



ORCHARD LINK *NEWS*

Gathering Strength.

Our Annual Gathering on 25th February was a real success. Thanks for firstly to Kevin and Petrina Frost who happily opened their home to us – welcoming into their beautiful converted barns for the talk and lunch, then offering a wander round their two newly planted orchards followed by a look at the press on which they make cider and juice. We gauged that around 30 would attend but were overwhelmed when over 50 of you called or wrote in for tickets – apologies to those who called during the week before and had to be turned away.

For members, it was a chance to meet each other and share ideas. The conversation flowed throughout the day and lots of useful contacts were made. It was also a chance for those who Orchard Link to see what members thought, needed and to gather ideas and new paths on our direction for the future. (see 'Your say in our future' and join in the debate). Guest speaker was Keith Goverd who came from near Bristol to talk about and let us all sample some of the hundred single variety apple juices which he presses. It was incredible to taste how different the juices were – and his history or orcharding gave plenty to think about. One particular fact which struck me concerned cider vinegar. Did you know that it could flush all the pesticide residues out of our bodies – if taken daily? I'll certainly be imbibing a little cider vinegar honey and hot water each day.

After a lunch of host pasties, salad, apple pickle and apples for dessert – accompanied by Grimpstonleigh's excellent apple juice or cider it was off to see their new orchards, planted full of traditional local varieties of apple trees.

Our thanks go to photographer Nick Philbidge who took the photos of the event for us.

INSIDE:

- ◆ Have your say in Orchard Link's future
- ◆ Give young apple trees the best start in life
- ◆ Find out what's happening for orchards – all over Devon
- ◆ Make your own cider vinegar



Members swap advice on planting apple trees in Grimpstonleigh's new orchards.

Your say in our Future

It's three years since Orchard Link was established. Starting from the problem of how to use wasted windfalls and to support all those with orchards we are growing into a network of orchard owners, cidermakers, contractors and interested individuals.

Three years on, we've been looking back at our successes (and problems!) and looking to the future. At the Annual Gathering we took the opportunity to discuss our findings with all present and to ask members opinions on some options for the future.

First a recap, at present Orchard Link provides two 'services' – **Membership** – which to date has proved a real success. It seems that we've fulfilled a need which orchard owners have for advice, to network with others, find out more about events and activities and to receive regular mailings to keep them informed and on track. We've always had good feedback about Orchard Link News and many members attend the Annual Gatherings or come to see us at the stall at agricultural shows and farmers markets.

The other aspect of Orchard Link is the **collection service** – and this gave us plenty of food for thought. Over the past three years, Orchard Link and its collection scheme has been partly funded by grants from the European Leader scheme and MAFF. The aim has been to try out both the organisation and collection and see whether it could be self-supporting. Despite last years appalling harvest, the basic collection scheme has

worked well – thanks to Nicola Herbert's brilliant organisation, hard work and allowing us to use her farmyard as a collection depot. The bad news is that without grant aid, the collection scheme alone is not viable.

Although orchard owners are often so enthusiastic and supportive of the scheme, three harvests have taught us that:

- Pickers are not easy to find
- In poor harvest years yields are low – but admin costs are still high
- Some orchard owners with higher yields have, once a relationship has been established, sold direct to the cidemakers, leaving a disproportionate number of small quantities to collect – often with many miles between.
- It's very labour intensive, for the return.

Despite this, over 3 years, Orchard Link has saved over 100 tonnes of apples from simply rotting and turned them into cider, juice and cash!

We asked how we could continue to achieve this result for orchard owners – yet be self-supporting. As Nicola is happy to continue to run a phone link we could:

- ♦ Offer a 'matching service' – linking cider and juice makers to those with apples. By linking varieties and yields to buyers who need them and letting orchard owners deal direct with the buyers, owners would receive 100% of the price paid
- ♦ We would help market juice and cider which contains Orchard Link apples through a recognition scheme (stickers on each bottle) so consumers could choose local apple products from local, traditional orchards
- ♦ We could book stalls at local farmers markets in the autumn. If members would then like to bring their eating and cooking apples to sell they could take the proceeds.
- ♦ We could buy a large but mobile press – and loan it to members to press juice or make cider. With basic training members could have a fun pressing day with neighbours and other members and take home their own products to drink. Our remaining grant aid will allow us to purchase a press, which is ours to loan out for years to come – and which we can take to fairs and Apple Days too.

We asked members opinions on all of these issues and received a good deal of positive feedback; understanding of the problems the

collection system had experienced – and perhaps that the above ideas could offer an acceptable alternative, with more options for people with orchards of varying sizes and types. Several people wanted to book the press there and then – and several others were keen to take part in farmers market stalls.

Whilst we look into pressing equipment and other issues – its over to you for your comments and ideas. Write in before the end of May with your feedback – Orchard Link is there to help you – so let's do the best for all.



Members said

Some comments from the 'feedback cards' we asked people to fill in at this year's Annual Gathering:

"I think the main thing is to keep going – well done so far"

"Perhaps articles in Orchard Link News on simple cidemaking and apple juice presentation?" John Harrison

"As new members we very much enjoyed the gathering. In need of advice – looks like this group will provide it". David Heath

"I would welcome the purchase of a press I have found Orchard Link excellent for networking, training events, advice re pruning Anyone interested in joint membership of the Soil Association to reduce the cost of accreditation?" Robin Cross, Beeson Farm

Hello Valerie – farewell George

You may have met Orchard Links' organisers at shows and stalls – but here, especially for newer members is an introduction to those who manage and work for Orchard Link.

Firstly we have three Directors. Orchard Link was originally set up by:

Cathy Fitzroy who used to run Devon County Council's orchard campaign. Cathy now works for the Countryside Agency and so is still closely involved with the landscape. She also helps husband Steve and others run Okehampton Youth Hostel and concentrates on the financial side of Orchard Link.

Trudy Turrell many will have spoken to Trudy on the phone. She works as Interpretation Officer at the Coast & Countryside Service for South Hams and thanks to their support is able to devote a number of hours per month helping run Orchard Link and write the newsletter. Trudy set up the South Hams Orchard Campaign in 1989 and still deals with orchard enquiries, events and Apple Days for the Coast & Countryside Service.

George Lacon planted a new orchard at his home in Diptford and helped grow on old varieties for the Devon Orchard Project. George's knowledge of insurance from his career has given us invaluable advice and although he will still be involved in Orchard Link, George is now standing down as a Director. Thank you George for all your help and support.

Joining us this spring meet:

Valerie Belsey an expert on green lanes (she has written two books on the subject), Valerie also has an in-depth knowledge of the countryside, has planted her own Devon apple trees and works part time at the Coast & Countryside Service. She has contributed several articles to this newsletter.

We also couldn't do without

Harvestline Co-ordinator Nicola Herbert

Nicola co-ordinates the apple collections and more. Based at Loddiswell she also manages to run a luxury farmhouse bed and breakfast, livery and care for her two sons. Nicola is our

only properly paid 'employee' and works September to November. Somehow she generously offers use of her farmyard and trailer too!

Ben Pike: a supporter from the outset. Orchard expert, he works as 'Devon Orchard Services' and kindly contributes an article to every Orchard Link News. Members are welcome to call Ben for free advice and he helps at our stalls.

Steve Bradley: runs Heron Valley Cider – and supports us with cider making advice, and helps to organise events

Much of what all these people do is voluntary and unpaid – and all have busy lives too. We're always looking for others to become involved. There's basic payment for some work and travel costs – but most of all lots of enthusiasm to share and a warm glow of satisfaction!



Some of the faces of Orchard Link at this year's Gathering left to right – Trudy Turrell, Cathy Fitzroy, Valerie Belsey and Kevin Frost, owner of Lower Grimpstonleigh.

Pomme Parade ; The Whitesour

The "Whitesour" was a popular variety in the South Hams. It was thought to have first been propagated in Modbury. There were three varieties, the best of which was the "Panerg". There was also the "Meadyate", named because it was originally found near a meadow gate in Ermington near Plymouth. Its cider 'in Devon is called Hewbramble or Bramble cider alluding to its roughness, which causes a sensation as if a bramble had been thrust down the throat and suddenly snatched back again.' (From Hugh Stafford of Pynes near Exeter 1727 in his 'Curious Account of the Most Valuable Cyder Fruit of Devonshire.'

Putting Down Roots: How to Beat the Competition by Ben Pike

When visiting local orchards I am often asked why trees haven't established well after planting. By far the most common cause is that they have been planted into grass with no attempt made to keep an area of grass free around the trunk.

If you are not familiar with this problem, then it may seem rather bizarre to think of such a "small" thing as grass competing with such a big thing as a tree, but underneath the ground everything looks different. When trees arrive from the nursery to be planted, their root system is usually fairly small, and often damaged by the lifting of the tree. We then place these roots into a new environment and expect them to provide nutrients for the tree. Even if there were nothing hindering this process, it would take a while for the roots to adapt to their new home and establish well. When young, the roots of fruit trees are very close to the surface, and so can be in close proximity to, or even interwoven with grass and weed roots. For this reason it is most important to keep an area of about 1 metre diameter around the tree free of vegetation.

There are various methods available to achieve this. Most are physical means, but the other possibility is spraying with a herbicide. This could either be diquat/paraquat or glyphosphate based. Both decompose to harmless substances upon reaching the soil (at least that's what the label says). Diquat/paraquat based herbicides have the advantage that they are effective during the winter, whereas glyphosphate must be used while vegetation is actively growing.

One simple method is to cut a circle in the grass at the time of planting and then to keep this clean by hand-weeding. This can be used in conjunction with mulches of various kinds, such as compost, bark chippings or manure. Using a mulch such as bark chippings may sound ideal, but don't expect it to take away the necessity for weeding altogether as weeds are tough cookies and will find a way through. One danger if using compost or manure is to be careful not to feed the tree too much nitrogen as this can promote sappy growth, which is very prone to canker.

Mulching and hand weeding is fine if you have a few trees planted in your garden, but if you have a larger orchard you would be well advised to consider mulch mats, as these are effective and cut down on labour considerably. There are two materials I would recommend, woven polypropylene and a

material fairly new to the market, flax. The polypropylene is ideal in that it lasts well, and being woven, can be quickly secured by chopping in the edges with a spade. For some reason it is usually sold with garish stripes printed on it, (so you can find your trees in the dark?), so those of you who are more concerned with beauty could consider flax matting. This is designed to slowly decompose and is secured with large metal staples pushed through the mats into the soil.

Once standard apple trees (on MM111 or M25 rootstocks) are established they will have sufficient vigour to not be concerned with competition from grass, whereas semi-dwarfing trees or smaller will benefit from a grass-free area throughout their lives. One final word of warning – if weeds or grass do get the better of you don't resort to the strimmer. One slip and you can kill a young tree instantly!

On a recent visit to Paul Vincent's orchard near Dittisham, I noticed that they had an unusual woolly mulch around his newly planted trees. 'It's black wool from my sheep' Paul explained. 'it fetches so little a kilo but makes an excellent mulch. It contains a small amount of manure and takes ages to rot' Not a 'baarmy' idea after all!

The young trees at Grimpstonleigh are well mulched.

Planting from pips:

For those of you who have left it too late to plant more apple trees this season how about heeding this advice from Common Ground's magnificent "Orchards" book.

The surest and quickest way of achieving the variety you desire is from a grafted sapling. Another method that is finding favour because of the strength of the resulting tree is planting fruit trees from pips. This is actually nothing new. Some of our best-loved varieties are chance seedlings. Keswick Codlin, a dual-purpose apple from Cumbria was found growing among rubbish behind a wall in Gileston Castle in the 18th century; Bramley's Seedling, the best-selling British cooker, was raised from seed by Mary Anne Brailsford in Southwell, Nottinghamshire, almost 200 years ago. The original tree still survives, having fallen over and rooted itself on an elbow.



Saving our Orchards – Devon wide

In March, we were invited to a meeting of all the local authorities, and trusts who operate orchard schemes in Devon. Hosted by the Devon Wildlife Trust who have a keen interest in traditional orchards for their wildlife value – it was a great opportunity to share ideas and catch up on all the schemes throughout the county.

Orchard campaigns and schemes varied widely from district to district – some local authorities not being especially involved in orchard conservation, some having a comprehensive campaign with advice and grants to offer. In some areas a voluntary organisation was the main focus for bringing people together locally to implement schemes or share ideas.

In the two previous issues of Orchard Link News we caught up with the Tamar Valley Countryside Service and North Devon Coast & Countryside Services survey of orchards and apples. (There's still time to take part in that survey if you live in the North Devon area and haven't done so yet – contact Dave Edgecumbe on 01271 817485 and he'll send you a brief form). In future issues we'll hear more about Dartington North Devon Trusts' 'Save our Orchards' initiative – although now the Dartington North Devon Trust has disbanded, the initiative is still ongoing and will, it hopes, offer courses on cider and juice making later this year. In this issue you can read about orchard initiatives in East Devon – from replanting to restoring old presses.

Our hosts, the Devon Wildlife Trust were taking a wider interest in orchards than just their wildlife value as Gavin Saunders, new Rural Development Manager for their Green Gateway project in north and west Devon explained.

The project which seeks a holistic approach to management of the wildlife – rich sites in the area (much of it culm grassland), recognises that certain countryside 'products' perpetuate good wildlife management of the land and landscape and often ecologically sensitive management has a tourism spin off too. Capitalising on the quality beef produced in a traditional way on culm grassland is one way of successfully benefiting both the area's ecology and economy. In a similar way, the Trust is keen to promote traditional orchards –

for their appearance in the landscape (enhancing it for tourism and for sheltering stock) and to use the apples in traditional cider and juice.

Following the new Countryside Agency's initiative 'Eat the view', perhaps we can all work towards an accreditation or labelling scheme which for the consumer links the purchase of juice or cider from traditional orchards to their conservation i.e. a label on bottles which explains that 'the cider which you drink is the landscape you create' or perhaps 'drink more local cider – save more traditional orchard's'?! Watch this space.



A mouthpiece for Devon

With all these organisations beavering away on local campaigns – our Devon meeting turned to the subject of spreading the word Devonwide and keeping everyone interested in orchards aware of developments in their area and beyond.

Although many organisations produce their own locally distributed newsletter – and we always try to cover news and events throughout the county and beyond, everyone decided to combine their news into one county-wide distributed newsletter – and all agreed to make that Orchard Link News.

All organisations will become corporate members – contributing their news direct to the pages of this newsletter and in turn receiving copies to distribute locally – so truly spreading the benefits of Orchard Link countywide. Of course, for individuals to use the collection service, press (when we hope to purchase one) and come to Annual Gatherings they'll have to be members themselves – however we look forward to providing up to date information on orchard initiatives throughout the county available to everyone with an interest in orchards.

What's on?



For Coast and Countryside events call 01803 861140. For Tresillian Garden Project courses call 01548 853220.

The Foot and Mouth Outbreak

The current Foot & Mouth outbreaks have led to many outdoor events being cancelled. Because many such walks and training days are organised well ahead of time – and because the situation changes almost daily – it's wise to check with event organisers before you set out for any outdoor event. The events shown below will be as far as we know, unaffected by the outbreak.

* **Farmers Markets** are cancelled until further notice (see local press for when they will be resumed).

* In the South Hams many of the 'Coast & Countryside Events' have had to be cancelled but not all (e.g. indoor events, canoe trips etc are still on). Call 01803 861140 for up to date details.

* If you live in the **Tamar Valley** area and would like to receive details of local countryside events, call the Tamar Valley Countryside Service, who will add you to their mailing list free of charge. Tel. 01822 610676.

May

Sunday 20th (if the foot and mouth crisis is over) – Come and visit Dittisham Farm – a smallholding where black Berkshire pigs, chickens, geese, ducks and bees are produced and the owners here have planted a new orchard of traditional varieties.
2pm – 5pm Dittisham Farm, Capton between Totnes and Dartmouth. Call Coast & Countryside Service to check.

June

Saturday 16th Pruning Fruit trees – for those with peaches, nectarines and other fruit trees in their orchards. 10am – 1pm at Tresillian Garden, Kingsbridge. Booking essential £7.50 (£5 unwaged)

Saturday 30th Composting Workshop – 10am – 1pm. Make a really good compost from kitchen and garden waste at Tresillian Garden,

July

Wednesday 25th Book ahead on an RHS Course on summer fruit pruning to be held at Rosemoor Gardens, Great Torrington. Cost £5 + garden entry. Call (020) 7821 3408 or (01805) 624067 for full details.

Walk for Barn Owls

Not strictly an orchard event, but we thought that you might like to know about the Barn Owl Trusts annual sponsored walk on Spring Bank Holiday Monday – 28th May.

The walk offers a rare opportunity to wander through the beautiful private Flete Estate, which surrounds the mouth of the Erme and Wonwell beach. There's free parking, teas for all walkers and the option of crossing the river in a huge Canadian canoe!

If you receive your Orchard Link News by mail, you will also have a small poster giving details of the event. Display it somewhere if you can. For full details and to check that the walk is going ahead, call the Barn Owl Trust on 01364 653026 (Tuesdays or Thursdays).
If you have marvelled at the sight of a barn owl flying over your orchard or local countryside, why not come along and raise some much needed funds for barn owl conservation.

Orchards for Sale or Rent

From time to time we are approached by people wishing to buy or rent a traditional orchard. Some members have also wondered whether in the future Orchard Link could own or rent its own orchard – as a demonstration plot, a place for members to visit, learn to prune and graft and generally be involved with.

If you have an orchard for sale or rent – especially in South Devon – or you'd be interested in helping to manage one – contact us. If orchards are to be sold – how encouraging to think that they could be owned by those who want them for what they are – not a building site!

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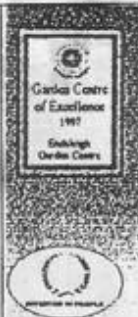
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Keith Goverd's Juice Tasting Menu

Do you remember when you go into supermarkets and they have nervous ladies hovering at the end of aisles not wanting to draw your attention to some curling item on a mini-biscuit on a mini-plate on a mini-stand? They try to look inconspicuous and blend in with the accessories hanging around them when in fact they should be jumping out at you and saying 'Hey hello try this free sample it's great you'll love it'.

Well this is exactly what Keith Goverd did at the Grimpstonleigh apple juice tasting session. Even the way he held the bottles up to the light and twisted off the caps had a hint of showmanship about it which would have had them stopping in their tracks in supermarket aisles.

We were dazzled by the variety and just in case you're still suffering from the intoxication of the event and cannot remember what you tasted this is how it was in order of sweetness:

- 1) Starting with the sweetest there was Egremont Russet.
- 2) The big apple taste of Charles Ross.
- 3) Lagny Russet.
- 4) Standard Braeburn.
- 5) Keith's favourite - Severn Bank.

- 6) One to abdicate for Edward VII
- 7) Lane's Prince Albert.
- 8) And finally the one with just a hint of chlorine which was where we came in an Egremont Russet. We tasted each in turn while Keith gave us bottles and bottles of information on each one. Having become accustomed to these wonderful flavours we were then treated to the Frosts' own juice and cider over lunch. A 'pommeacious' time was had by all!

Cider Vinegar

Still dry cider
vinegar (either cider, malt or wine
vinegar)

Sterilise a plastic bucket and half-fill it with the cider.
Add one tablespoon of vinegar and whisk this in thoroughly.
Cover the bucket with a tea cloth and leave in a warmish place for about a week in which time it will have turned into vinegar.
Your nose will reassure you!
Bottle and store in a cool place.
It should last for a couple of years but always test before use.

East Devon Orchards: Heritage and Hope

The history of orchards in East Devon closely mirrors that of the rest of the Devon and the South West, with the most serious recent period of decline following the Second World War.

The MAFF Agricultural and Horticultural Census (1999) lists 50 non-commercial orchards in the District, totalling 45 ha. / 110 acres, but we're sure this figure doesn't include all surviving orchards.

Compare this figure to the 115 ha. / 285 acres of orchards recorded in just one East Devon parish – Woodbury Salterton – in 1839!

Gittisham, in the heart of the East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, where the Putt family lived between the 17th century and mid 19th century, is closely associated with the development of the apple variety Tom Putt.

Other parishes such as Shute, Sidbury, Woodbury, and Whimble were all well known apple growing areas over the centuries.

Recently, the Branscombe History Group carried out an oral history project looking at orchards in their parish. In the 150 years from 1800, nearly 2/3rds of the orchards had disappeared, along with a multitude of presses (people alive now can remember at least 11 working), an illegal still, and the numerous 'drinking houses' in farms and houses throughout the village.

Concerned at the continuing loss, the East Devon Coast & Countryside Service has launched an orchard restoration grant scheme with funding from East Devon District Council, with up to 50% funding available for the restoration of old orchards or the planting of new ones.

If you would like to know more about our scheme and programme of training courses or have any information about traditional 'East Devon' varieties of apple, archive material and machinery, we would love to hear from you.

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In search of the wild apple- Finding the Garden of Eden

Dr. Narrie Juniper of Oxford University describes an expedition he took to Russia two years ago.

Three of us flew to Almaty in Kazakhstan. Almaty means 'the place of the apples'. We supposed in our naivety that we might find wild apples in abundance just up the road. Not to put too fine a point on it, however, the whole of the central section of Kazakhstan and most of Uzbekistan has been wrecked, in the botanical sense, by several thousand years of nomads' goats and Stalin and Krushchev's virgin lands projects.

But they certainly found some apples on their expedition.

Dismiss your view of apples in a gentle Kentish meadow! Real apples we found up to 6,000 feet enjoying 30 degrees centigrade in summer and minus 30 degrees of the same in winter. Tiny fragments of this forest still exist, preserved by the accident of political and military whim which has kept all but the most suicidal of travellers out ever since the world began. This area is, after all, the other side of the vast frontier of the Great Game. Wherever the goat and cow could penetrate, the forest has gone. The tsars, the Soviets and now the Kazakh government have ensured that a few tiny fragments remain. But for how long?

Keep in Contact

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