



ORCHARD LINK NEWS

NEW GRANTS FOR ORCHARD RESTORATION.

If you live within the South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (near the coast or in one of the main valleys,) then the 'Changes & Challenges' programme is something which you are going to hear plenty about. This 'umbrella' programme is a new 3-year initiative linking people, places and wildlife across the South Devon AONB and spells good news for orchard owners.

Supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, South Hams District Council and Devon Wildlife Trust are offering free of charge advisory visits and grants towards the cost of restoring a range of farmland habitats including orchards. The *Landscape Heritage Scheme* will run until September 2006 and offers standard payments for a variety of work including pruning old trees, (£10 per tree), and planting new trees – in existing orchards only - £5 per tree.

For further information about the scheme or to arrange a site visit, please contact David Leach, Devon Wildlife Trust, 35-37 Shirehampton House, St. David's Hill, Exeter. EX4 4DA. Tel. 01392 279244

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- ♦ Choose the right trees for your orchard
- ♦ Come to a wassail
- ♦ JOBS! JOBS! JOBS!- see our Situations Vacant



Mysterious mistletoe; find out about this festive plant and its association with apple trees inside. (photo; Jackie Sarsby.)

THE PROOF OF THE PUDDING.

After a hectic Autumn season, we were cheered to receive this letter from member Rosalind Gibbs of South Pool, who proves that by using her membership, none of her apples have gone to waste this year...

'I wanted to thank you without bothering you to come to the phone-hence the note! You must work incredibly hard at this time of year on Orchard Link business, but to very great avail- in my own case anyway.

Risden Pratt took away 16 sacks of cider apples and the people from Aveton Gifford who are making apple jelly came for what remained of the Bramleys and the crab apple and seemed pleased.

I myself have 8 jars of apple wine going plop-plop-plop(long may they continue to do so!). So I haven't got an orchard littered with fruit thanks to you'

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THE MYSTERY OF MISTLETOE.

Why does mistletoe, or *viscum album*, grow in great bunches and boughs in the orchards of Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire, and yet never a sprig in the orchards of Devon? Or so it appears, and if this is true, is its absence new, or is it affected by our climate or trees? Did we lose our mistletoe along with the hundreds of old orchards which were grubbed up or allowed to decay, late this century? Well, it seems not. The agricultural commentator, William Marshall, writing in the late 18th century, already noted that no mistletoe grew here. He had seen the orchards of Gloucestershire and Herefordshire, where it grew in abundance, and he rode the length and breadth of Devonshire and Cornwall, where every farm had its orchard, and found not a twig. Was it, as some people said, the effect of the salt-laden winds? Or does Devon have too much pasture and not enough tall deciduous trees? The orchards in Herefordshire were large with tall apple-trees, and our orchards were numerous but small, and the trees short and stubby. But since Marshall's day, has mistletoe been absent or keeping a low profile? If it didn't grow here in the 18th century, does it grow anywhere in Devon today?

Much of our Christmas mistletoe comes from France, but anyone who travels North from Gloucester, following the River Severn, will see numerous old orchard-trees festooned with it. The border counties are its home, but it grows over a wide area of Britain, and not only in orchards. Although it likes apple-trees, it also favours the lime and the poplar, the hawthorn, sycamore and field-maple, the willow, the ash and elm

(when it can find one), and will grow on many other kinds of tree and shrub, including the rose and the false acacia.

The big Christmas auctions for mistletoe are held at Tenbury Wells in Worcestershire, which is in the heart of the mistletoe-growing area. This was once a centre for damsons, and the farmers still bring in great bundles of mistletoe from their mixed orchards round about. At one time, it was the gypsies who did the picking, but now many of the sellers are farmers, or smallholders. Stanley Yapp is one of these: every year, he brings in mistletoe from his 75 acre farm, and every year television crews follow him to ask him about this mysterious plant, which he loves. It is, of course, a curious parasite, growing as it does, without roots, up in the trees, green, when the tree on which it feeds is leafless, and with white berries on the female plant, instead of the usual red berries of autumn and winter. Here, it grows on 17 kinds of tree, but in Stanley's orchards, it grows on the Tredlow apple and the Princess Pippin, the Forester and the Devonshire Red ("a beautiful all-purpose apple, dessert, cooker and cider"), Tom Putt, the Vicar of Woolhope, the Bramley, Ribston Pippin, Blenheim, Lady Sudeley ("a beautiful, early dessert apple"), the huge, green Warner's King, Annie Elizabeth and Upright French. It grows on his plums too: Yellow Pershore and Marjorie's Seedlings. He loves it because it spreads happiness.

Stanley's orchards overlook the beautiful Teme Valley, where he knows every feature of the landscape and every point of interest. He knows the traditions of mistletoe too, and keeps to some of its customs. He goes to his orchards with a

long ladder and a pole with a hook on one end. You must pull mistletoe, rather than cut it, and if you are a wise grower, you take care to leave enough for the birds. Stanley says that the mistle-thrush is much better at growing the mistletoe than the farmer is, and so you must leave it some berries. They are sticky, and the bird can deposit the mistletoe seed on the bark, when it wipes its beak, or alternatively, the seed may be deposited in its droppings. Mistletoe needs to get under the soft bark of a tree, and the grower can try cutting the bark and putting the seed in there, but should do it in February or March, when the berries are ripe. Another tradition is that the mistletoe must never touch the earth, and Stanley Yapp carries his bunches hanging from a stick, like a yoke on his shoulder. Not so long ago, he says, other beliefs were strong: a spray of mistletoe was placed in a cradle to prevent the baby being taken away by fairies and replaced by a changeling. Mistletoe was hung up around the New Year, and kept for a year. "A local tradition at a farm near here," he says, "that was always kept up until the 1939-45 War broke out, was that when the mistletoe was taken down, I believe at Candlemas, it was set alight, and the younger members of the family had to run across a field of growing corn. This ensured a good corn crop, free from evil spirits. Members of this family are alive today."

Everyone knows that kissing under the mistletoe is one of the perks of Christmas. Richard Mabey, in *Flora Britannica*, says that much of the myth and magic surrounding mistletoe and the Druids goes back to an 18th century antiquarian called Revd. William Stukeley, who puffed up a few lines of Pliny's *Natural History* and invented a

Druidic religion surrounding the 'sacred' plant. Modern Druids have taken him at his word, and, following Pliny, worship it on the oak, where it scarcely ever grows. At Tenbury Wells, there is no sign of this awe or mystery, but huge bundles of mistletoe lie in rows on the ground, and are methodically picked up and weighed by the wholesalers who come from all over the country to bid for them. Even laid low, in glistening heaps, it is a wonderful sight. The auctioneers are Brightwells of Tenbury Wells in Worcestershire (tel. 01584 810666), and the auctions of holly, mistletoe and Christmas trees take place on the last Tuesday in November and the 1st and 2nd Tuesdays in December. But does it never grow in Devon orchards?

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SOME LIKE IT HOT !

At The South Devon Chilli Farm we grow chillies not apples, that is our area of expertise, but when sales of our new range of chilli jellies took off we realised we would need a much larger quantity of apples than we had access to. Apples are a key ingredient in our jelly and chutney, and we knew our existing supply from friends and neighbours would not be enough. That's where Orchard Link came in. We were put in touch with local people who could satisfy our demand, and after a few visits to friendly orchard owners we now have all the apples we need. We have also developed quite an interest in apples and made some new friends along the way. We owe special thanks to Mrs Page of South Pool.

If you'd like to taste our range of warming chutneys or buy a range of chillies, look out for our stall at South Hams farmers markets or contact us - Jason Nickels & Steve Waters

South Devon Chilli Farm

01548 854323

www.southdevonchillifarm.co.uk

SITUATIONS VACANT.

Salary; very limited

Job satisfaction; enormous!

It was very pleasing to have a number of helpers at this Autumn's shows and events (see 'Thank you all'), and it makes us realise the need for a little more structure and sharing in our organisation. At present much of the work is being done by Trudy and I, but it would be far more representative to have the useful input of lots of members in Orchard Link. So we have divided up the work which needs doing into defined jobs, so that members can offer to take on a job with specific responsibilities. The roles which we have created are as follows;

COMPANY DIRECTOR-

Involves attending infrequent company meetings to decide policy and planning. Looks good on your c.v!

ADMINISTRATOR.-

A fantastically important job- one of many currently held by Trudy. Involves paperwork, people work and phone work.

BOOK KEEPER-

To organise our fairly basic accounts ready to take to the accountant and so keep these potentially hefty fees to a minimum.

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY-

Answering membership enquiries, reminding members of subscriptions and devising wizard schemes to entice new members!

ASSISTANT EQUIPMENT CARER-

To help Phil Sheardown keep the mills, presses and equipment in good order- vital during the pressing season. We'd also like to know if you have woodworking or welding skills for very occasional repairs.

WEBSITE DESIGNER AND LOOKER- AFTER-

At present we don't have a web site. Having one would help us enormously. We need a talented person to put this into action.

COMPUTER WHIZZ-KID-

To help with all aspects of computing e.g. compiling a list of members E mails addresses, sending out E mails to members.

HARVESTLINE OPERATOR-

This year I have answered phone enquiries, hired out presses and helped place orchard owners with spare fruit together with cider and jelly makers searching for fruit. Anyone willing to take on any of this for next year would be welcomed- and paid!

SHOW CO-ORDINATOR-

Sounds grand! During the season we visit farmers markets, shows and Apple Days with the presses and/or displays. We need someone to co-ordinate this- to organise the helpers and ensure all equipment comes to the venue and works properly etc.

SOCIAL SECRETARY-

Someone who could organise social events, particularly in members orchards. At present this isn't really happening , but it would be a great way of expanding contact between members. For example, would anyone like to host a wassail in their orchard?

One of these positions is bound to suit you perfectly. When you have spotted which one it is, please call Orchard Link on 07792 664 710. Be quick, or you might be disappointed! The success of Orchard Link is in your hands.

Ben Pike.

As we have received so many contributions to this winter's newsletter - there was no room for my article on choosing and planting apple trees. - Watch out for a new 'mini - series' in spring!

NEW LIFE IN OLD ORCHARDS

All the hard work of many volunteers is now bearing fruit – in every sense of the word – in this second year of orchard restoration at Hazelwood. It is so miraculous to see these ancient apple trees (or at least some of them) now bowed to earth with fruit, that I thought a short piece for Orchard Link would celebrate this; and be a gesture of appreciation to Ben Pike, and his assistant Romeck Vanzeyl. For the last two winters, undeterred by the trifling inconveniences of cold and rain and limited tools, they have patiently led a group of volunteers, including me, through the arts of fruit tree pruning.

Those of you whose well-tended orchards annually groan under an abundance of fruit, may not have had the experience of peering over an overgrown stone wall into a dense mass of bramble and bracken, wondering if there could really be anything capable of bearing fruit (other than blackberries) buried in there? I did, early last summer (2002). In late July we started the first forays of hand-clearing, with scythes and shears. There is a great satisfaction and delight in freeing trees from a stranglehold of brambles looped up to their highest branches, arduous and prickly through the work may be. Thickets of hawthorn, oak and alder had spread themselves among the apple trees, some very ancient – only one bore any apples last year, a sparse handful.

Through the autumn and winter groups of volunteers intermittently continued the clearing, enjoying bonfires when we could, digging up bramble roots when possible. We managed to plant a few new traditional Devon apple trees in the late autumn. By the time we were ready to prune the trees in February this year the ground was radically cleared, and the trees

were obviously enjoying being able to move freely in the light of day.

Interesting to me was the difference in an approach to pruning that focuses attention on life, growth and vitality, from one that directs attention to death disease and decay. I found I was seeing the trees differently, inevitably, and wonder if that affected my actions.

Spring found me brooding under the blossoming trees, thinking the bees were few and far between, worrying about pollination! More fool I, as it turns out. An old man who had been working on this land 40-50 years ago recalled a tree with fantastic sweet apples in one corner of the orchard; and so they are.

At the end of this September we hope to borrow the Orchard Link Apple press to make juice at one of our volunteer weekends. Meanwhile we're enjoying the windfalls, as are the rabbits, and it's a race as to who can get them first!

Clearing and tending the two orchards is part of a fairly recent initiative to bring new attention and care to the 67 acres of land surrounding Hazelwood House near Loddiswell. Starting in December 2001 the regeneration project has involved many volunteers, local and distant, who have come for a day, a weekend, a month or more. Between us we have again started fruit and vegetable growing (organically) and clearing and creating paths to open up this lovely river valley for all to enjoy. Some volunteers have come only once, others regularly over a long period. It is a rewarding venture.

Wendy Stayte

Co-ordinator Hazelwood Land Project

Anyone interested in taking part in this project please contact me on
01803 868305

WHAT'S ON?

Contacts for events:

'Orchards Live' - Jane Schofield,
Lewdown Farm, Black Dog,
Credon, Devon. EX17 4QQ.

Hazelwood Land Project. Wendy
Stayte. Tel 01803 868305.

**Charles Staniland. (Orchard Link
pruning courses)** Te. 01364 653169

November.

Sunday 30th. Learn to hedgelay. At
Middlecombe Farm Beesands, with
National Trust Rangers. Just £1.50 per
adult. Booking essential. Tel. 01752
346585.

December .

Saturday 6th. Pruning course at
Bradford Barton, Witheridge,
N Devon. 10.30am till 3pm. £10.
Contact 'Orchards Live' to book.

January

Saturday 17th. Come to a traditional
Wassail at Stoke Gabriel, near Totnes.
From 7pm, outside the Victoria and
Albert Inn. Wassailing in the orchard,
complete with wassail queen and
morris men, midwinter storytelling in
the pub, a medieval mummers play and
local cider and a barbeque. Adults
£2, children £1.

Sunday 25th. Learn to Prune, hands on
day course at Berry Pomeroy near
Totnes. £10, £8.50 to Orchard Link
members. Call Charles Staniland to
book.

Saturday and Sunday 24th-25th
Working day including apple tree
pruning at Hazelwood. Come and help
and learn some new skills! Contact
Wendy Stayte for details.

February

Saturday 7th. Grafting course. At
Kings Nympton village hall,
N Devon. 10am till 3pm. £10. Call
'Orchards Live' to book.

Saturday 28th - Sunday 29th. Workday
and hedgelaying training at

Hazelwood. Cost of training on the
Sunday is £20 or a donation. Call
Wendy Stayte to book.

SAVE THAT CIDER!

If you are now turning some of your
apple juice into cider - save a bottle for
next year's Annual Gathering. To
encourage members to swap and taste
their home made cider, David Halpin
has generously offered to sponsor a
cider competition for Orchard Link
members. The prize will be a basket of
delicious Westcountry cheeses and
David hopes that it will encourage all
those who are having a go at
cidermaking to learn from each other.
It will certainly make for a merry
meeting later in 2001. Full details
should appear in the Spring newsletter,
meanwhile our thanks to David for his
very generous scheme.

SEARCH OVER FOR THE SYKEHOUSE.

*In a previous issue Robert Jubb wrote of
his search for a rare Yorkshire apple.
Here's the happy ending of his tale...*

A week ago my neighbour called
around in the evening with a small
parcel that had been delivered by post
during the day.

It was marked with "Open carefully"
and "handle with care." She waited
while I opened it keen to see what was
inside.

I was delighted to find it contained one
Sykehouse Russet Apple sent all the way
from Yorkshire by a lady who lives in a
village close to Sykehouse. It was a
lovely surprise although my neighbour
left looking very puzzled.

The fruit had an excellent flavour and
appeared to fit the description "The
apples of England" By H.V Taylor and
Robert Hogg fruit manual 1862. Over
the last few days I have found a nursery
who stock this variety. So ends a search
that began with an article that I placed in
Yorkshire News papers in 1986.

I am still looking to purchase a small
piece of land on which to plant a new
orchard. Everything suitable seems to
get snapped up for a horse paddock.
How do you purchase land in this
country?

THANK YOU ALL!

In the last issue of Orchard Link News, we asked for help with some of this Autumn's events. If I had ever doubted that members read their newsletters I was quickly proved wrong as the phone soon started to ring with offers of help at the Kingsbridge Show, Farmers Markets and Avon Mill Garden Centre Autumn Festival. So a special thank you to Liz Butler, Catherine and Peter Cowper, Wendy Stayte, Dick and Valerie Ensor, Jackie Stephens and Elaine, who came to help the usual crew out. All the stalls and apple pressing events were buzzing with activity and interest and we all had a lot of fun working together-so thank you- Orchard Link couldn't have done it without you!

A TOAST TO OLD TRADITIONS

If you wish to ensure a good crop of apples next year, follow the age old Devon tradition of wassailing your trees around twelfth night. No one knows when the tradition of wassailing started, but many say that it goes back over thousands of years to pagan times.

The Gentleman's Magazine of 1791 records that 'In the South Hams of Devonshire on the eve of Epiphany, the farmer attended by his workmen goes to the orchard with a large pitcher of cider, and there encircling one of the best bearing trees, they drink the following toast there several times;

'Here's to thee, old apple tree,
Whence thou may bud and whence
thou may blow,
And whence thou mayest bear apples
enou,

Hats full! Caps full!

Bushel-bushel -sacks full,

And my pockets full too!

This done, they went to the house, the doors of which they are sure to find bolted by the females, who, be the weather what it may be are inexorable to all entreaties to open to them, till

someone has guessed at what is on the spit- which is generally some nice little thing, difficult to hit on, which is the reward of him who first names it. The doors are then thrown open and the lucky clodpole receives the tit-bit as his recompense.

Some are superstitious as to believe that if we neglect this custom the tree will bear no apple that year' (J Brand. 'Observations on old Antiquities'.)

Of course, if you'd rather not stand around, locked out of your house on a cold January night, we'd recommend, a visit to Stoke Gabriel's wonderful wail wassail evening on 17th (see What' On for details), where you'll be guaranteed of a warm welcome and a log fire in the pub whilst you enjoy your cider!

PRESENT PROBLEMS SOLVED!

If you are looking for a Christmas present for a friend with an orchard- or just an interest in apples and cider, what could be more appropriate than a year's membership of Orchard Link? They will receive all members benefits plus newsletters each season, an invitation to 2004's Annual Gathering and we'll send a Christmas card from you. Just send a cheque for £15 to Orchard Link by 14th December, let us know the recipient's address, and we'll do the rest- that's one problem sorted!

KEEP IN CONTACT

You can contact us at the address below or by phone- on our new number- 07792 664 710.

Alternatively E mail us on;
Trudy.turrell@southhams.gov.uk ,
tq9ltd@hotmail.com ,or
benpike@talk21.com

We welcome your letters and articles for Orchard Link News too. Thank you to all those who contributed to this edition.

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Clearing