

ORCHARD LINK *NEWS*

MAKING YOUR ORCHARD A HAVEN FOR WILDLIFE.

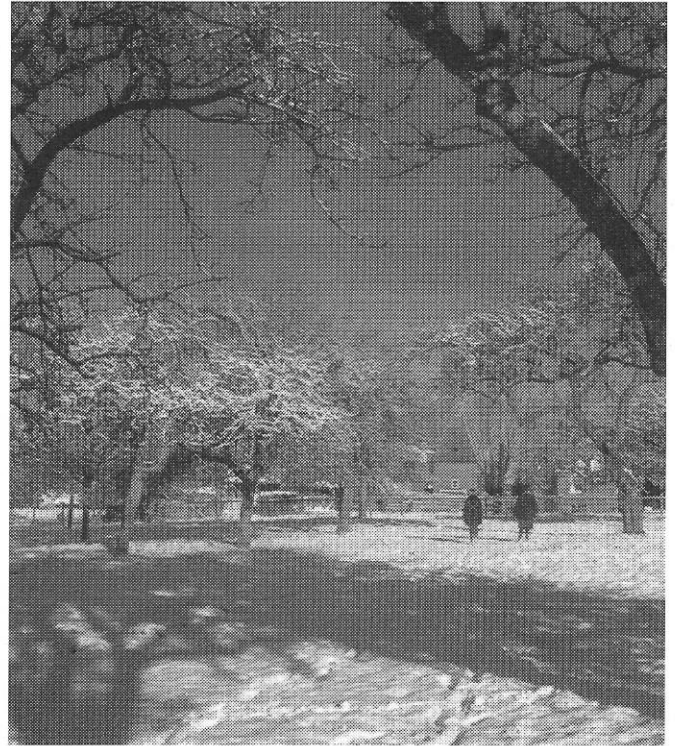
For many of us, our orchards are not only a source of fruit but also a place to relax, to recharge our batteries and to enjoy observing the wildlife, which they support. Traditional orchards which contain old apple trees and unimproved, unsprayed lightly grazed grassland provide a unique habitat for wildlife- from lichens to wild flowers, insects, mammals and birds.

Orchard expert Ben Pike (now one of our Directors) contributes to 'Orchard Link' News manages just such an orchard at Harberton near Totnes. Although its gnarled apple trees do not produce a great deal of fruit, the combination of a stream, copse, old hedgerows, stone walls and areas of shrub make this orchard a haven for a wide variety of wildlife. The owners appreciate the dragonflies and damselflies which live by the stream, the bats which inhabit old tree holes, the wrens, pied wagtails and lizards attracted by its stone walls.

This old orchard is a great place to understand how a mosaic of different habitats can provide for a rich diversity of wild life. Thanks to Ben and the orchards owners, Orchard Link members will be invited to visit, enjoy observing its wild plants and animals and learning how to provide for wildlife in their own orchard – whilst also producing a good crop of apples. Inside, bird expert Richard Hibbert tempts you to our special 'Birds and Orchards' day in this orchard next April.

Inside:

- ◆ Create a haven for birds in your orchard.
- ◆ Go to an orchard wassail.
- ◆ Learn to prune and plant apple trees.
- ◆ New grants for orchards in the Tamar Valley.



A UNIQUE POMONA FOR DEVON.

Over the past few years, 'Orchards Live' (the North Devon Orchard Organisation) has collated and compiled their knowledge of Devon apple varieties into a list with descriptions of the qualities of each fruit – a Pomona.

Now wishing to extend this very useful reference to include more varieties, more details on each fruit and it's uses and colour photographs – in effect a major apple reference book for the county; 'Orchards Live' approached us to become involved. Such a project will take several years to complete and will need its own funding – but Orchard Link is excited to be part of it and will be seeking to gather knowledge on the hundreds of unique varieties of Devon apples from specialists, orchard owners, local historians and all those interested in our country fruits – a huge task. We will need all the knowledge, which members have of Devon varieties if we are to make Devon's Pomona a comprehensive reference of our famous fruit.

WASSAILING MEMORIES

Those who received the Summer edition of Orchard link News will recall an evocative article on cidermaking by Derek Rugg, who is writing his memoirs of a childhood in East Devon. Here, he recalls wassailing in Kentisbeare. If you would like to see a wassail for yourself, don't miss the event at Stoke Gabriel near Totnes on 18th January- see 'What's On' for details.

It was some time before Christmas, some forty odd years ago, and the teaching spouse of the headmaster in the village school that had the doubtful pleasure of my company, whilst hammering her pointer up and down a tonic solfa chart and demanding at intervals that we shoved three fingers in the general direction of the tonsils. She always carried on like that just prior to the introduction of a new hymn, carol, song- or whatever.

"Here we come waissailing among the leaves so green. Repeat that after me," she said, and after a tussle with the song which began with such words, she gave us some kind of spiel on ~~wassailing~~.

But I was not a bit satisfied, and the next time I came across grandfather I inquired, "Wassailing granfer?" He sort of smiled and furrowed his brow at the same time. Then he sighed and began to fix me up with an answer, for he knew full well that I should harp on and on til I did get some sort of information.

"Wassailing," he said resignedly, "ev got to do wae apple trees. Zum years back they used to go out in the orchard on January 6th, which is Twelfth Night, and they'd dance around the trees and 'oller and sing:

"What d'um sing, Granfer?" provoked a further sigh.

'Old apple tree we'll wassail thee
Hopping thou wilt bear
The Lord does know where we shall be
To be merry another year.
To blow well and to bear well
And so merry let us be;
Let everyman drink up his cup
A health to the old apple tree.
Apples now, hat fulls, cap fulls, three
bushel-bags full,
Tallet ole fulls, barns' floors fulls and
little heaps under the stairs."
"What wuz the idea of that, Granfer?"
I enquired.

"They thought that if they carried on like that they'd get a good crop of cider apples. Zum maidens put bits of toast in the branches of trees, and volks vired off guns. But tidn done now much," answered the gaffer. "They poured cider around the bottom of the trees", he added, looking at me in a wistful fashion as if he found the thought of such waste, very disturbing,

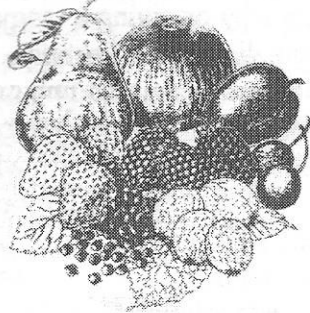
Then Granfer doused his moustache in his scrumpy mug, looked into the fire, and didn't say any more for some time.

Many years have gone since that crash course on wassailing, and I had been thinking of the bits and pieces needed to resuscitate the ancient revel. But the trouble is that when myxomatosis claimed all the rabbits, my old under-lever twelve ball, literally went to pieces. When it comes to singing I have an unwanted remembrance of being sent home early from a carol singing party. And I wouldn't be able to help with the toast bit as I have lost my head for heights.

Come to think of it anyone may well have a job finding a bona-fide cider apple orchard these days, and with farm sellers few and far between a good deal of spade work seems called for in advance of reviving the waissailing junket.

Next year perhaps! Yes, anyone needs a while to sort things out. Infact a working party seems called for. I feel sure some of my shooting mates could line up an apple tree from twenty yards and do all the shouting and ollerer necessary. I dare say a sponsor could be found for the cider. But the singing, etc?

If you happen to rub shoulders with a maiden, a veritable tree sprite adept at clambering, and a dab hand with toast-who can also sing- perhaps you'd let me know.



NEW WAYS WITH APPLES.

Each October, when we have had our stall at 'Kingsbridge Farmers Market' we have been delighted to have Celia Hyland alongside us – demonstrating apple cookery and promoting seasonal local food. Here Celia shares a few of the recipes that she cooked in October. All offer a different twist on our favourite fruit.

HONEY AND APPLE SQUARES

175g/6oz set honey
175g/6oz butter or margarine
75g/3oz caster sugar
2 eggs – beaten
tspn Baking Powder
100g/4oz diced apple
225g/8 oz SR flour
25g/1oz flaked almonds (optional)

Method:

Preheat oven to 160C/325F Gas Mark3
Grease and line a 19cmx34cm (7x13") tin.
Melt the honey, butter and sugar in a saucepan.
Add the apple, cool slightly, beat in the eggs.
Sift and mix in the flour and baking powder.
Place in prepared tin, sprinkle on the nuts if used.
Bake for 40-45 minutes until well-risen and golden brown.
Cool on a rack and cut into squares.
Delicious eaten when hot with cream, crème fraiche, custard etc.

CHEESE and APPLE PIZZA

1 pizza base – basic scone or bread dough
5-6 tbspn unsweetened apple puree
250g/9oz onions-chopped
75g/3oz Stilton
fresh basil leaves
1 tbspn oil
50g/2oz Red Leicester cheese
100g/4oz Cheddar Cheese
black pepper

Method:

Set the oven – 200C 400F Gas Mark 6
Place the pizza base on a pizza tray or baking sheet
Heat the oil and sauté the onion until golden brown
Spread the apple puree over the pizza base, spread over the onions Slice or grate the cheese on top, season with pepper.
Bake for 20-25 minutes or until the base is cooked and the top is bubbling. Scatter the basil leaves over the top and serve.
Any mixture of British cheeses can be used with other vegetables.

CYDER PORK

450g/1 lb pork fillet – sliced or diced
2 medium onions – sliced
100g/4oz button mushrooms
150ml/5fl.oz cream
seasoning
2 tbspn oil
1 clove garlic
300ml /1/2 pt dry cyder
1 tsp herbs
cornflour

Method:

Fry the pork, onion and garlic in the oil for 4-5 minutes.
Add the herbs, cyder, mushrooms and seasoning. Carefully bring to the boil, cover and simmer for 25-30 minutes.
Add the cream and thicken the sauce with cornflour if required.
Do not boil, adjust the seasoning.
Place in a hot dish, sprinkle with chopped parsley and serve with seasonal vegetables or a green salad.
In place of cyder a sharp apple juice eg. Bramley can be used.

PRUNING APPLES AND GROWING QUINCES

In this article I shall be continuing the series on lesser known fruits that can be grown in an orchard, but apple pruning time is here again, and I would first like to give some advice about how hard to prune your apple trees.

Put simply, the advice is **DON'T PRUNE YOUR APPLE TREES TOO HARD**. I see far more trees that have been pruned too hard than those that have been pruned too little. Remember the old adage 'You can always take more off, but you can't put it back'. If you prune a tree hard, you are carrying out an operation that is akin to pollarding it. This will cause a lot of upright growth from around the place that you have made the cut. Once this has happened it is a very difficult and gradual process to get the tree back into shape, and more importantly, production. Apples fruit largely on wood originating from horizontal branches, so if the top of the tree is comprised of vertical branches as a result of overpruning, then there will be less fruit as a result. So, I suggest that, when you are pruning, you check whether each cut is really necessary, and only make a cut if there is a reason for doing so.

So how hard is too hard? If you are restoring a tree that has been neglected, think of it as a process taking up to four years if the tree is overcrowded, and don't take off more than 20% of the growth in any one year. Once you have a tree in reasonable shape, most of the pruning will be a question of fine tuning. It is much better to take off a little wood each year than to take off a lot in one go. If you need to remove a lot of wood to make the tree "fit" into your garden, then you probably have a

tree on the wrong rootstock. A tree will always grow to the size it wants to grow to, not the size you want it to grow to.

That's enough of me being 'schoolmarmy'; let's look at quince trees. Quinces have one great advantage over other fruit trees - they will grow well in poorly drained soil. Unfortunately, for many people, they have one major disadvantage, their fruit! Quinces are largely known for making jelly or giving a tangy flavour to apple dishes, but I'm sure imaginative cooks will find many more uses. Some varieties of quince make attractive trees with pretty white flowers in the spring, followed by yellow fruits looking a little like a misshapen pear. The fruit can be stored for a while after picking. Some varieties tend to grow into multi-stemmed bushes rather than trees. To my mind, 'Vranja' is one of the prettiest and best varieties.

Quinces are easy to grow, preferring moisture, warmth and a rich soil that is not too alkaline. They are self-fertile (i.e. you can grow just one tree without needing a pollinator), and usually start cropping at about 5-6 years old. Some varieties will naturally grow into a multi-stemmed bush, while others can easily be trained as a standard tree. Quinces tend to have a rather random habit of growth, which it is best to keep somewhat under control by cutting out strong upright growth and branches growing into the middle of the tree. This is carried out in the winter. Quince leaf blight is the most common and troublesome disease of quince trees. It is a leaf spot fungus which can almost defoliate the tree by midsummer. It can be controlled with copper based fungicides, but it is difficult to eradicate completely.

WELCOME WINDFALL.

Our thanks go to the Devon Orchard Project who has donated around £700 to Orchard Link over the last year. The project, which was set up by a small group of local apple enthusiasts to propagate old and rare Devon apple varieties decided to close last year, having successfully grown hundreds of young trees. During its lifetime Devon Orchard Project received some grant aid and so members have kindly donated the leftover cash in their account to Orchard Link, to continue orchard conservation work in Devon. As we receive no grant aid at all now, this cash windfall was particularly welcome and has immediately been used to benefit members. We have purchased another high-speed portable apple mill to enable both of our presses to be used at once during the busy pressing season.

EARLY HARVEST.

Congratulations to Director Cathy Fitzroy, who gave birth to baby Matthew in September. Cathy and husband Steve are thrilled at being first time parents and I am told that Matthew had his first trip out to Dartmoor at just five days old!

LOCAL EXPERT TO JOIN THE TEAM.

We were thrilled when Ben Pike, local orchard expert who runs Devon Orchard Services decided to become a Director of Orchard Link.

Over past years Ben has instinctively written lively and knowledgeable articles on orchard care for our newsletter- and given help at our stalls and advice over the phone, all free of charge. He will make an excellent and valuable addition to our team and bring his own extensive knowledge and enthusiasm to Orchard Link. The entire team wish to give Ben a warm welcome, as I am sure members will too.

CHRISTMAS PRESENTS WHICH DON'T COST THE EARTH.

If you are fed up with looking for different and interesting Christmas presents with buying gifts which do more harm than good to the environment or simply with standing in shop and post office queues; help is at hand from the Barn Owl Trust. This year the Ashburton based conservation Charity is offering to take the pressure out of present buying with two Christmas packages. Both combine joining your family and friends as Friends of The Barn Owl Trust with a gift. Of either a delicious Christmas pudding (suitable for vegetarians) or an unbleached cotton shoulder bag with the Trust's own unique print on the side.

Those who receive a Christmas gift (already wrapped and sent with a card directly from the Trust) will also receive a Friends pack in January. With news, lapel badge, poster and more.

The whole package costs £22 from the Barn Owl Trust at Waterleat, Ashburton. Call them on 01364 653026 or print a form from the website. Visit them at

www.barnowltrust.org.uk

If you have ever been fortunate enough to see a barn owl silently hunting over your orchard or local countryside – you will appreciate spreading the word on this great local organisation, who does such a lot of practical and educational work and provides landowners with advice on barn owl conservation.

Alternatively there is another excellent gift, which will last all year and which is just as easy to order for friends and family. Membership of Orchard Link! Just send us £15 with details of who is to receive a gift membership. Plus wording for a Christmas card from you. What easier and more environmentally friendly solutions to your Christmas present dilemmas could you need?



WHAT'S ON?

For further details contact:

Orchard Link-Harvestline- 01548 550516.
Orchards Live, Jane Schofield, Lewdown
Farm, Black Dog, Crediton, Devon. EX17
4QQ.

NOVEMBER:

- Friday 29th
Course: The Restoration and Management of Traditional Orchard
Based at Slapton Ley Field Centre. A week addressing pruning, planting, selection of varieties and more. Led by Tom Hoblyn of Kew. £140 resident £100 non-resident. Tel: 01548 550466

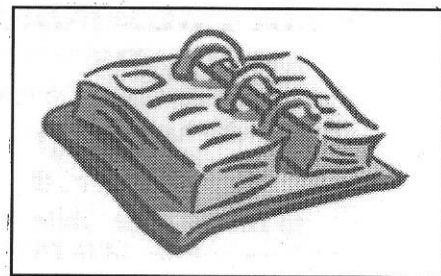
DECEMBER

- Sunday 1st –
Devon Apples in Juice and Food:
Learn to make better use of your apple varieties in juice and food. A hands-on workshop with lunch at Filleigh Village Hall 10.30am – 2.30pm. £10. Contact Orchards Live to book.
- Saturday 7th
Pruning Course: Learn to prune old standard trees indoor talk and outdoor practical session at Head Barton near Chumleigh. 10.30am – 4pm £10. Contact Orchards Live for details.

LEARNING ORCHARDING SKILLS.

New member Michael Gardner has four acres of mainly stone fruit orchard in Essex, but also spends much of his time in the Westcountry. Michael is keen to learn more about traditional apple orchard management and pruning and has time to work alongside experienced pruners or local orchard experts, as a volunteer, to pick up skills and tips.

If you would like to help and have some expertise to pass on, call Michael on
Tel: 01708 344642



JANUARY:

- Saturday 18th:
Stoke Gabriel Orchard Wassail. Come and celebrate an ancient tradition in Stoke Gabriel's Orchard. See the Wassail Queen wassailing the trees, Morris dancing, a mumming play and storytelling. Plus a midwinter BBQ and cider. Victoria & Albert Inn, Stoke Gabriel, near Totnes. 7pm-till late.

FEBRUARY:

- Saturday 1st
Orchard Restoration and Management. Talks and practical hands on planting at Head Barton near Chumleigh. 10.30am – 3.30pm. £10. Contact Orchard Link for details.
- Sunday 2nd
Old Orchards: Restoring & Planting
A hands-on workshop at the beautiful old orchard in Harberton, near Totnes. Led by orchard expert Ben Pike of Devon Orchard Services. 10.30am-4pm. Organised by Orchard Link. £12 or £8 to Orchard Link members. Call Harvestline to book.
- Saturday 22nd
Grafting Day. Learn the skills of grafting from expert Kevin Croucher of Thornhayes Nursery at Kentisbeare Village Hall, near Cullompton. £12. Booking essential. Call 01884 266746.

SPRING: APRIL

- Sunday 27th A spring date for your diary – an Orchard Link event at Harberton near Totnes. 'Birds in your Orchard' (see article in this newsletter for details)

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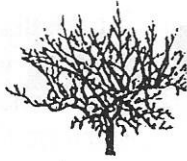
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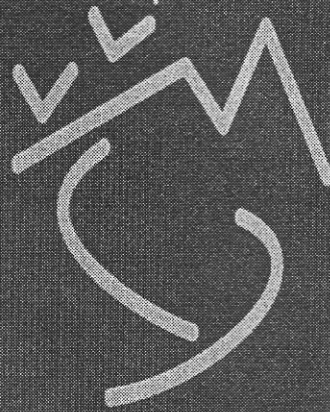
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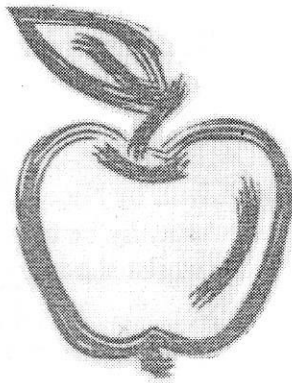
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COLLEGE STUDENTS CELEBRATE APPLE DAY

Students at the Royal West of England College For The Deaf in Exeter celebrated Apple Day in October, by holding their own day of fruity festivities.

The event was organised by BTCV Millennium Volunteers, with help from Devon Wildlife Trust's Ark Project. The College has received a Lottery-funded Peoples Places Award, through which they are developing a sensory trail around their grounds.

For the Apple Day event, the College hired the Orchard Link apple juice press. Enthusiastic students helped produce a constant supply of tasty juice throughout the day, and really enjoyed taking through the complete process from windfall apples to bottled juice.

Other apple based activities were on the go throughout the day, including arts and crafts, apple tasting, toffee apple making, and apple bobbing. The students learnt much about the humble apple, and had a great deal of fun along the way.

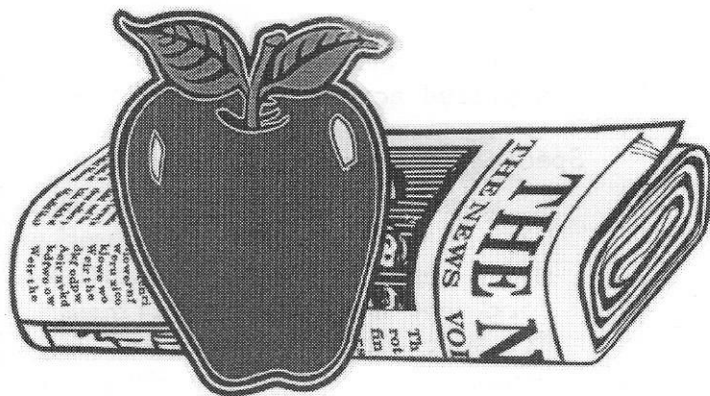
The College For The Deaf has now joined up with Orchard Link, and students will be planting their own orchard at the college, using traditional local varieties of fruit tree, in the coming months.



NEW ORCHARD GRANTS IN THE TAMAR VALLEY.

At the time of writing the Tamar Valley Service, together with Silvanus Trust are launching a new grant scheme to encourage the establishment of small traditional orchards in the Tamar Valley. The scheme aims to provide 100% finance for the establishment of small orchards and community orchards planted with local varieties of fruit.

If you live in the area and wish to know more about the new service contact the Tamar Valley Service at Kilworthy Park. Tavistock PL19 0B2. Tel: 01822 610676 or www.tamarvalley.org.uk



Keep in Contact

Over the winter, whilst Trudy is on maternity leave, please contact us either by letter at the address below or by phone using the Harvestline no. 01548 550516. Your call will automatically be diverted to Ben Pike who should be able to answer your orchard queries direct as well as sending out Orchard Link information. Later in the winter calls will be forwarded to Trudy Turrell via the same system.

Our address is
Orchard Link
P O Box 109
Totnes
TQ9 5SX

