign is supported by players of People’s Postcode Lottery, with the Manchester events supported by CJ Wildlife.

Laura Chow, Head of Charities at People’s Postcode Lottery, said: “Our players have raised more than £6.5 million, helping to support the invaluable work of the National Trust. “I hope lots of people get involved in the many events taking place over Blossom Week, to help them connect with nature and mark the arrival of spring.”

For more information on events taking place visit [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/blossom](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/blossom)

For more information and to read a copy of the Fossil Blossom report, visit [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/fossil-blossom](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/fossil-blossom)

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**For more information or to arrange interviews, please contact national press office Jeannette Heard on [jeannette.heard@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:jeannette.heard@nationaltrust.org.uk) or 07884 473396 or South West via [swcomms@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:swcomms@nationaltrust.org.uk)**

### Picture editor’s notes

A range of imagery of blossom in cities can be found in the link below. Please use images in conjunction with this story only, and please credit as indicated.

[Fossil blossom](#)

Or [Photos of blossom around the South West](#)

A PDF of the actual Fossil blossom report can be downloaded here:

 [Fossil blossom report](#)

### Editor’s notes

[1] Historic place names were examined using the GB1900 gazetteer supplied by the National Library of Scotland. The gazetteer includes over 2.5 million entries recorded from the Ordnance Survey six-inch (1888-1913) maps of England, Scotland and Wales. These entries include all text present on the historic maps. While these usually include major thoroughfares, many of the less substantial routeways are not named on the mapping.

Current place names were examined using 'OS Open Names' a comprehensive dataset of place names in Great Britain presented in English, Welsh, Scots or Gaelic and created by the Ordnance Survey.

[2] The AI analysis of orchards in 2022 and of the mapping for this project, was undertaken by Arch AI using machine learning and template matching methodologies to automate the identification of mapping symbology associated with orchards.

The research revealed a dramatic decline in 'traditional' orchards with a halving of orchards across England and Wales since the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century driven by changing farming practices and the expansion of towns and cities.

[3] Note that the percentage of Wales included in the research is much lower because there is far less mapping information available for the upland areas that comprise most of the country.

This lack of information is however unlikely to affect results as upland areas are generally unsuited to growing fruit trees.

The analysis couldn't be extended to include Northern Ireland because of a lack of suitable historic map data.

[4] The charity looked at terms associated with blossom in both English and Welsh, divided into categories including 'orchard-related' terms (incorporating 'blossom' and 'orchard' as well as fruit and nut types such as 'hazel', 'apple' or 'cherry' and particular prevalent varieties such as 'Pippin'), 'blossom-related' terms (such as bud, petal and bloom); and other structural terms (like copse, grove and spinney).

[5] See the Blossom over Time report published by the National Trust in 2022.

[6] It also remained similar when the focus narrowed to examining place names only related to orchard-related terms, accounting for 3,800 (1%) of place names in 1900 and around 15,000, (2%) of instances, in 2023.

[7] See the Blossom over Time report published by the National Trust in 2022.

[8] The Isle of Wight is approximately 148 square miles, 43,017Ha is equivalent to 166 square miles.

[9] In 1921 there was a little under a million people that spoke Welsh, compared to the 2021 census where only 538,300 reported as being able to speak Welsh, (a 42% decrease).

### **About the National Trust**

The National Trust is an independent conservation charity founded in 1895 by three people: Octavia Hill, Sir Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley, who saw the importance of the nation's heritage and open spaces and wanted to preserve them for everyone to enjoy. Today, across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, we continue to look after places so people and nature can thrive.

We care for more than 250,000 hectares of countryside, 780 miles of coastline, 1 million collection items and 500 historic properties, gardens and nature reserves. In 2022/23 we received 24 million visitors to our pay for entry sites. The National Trust is for everyone - we were founded for the benefit of the whole nation, and our 5.7 million members, funders and donors, and tens of thousands of volunteers support our work to care for nature, beauty, history for everyone, for ever.

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