

## The history MAN

In the second of a series of five landscape vignettes, UEA historian ADAM LONGCROFT explores the landscape of north Norfolk



As a young postgraduate student one of my most memorable experiences was on a field trip to north Norfolk. Having grown up in Hertfordshire I had never seen anything like the landscape of north Norfolk before and was smitten.

Like the claylands of the south of the county, the landscape of Norfolk has been heavily influenced by its soils. Much of the region is covered by light, sandy wind-blown soils deposited at the end of the last ice age. Though acidic and lacking in fertility, the soils of the area were easy to plough and by the Middle Ages a system of open field arable cultivation had been established with rye, barley and wheat the main crops. The land was ploughed in narrow strips organised into units of increasing size called furlongs, precincts and fields. In many parishes a powerful manorial lord facilitated the establishment of a foldcourse – a legal arrangement which entitled the lord to graze his sheep flock on the stubble after the harvest.

The lord's sheep grazed not only on his own arable strips but also those of his tenants. The lord's sheep were provided with essential grazing and the peasants' "nutrient-hungry" strips were manured by the sheep which served as mobile muck spreaders. The wool from the sheep was first exported and, later on, was the raw material for a domestic woollen cloth weaving industry centred on Norwich and north Norfolk settlements such as Worstead. Some of the wool provided employment for young girls and older women in north Norfolk's spinning and stocking-knitting industry. The nucleated settlement structure of the area, with clusters of houses often tightly grouped around the parish church, was well suited to the communal system of agriculture and may, in fact, have been a consequence of the cooperation and co-ordinated decision-making that an open field arable system of husbandry required.

The sandy soils and light loams of the north were associated with strong lordship – which is manifested today in the close spatial relationship between the manor house and parish church. In Stiffkey, for example, the manor house is literally within spitting distance of the church of St John the Baptist.

By the late 16th century some of the wealthier landowners were beginning to amass very large estates and very large sheep flocks. Flockmasters like Henry Fermour, the builder of East Barsham Manor, were aggressive landlords, quick to evict tenants or trample over their rights to establish vast sheepwalks.

The pattern of strong lordship in the area later facilitated Parliamentary Enclosure in the 18th and early 19th centuries – a process which saw most tenants lose their grazing rights on greens and commons, and which swept away almost all of the open fields. Today, the landscape of north Norfolk conforms to what has been described as "planned countryside". It's a much more "regimented" landscape but has an endless capacity to fascinate.

■ Dr Adam Longcroft is a senior lecturer in the School of Education and Lifelong Learning at the University of East Anglia. Contact him at a.longcroft@uea.ac.uk

As young readers welcome the arrival of her latest book, Norfolk author Sheridan Winn is preparing to wrap up a series that has had her fans gripped. ANGI KENNEDY finds out what's in store for the Sprite Sisters and their creator.

# It's a kind of magic

Picture: ADRIAN JUDD

IT STARTED WITH A SIMPLE SENTENCE – FOUR GIRLS WITH magical powers, east, south, north and west – and it has grown into a five-book series for Norfolk children's author Sheridan Winn.

Since the arrival of the first Sprite Sisters book last year, her series has attracted a growing band of fans across the region; young girls identifying with the four quite different sisters, who have to use their magic to save their extraordinary Norfolk home.

Now, as book three hits the shelves, Norwich-based Sheridan has revealed that the series will have just two further books before it reaches its exciting conclusion next year.

She is busily putting the finishing touches to book four, the Ghost in the Tower due out in July, and then it will be straight into the fifth and final book of the series, which is scheduled for publication next spring.

"It really did begin with that one sentence and everything grew from there," says Sheridan. "One idea leads to another and new characters appear. I definitely feel I have been led through all this.

"I go for lots of walks and enjoy being out in the woods and by the water where I can think. The tranquillity of the countryside is key to me to letting the ideas float up in my mind. Everything has to fit together logically, but for the imaginative side to work you have to let your creativity unfold – you really can't force ideas.

"I use these wonderful moleskin notebooks and if I am out in the woods alone I will write down my ideas as they appear, or walk along talking into a voice recorder.

"It is about getting to a sufficiently restful state when my mind opens up. It is the most fascinating and joyful experience. Writing gives me such a sense of freedom when I get into 'the zone'."

So there will be plenty more walking and wondering for Sheridan in the coming weeks as she plans out the plot for the final book of the popular series.

"Somehow I have got to pull together all the threads of the previous four books," she said. "In some ways you need to know the ending of your series before you start, because then you can work backwards. I think I will have to throw up all the elements of the series into the air and let them fall, and then see what pattern they make."

But for the young Sprite fans there is some consolation. Sheridan has let slip that although the Sprite Sisters series is coming to an end, she plans to leave it open so that she could perhaps return to the girls in the future.

Also within the next few weeks she hopes to launch a Sprite Sisters website



**INSPIRED BY NATURE:** Sheridan Winn gets ideas for her Sprite Sisters books while out walking in the woods or by the water. Below, the third and latest book in the series, *The Secret of the Towers*.



(at [www.sheridanwinn.com](http://www.sheridanwinn.com)) where fans will be able to find out more about the stories and about Sheridan's writing.

And she is looking forward to setting to work soon on a new series set in Breckland. This, she said, would be "a post-apocalyptic scenario about a small tribe of people coming back to the area to live by the Old Ways".

Once again Norfolk will feature strongly in this series. Her childhood, growing up as the eldest of four sisters at Littlewood House in Drayton on the outskirts of Norwich with plenty of pets and lots of space to roam and play in, informed much of the Sprite Sisters stories.

In the new book, *The Secret of the Towers*, for instance, the girls set up camp in a caravan in their large garden, something Sheridan and her sisters did themselves when they were children.

"The caravan was from my direct experience. We would cook amazing cheese sandwiches over the campfire," she said. "We had a freedom and fun that children today don't seem to have a sense of."

Sheridan wanted to be a writer from her early 20s but it wasn't until 2007 that she took the leap of putting pen to paper. Before then she had been business and creative manager for her illustrator and cartoonist husband Chris Winn. When the couple divorced, Sheridan earned her living as a freelance writer and journalist, but the past two years have seen her devote her energies to the Sprite Sisters. The first in the series, *The Circle of Power*, has recently been released as an audio book read by Emma Parish.

Sheridan, a member of the Society of Authors and of the East Anglian Writers' Group, hopes eventually to write for an adult audience too.

She has given talks about her work to schoolchildren and is looking to run a series of writing workshops at schools and groups around the region in the near future. Anyone interested in booking her for a workshop can contact Sheridan by email at [sheri@sheridanwinn.com](mailto:sheri@sheridanwinn.com) for more information.

■ *The Sprite Sisters, The Secret of the Towers* by Sheridan Winn (Piccadilly, £5.99)

## QUOTES OF THE DAY

"A friend once told me that you wouldn't want to make someone wait too long for his car since a car is like a pretty woman. If you wait too long she will become old and perhaps fat. We don't want to make people wait too long" – Ratan Tata, chairman of Tata cars, on the possible long waiting list for the £1,300 Nano car.

"The Gaza side of me is still there – the fun and jokes – but now I want to

become Paul Gascoigne and for people to know me as Paul Gascoigne – not too serious but serious enough about things that matter to me" – The former England footballer, right, on his road to recovery.

"Humour is meant to



be part of our national DNA. Yet the politically correct brigade are behaving like a bunch of Cromwellians, cracking down on any signs of laughter" – Actor Christopher Biggins.

"We have never come across an organisation as stuffed with talent. How can it continue to get so many obvious common sense issues wrong?" – A

consultancy report on the Foreign Office.

"I just think it's really sad. I think she has been really great. I just hope that her family stay strong" – Model Katie Price pays tribute to Jade Goody.

"People can take me or leave me now, I don't care" – William Hague, shadow foreign secretary.