

An appletising challenge for George

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By Danielle Nuttall

A HIGH-flying solicitor is quitting the legal world after 35 years - to grow apples in East Anglia.

George Hodgkinson, from Monks Eleigh, wants to follow in his father's footsteps and rekindle his childhood growing up on a farm after a successful career as a shipping lawyer in London.

Fed-up with the lack of local varieties on the supermarket shelf, Mr Hodgkinson set about growing his own apples in his garden four years ago as an experiment.

The 59-year-old, who has three grown-up children, has now decided to make it a permanent business by creating a small commercial orchard, which last week alone saw him plant more than 700 traditional English dessert apples.

These include old Suffolk varieties such as St Edmund's Pippin and Sturmer Pippin. Mr Hodgkinson is also planning to plant 140 Suffolk greengages, Coe's Golden Drop, a dessert fruit that originated in Suffolk in the 18th century and which is not available in shops today.

"My father used to farm in Little Waldringfield. When I was going on to university he said 'George, do you want to take over the farm?' and I said 'No thank you, I'm going to become a lawyer'," he said.

"But somewhere in the genes there must be something. We had a huge orchard and I used to spend a lot of the school holidays picking apples, so I've been very much brought up with apples.

"I like the challenge of doing shipping finance and the cruise ship business, but you get to a certain point where you have been commuting two hours each way when you want to do something different.

"I am looking for a new challenge and I think I have found it. You only get one chance to do what you want in life. At 59, I have got to do it now."

Mr Hodgkinson, who retires as a solicitor in December, is planning to sell his produce through local outlets, such as farm shops and farmers markets, and is also creating an internet ordering facility. "It's a new challenge, a new niche for me," he said.