

ORCHARD LINK *NEWS*



Volunteers raking hay in Churston Orchard.
See inside for story.

ANNUAL GATHERING OFFERS A LOOK AT LIVING HISTORY

Over 10 years ago, local historian James Bellchambers came into the office claspings 2 ragged scraps of paper. 'Thought you might be interested in these' he said, leaving a hand written list and a hand drawn plan of an orchard. The scribbings were written around 1860 and referred to Druid Orchard, on the edge of Dartmoor, near Ashburton. The pages of notebook related to an estate soon to be sold and were with various other papers, off to Totnes Museum where local historians would read and copy them.

The list of apple varieties which accompanied the sketchy plan included names such as the Fool's Apple, The Snow Apple and Custard Apple. A quick call to the National Apple Collection at Brogdale soon showed that living specimens of these were unknown if they existed, so we paid a trip to the orchard which was soon to be sold. 'Plan' in hand we could see that some of the original trees still stood, but which were which? The list of intriguing names (which also included well known Bramleys and Blenheim Oranges,) didn't tell us which trees where each variety was planted. As we were allowed to take graftwood, we

made our own map and took a little from each tree to grow on at the then Coast and Countryside Service nursery in the Dart Valley. We couldn't miss the opportunity of propagating some of those lost varieties- however we'd have to wait for each tree to fruit until we could begin a process of detective work to see whether we might have propagated some of the 'extinct' species.

Over 20 different sets of graftwood were propagated and after the Devon Orchard Project took to growing on some of the trees, they were distributed to those with orchards in South Devon, records being kept of who had which Druid trees. Now, with fruit finally being produced, but with so many other projects in hand, we hope that Orchard Link members will be able to help with the valuable detective work to name Druid's trees.

On Sunday 7th August, you'll be able to see some of the 'parent trees' at Druid, as new owners Anthony and Fiona Walters invite us all back to this fabulous orchard which Ben Pike has spent several years restoring. Between the venerable old apple trees are new apple, plum, cherry and other fruit trees- all planted with special care for this historic site. Come and enjoy a guided tour, pick up tips on growing and caring for a variety of fruit trees and see the adjoining farm buildings which have also been expertly restored, at our Annual Gathering. We look forward to seeing you there and continuing Druid's unfolding story.
Trudy Turrell.

In this issue:

- ❖ Don't miss our Annual Gathering
- ❖ Grow your own nectarines
- ❖ Lend a hand at our autumn events
- ❖ Use an 1876 pomona!



Enjoying the orchard in summer

YOUR CHANCE TO BE A BEE!

Ben Pike

I chanced upon a young olive tree on a market stall the other day. As it was only £5, I succumbed. It is sitting in a pot in the greenhouse; I wonder if it will proudly be sporting olives one day, or perhaps be consigned to the list of interesting curiosities that never quite made it in our climate.

It set me to wonder whether global warming will allow us to grow an increasing range of fruit. Fruit News (the magazine of The Friends of Brogdale) sometimes carries articles from people telling of the fruiting of their loquat or persimmon trees, though it seems that these are rare events in this country. There are, however, other fruits, usually thought to be of warmer climes that can be grown here with just a little help. Perhaps the most useful fruits in this category are peaches, nectarines and apricots. Nectarines are most in need of warmth, with apricots being the most hardy, although all are only really likely to succeed in Devon if fan-trained against a wall.

One problem of these fruits is that they flower early, so the blossom is likely to need some protection against frost. This could be in the form of hessian or fleece draped over the branches, but the best solution is a lean-to polythene frame, which also gives protection against peach leaf curl and excessive winter wet. The early flowering also means that some help with pollination is needed. This is good fun – getting

hold of a rabbit's tail or a wolf's hair brush (did you know that wolves brushed their hair?) and going from flower to flower pretending to be a bee. You can even make buzzing noises if you like.

Peach leaf curl is a fungus that causes reddish blisters to appear on the leaves, precipitating a premature leaf fall. Spraying with Bordeaux Mixture just before the leaves drop, and again in January or February, gives some control, but again the simplest solution is a lean-to cover that acts as a physical barrier against the spores. All these fruits prefer a more continental climate than ours; visiting Brogdale, in Kent, last year, I was fortunate to be there when the apricots were ripe. Although you are not supposed to eat the fruits, I couldn't resist the succulent piles of sweet, juicy apricots that were strewn over the ground.

Growing dwarf cultivars in pots is another way of avoiding the problems of frost and peach leaf curl; they can be moved into a greenhouse for the winter, and then brought out to look impressive on your patio for the summer. Now all this faffing around does seem like a lot of hard work, but have you ever tasted English peaches or nectarines fresh from the tree? They are just fantastic.....far better than anything you could buy in the shops, and it is possible to get decent quantities. Last year we had over 50 nectarines from one tree. It's wonderful to be thinking, "Now, what can I do with all those nectarines!"

Olive trees are available from The Agroforestry Trust at Dartington. Tel. 01803-840776

Peach, apricot and nectarine trees are available from Scott's Nurseries. Tel 01460-72306

Monarflex UV Sheeting is available from LBS Horticulture. Tel 01282-873333. This is a plastic material that is ideal for making a frame. I have a frame that has lasted 5 years and still looks as good as new.

Wolf's hair brushes are available from Harberton Arts workshop in Totnes Tel 01803-862390, or from any good art shop. Rabbit's tail may be available from me. Our neighbour has a cat called Henry, who hunts rabbits, and kindly leaves the remains in our garage.

Further advice is available in 'The Fruit Garden Displayed' by Harry Baker, publ. RHS, or from the Orchard Link advice line –

Tel. 07792-664710.

Book Review:

'Sweetstone: Life on a Devon Farm.'

The fate of orchards in Devon, and in one village, Blackawton, is explained in this evocative new book by Orchard Link member Jacqueline Sarsby.

With over 80 photographs of Sweetstone Farm and the family who farm it, this book reminds us that not all Devon farms are mechanised and modernised. Here, butter is made on the farm and churned by hand. The farm is a traditional mixed one, where the family keep the orchard as they keep 'a little of everything' – so that the farm could survive whether prices rise or fall, feeding the farm family, or in the case of the orchards; providing the farm workers with cider.

In text and sensitive black and white photographs, Jacqueline captures lives that few still live; governed only by seasons, weather and soil – but which all too soon will die with that generation. It's an understanding study of the land and those who live from it – a real visual treat. 'Sweetstone' is available from local book shops or from Green Books, Foxhole, Dartington, Totnes TQ9 6EB

Your chance to own a Pomona

In 1876 a group of apple enthusiasts in the Hereford area came together to document the varieties of apple that were to be found locally. Over a period of eight years, Dr. Henry Graves Bull and his daughter Edith Elizabeth painted the illustrations of 441 different apples. Dr. Hogg, a renowned fruit expert, provided the text, and the result was *The Herefordshire Pomona*, sold annually at a guinea a time. The same work now sells for around £7,000 per copy, but Orchard Link members (or anyone else) will soon be able to buy their own copy on CD for just £15 (or £12-50 on pre-order) or borrow Orchard Link's.

The Marcher Apple Network, a Welsh Marches form of Orchard Link, is currently digitalising the whole work ready for release in the summer. To pre-order a copy, send a cheque made payable to MAN to Mr. D. Kempton at Brook House, Hopesay, Craven Arms, Shropshire. SY7 8HD.

The original paintings are currently on temporary display at the Cider Museum in Hereford. Tel. 01423 - 354207

Could you lend a hand this Autumn?

As we all look forward to relaxing in the summer sun, Orchard Link's diary is already starting to fill for Autumn. As we become more known, we are asked to attend many different events – with the press, display materials and, of course, apples to taste and sell.

To make the most of these opportunities – which are also a chance to raise funds, we need the support of members – so I'm writing to ask you to take a look at your diary now and let us know if you could help out on the stall – selling juice and apples, pressing apples using our mills and presses and giving out information. Over the years I have helped at many different events and found them all really enjoyable. You'll get stuck in with making and bottling juice and talking to people about apples and orchards (no expertise required – just enthusiasm), and there's always a real buzz in the air. So why not try joining in with one of the following?

- Saturday 3rd September – Kingsbridge Agricultural Show – we always have the big wooden press going all day and it always draws a crowd. Come for a couple of hours or half a day and we'll pay your entrance ticket to the show.
- Saturday 1st October – Kingsbridge Farmers Market, Kingsbridge Quay 8.30am–1.30pm – presses in action and a chance to sell your surplus apples too!
- Saturday 8th October – Dartmouth Farmers Market – We've been offered free space at this celebration of newest South Hams farmers market – and it's Devon Food Week too. We're also booked to be at the National Trust's big farm open day at Woodhuish – between Brixham and Kingswear – with the big wooden press. The whole day offers hands-on activities, such as cutting corn, making bread, spinning fleece, digging potatoes and making soup. So – a good event to bring the family to – BUT we can only go to Dartmouth with a small press too if we have enough volunteers. Can you help?

Later in the Autumn, there will be the chance to go to farmers markets (Kingsbridge is the 1st Saturday of the month, Totnes the 3rd), and other events too – however, we'd like to say we can attend all four of the above ones first. Why not come and join the gang and lend a hand?

Trudy Turrell.

You are invited to Orchard Link's Annual Gathering

On Sunday 7th August 11am- 3pm.

At Druid Orchard, near Ashburton.

Our day will be based at Druid House, where a beautiful historic orchard has been expertly restored.

By kind permission of Anthony and Fiona Walters.

During the day you can;

- See how this orchard has been expertly restored and planted with a variety of fruit trees.
- Learn how to prune plum trees and pick up tips on fruit tree growing.
- See rare old trees which have provided graftwood for new trees now planted in orchards around South Devon
- Be part of Orchard Link's plans for the coming year.
- Meet and exchange ideas with other Orchard Link members.
- See the restored farm buildings at Druid, which recently won a DEFRA award for the most outstanding restoration of agricultural buildings on Dartmoor in the last 10 years..

The day will include a buffet lunch with hot soup, bread and local cheeses, tea, coffee and apple juice: If you made juice last season, bring a bottle to share, so that we can taste a variety of juices.

Orchard Link members are entitled to 2 FREE places at this event, but places must be booked by Friday 22nd July. Some additional places may be available to non members at £8 per head, though priority will be given to members.

Directions: From Ashburton town centre: Turn left or right up North Street until the road forks. Take the left hand road over the small granite bridge where a signpost points to Widecombe and Buckland In The Moor. After 1 mile, take the first unmarked right hand lane (known as Druid Lane,)Continue along for a few hundred yards. Druid House is the 2nd drive on the left hand side, immediately after the farm entrance, (look for the Orchard Link sign.)

To book your place(s), simply return the slip below, or e mail us via the web site on www.orchardlink.org.uk. We look forward to seeing you.

.....
TO: ORCHARD LINK, PO BOX 109, TOTNES, DEVON. TQ9 5XR
Annual Gathering, Sunday 7th August.

I should like to book(no.) of places. (Non-member places cost £8. Please make cheques payable to Orchard Link. Thank you.)

Name.....

Address.....

Telephone. No.

RESEARCHING RARE DEVON APPLES

In the early 90's, when South Hams Coast and Countryside Service was running its orchard campaign, it also set up a nursery to propagate 'endangered' local apple varieties and to grow new trees from old to restock the orchards of South Devon. Yarde Farm, an ancient farm near Salcombe was one such reserve of old local varieties. The then owners, John and Marilyn Ayre could name many of their trees and were keen to see them propagated. The Coast and Countryside Service took graft wood from many of Yarde's trees - and 3 years later, John and Marilyn planted an orchard of new trees of Yarde's varieties to adjoin the old. Varieties included Haragon Payne, Greasy Butcher, Chadders, Ironside and Doll's Eyes - varieties which John and Marilyn knew and had used for years - but we had never heard of. Now the old farm has been sold, but John and Marilyn still keep ponies in a field there and take an interest in the orchard.

Last summer, in an attempt to learn more about Yarde's distinctive apples, Robin Cross met Marilyn and John in the orchard to take samples of the fruit to Brogdale - the national fruit collection in Kent. The apples were examined by Joan Morgan - probably the national expert on fruit identification and co-author of the book 'The New Book of Apples' - (which Robin thoroughly recommends). Although there are 6,000 varieties of apples in the National Apple Register, none of Yarde's were in it and Dr. Morgan could not give any further information on them - except that they are special local varieties. As some were cider apples, it was recommended that cider expert Liz Copas examine them and all were sent to Emma Jane Lamont at Imperial College London - where a national database of all apple varieties is being compiled.

As for more information on Yarde's apples - the search goes on - as it will for so many special Devon varieties, where often only local people have any knowledge of them. Perhaps saving these 'unlisted' local specialities is all the more worthwhile.

Having visited Brogdale with the Yarde apples for a day, Robin Cross says it was well worth the trip:-

A Fruitful Day at Brogdale

Although it's a long drive from Devon, if you get the chance to go to Brogdale - and can perhaps combine it with a trip to the South East - you won't be disappointed. Not only does it contain the National Collection of apples, but of many other fruits too: plums, pears, bush fruits, cherries- it's a Mecca for fruit enthusiasts and offers a rare opportunity to see and compare varieties.

Robin recommends that you time your visit with the cropping time of the fruit you are interested in. Take the conducted tour (for around £5 extra), and you will learn from an expert as you go round. When you see the trees in fruit, you'll also be able to taste it too - a real boon to anyone who has scoured a nursery catalogue in winter and tried to imagine taste from a description. If you like particular fruits - you can even ask for a tree to be grafted for you - and can collect it as a young maiden - or as a larger 'headed' tree, for your orchard. What's more - there are experts on hand who can tell you everything about the fruits you choose to grow - a great way to avoid costly mistakes years later. Robin and his wife liked the taste of an apple called 'Cameo' and asked where they could buy a tree. After leaving Brogdale, they received a message on their mobile phone giving details of local nurseries which stocked it - now how's that for service?

Brogdale has a plant sales area, well stocked gift and book shop and a tea room. They also hold around half a dozen excellent fruit courses each year - well worth making a short break holiday for. You can find details on their Website: www.brogdale.org.uk - which also includes a gazetteer of thousands of apples - well worth a browse for this alone.

Just the Ticket

Don't forget that Orchard Link is a 'Friend of Brogdale' and has a membership card which enables Orchard Link members free entry. It also offers free entry to: Harlow Carr, Bedgebury Arboretum, HDRA at Ryton (Coventry) and Yalding (Kent), Hyde Hall (Essex), the RHS gardens at Wisley (Surrey) and Rosemoor (N.Devon) as well as Kew Gardens. So if you're planning holiday trips, ask to borrow it. We do only have one though, so it's on a first come, first served basis - Happy exploring!

WHAT'S ON?

Contacts for events:

Charles Staniland. (pruning courses)
Tel.01364 653169.

Coast and Countryside Events.
Tel 01803 861384.

Orchard Link events- see address and no. on back page.

JULY

Wednesday 20th. Summer Pruning.

Basic techniques suitable for all. Increase the crop quality of your trees after a hands on workshop! Led by Charles Staniland for Tamar Valley AONB Service and Cornwall FWAG, at Botus Fleming, near Saltash. 10am-1pm. £15. Booking essential, call Charles Staniland.

Sunday 31st. Summer Pruning led by Charles Staniland for South Devon AONB Unit and Orchard Link. 10am-1pm at Berry Pomeroy, near Totnes. £12 (£10 to Orchard Link members). Booking essential, call Charles Staniland

AUGUST

Saturday 6th Learn to Summer Prune- in Dartmouth's community orchard. Come and help Dartmouth In Bloom volunteers and pick up some useful skills. This event is FREE, Thanks to Life Into Landscapes funding. Home made cakes provided too! Led by Charles Staniland-please call him to book. 9.30am- 12noon. Bring a picnic and stay on if you wish.

Sunday 7th. ORCHARD LINK'S ANNUAL GATHERING. Don't miss this enjoyable, informative event- FREE to members! A chance to visit historic Druid orchard on the edge of Dartmoor, near Ashburton. See the article and invitation in this newsletter for full details. Booking essential- mail, e-mail or call Orchard Link.

Sunday 7th. Summer Pruning with Charles Staniland, at Churston orchard. 10am-1pm. Booking essential, call 01803 606035.

Wednesday 10th. 'Rare breeds, lobelia and a lost village'. Guided tour of Stanton Farm- a farm under Stewardship with rare heath lobelia, pigs, sheep and a new orchard full of old varieties of apple. Meet at 2pm at Staunton Farm, off the California Cross to Loddiswell road, South Devon. Adults £3, children £1. No need to book. A Coast and Countryside event.

Saturday 20th 'Tasty Fruit and Vegetables' A guided tour of Sharpham estate's walled organic garden- complete with apple trees and soft fruit. Lots of advice from Ben Pike (who manages the garden,) and a wild food search after lunch! Ashprington, near Totnes. 10am-3pm. Adults £15, children (over 10) £10. Booking essential, call 01803 732799.

Wednesday 24th Orchard hay raking, volunteer day at Churston orchard. Learn more about a historic orchard and improve its diversity of wildflowers. 9.30am- 4pm. FREE, but booking essential. Call 01803 606035.

SEPTEMBER

Saturday 3rd. Kingsbridge Show. Orchard Link hope to take the big wooden press and be pressing apples all day. Come and lend a hand -Call Orchard Link if you can help and we'll pay for your entry ticket.

Wednesday 7th. Countryman Cider Tour. See how traditional cider is made- from orchard to bottle. Organised by Tamar Valley AONB Service. Meet at Countryman Cider, Felldownhead, Milton Abbot. 6.15pm- 8pm. FREE but booking essential, call 01579 351681.

Saturday 17th 'The Fruits of Sharpham'. A rare opportunity to visit Sharpham estate's newly planted orchard with Ben Pike. The walled garden, with apples and soft fruit and tour its famous vineyard beside the Dart. 2-5pm. Adults £8, children £6- (£7 and £4 to Orchard Link members). Booking essential, call Joanna on 01803 732542.

CHURSTON ORCHARD

Churston Orchard is a beautiful site off Alston Lane, Churston. For nearly ten years the Torbay Wildlife Group (TWIG), has successfully cared for the site, clearing and restoring it to a working orchard. However with many members becoming elderly and unable to carry out the work, and a drop in new members joining in recent years, TWIG has been finding it hard to maintain the site.

Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust has been working with TWIG to help preserve the orchard and running practical conservation days to rake the orchard's rich meadows each autumn, to protect the site's many species of wildflower. Apples are collected for pressing at Cockington's annual Apple Day Food Festival in October. But more people are needed to offer their time to the site's up-keep.

To start regenerating interest in the site, a pruning course was held at the orchard in February led by Charles Staniland (pictured opposite on our front cover,) who has worked as a contractor in Devon orchards for 25 years. A follow up course will be held on the site in the summer to learn the art of summer pruning fruit trees.

If you are interested in being involved in this site please contact Emma Reece on 01803 882022.

Fair Celebrates Trees and Wood

Anyone who loves wood and trees will enjoy the South West Wood Fair – which takes place at Roadford lake, between Okehampton and Launceston. This year's Wood Fair will be the biggest yet: a celebration of the South-west's woodland and the crafts, skills and foods that stem from the region. Organised by South West Lakes Trust, the event brings together all those with a passion for wood – from growers to crafts people; nature enthusiasts to traditional house builders; artists to forestry professionals.

There will be over 130 organisations represented with plenty of demonstrations – from horse-logging to wood turning and the chance to 'have a go' at crafts and skills too. From long bow making to charcoal burning, storytelling and children's games – the fair which runs from 10am to 5pm offers something for all ages. Adult tickets cost £5 each, under 16's go free.



Letter from an OL Member

Dear Ben

I am writing to you on behalf of my grandson Jamie Luke McNabb who just turned five years old in January. Jamie is very keen on apples and came with us to apple events at Trelissick, Rosemoor, Cotehele and Cockington Court last autumn. At each event there were plenty of opportunities to taste apples. Jamie's favourite was an old Cornish Variety called Red Roller. The apples are red skinned and very sweet. He tasted these at Trelissick at Feock in October, at a well organised event. My own favourite is Pitmaston Pineapple. The fruit are small but very well flavoured resembling pineapple. Another favourite is Sykehouse Russet an old Yorkshire variety that is difficult to obtain. A specimen was posted to me last year from a village near Sykehouse in Yorkshire. The fruits have an excellent flavour

Yours Sincerely
Robert Jubb

Contact Orchard link at:-

**ORCHARD LINK, PO BOX 109,
TOTNES, TQ9 5XR.**

Or call – 07792 664710.

Don't forget to visit our website at:-

www.orchardlink.org.uk

You can email us there or at:

info@orchardlink.org.uk