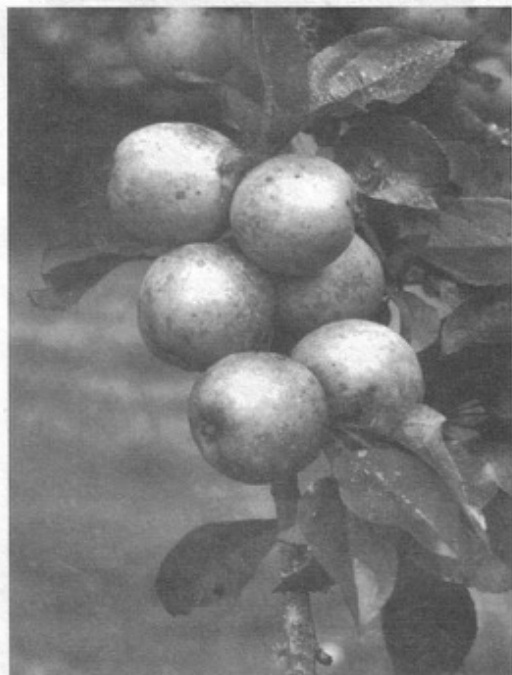


ORCHARD LINK *NEWS*



A LETTER FROM TRUDY TURRELL:

TIMES THEY ARE A CHANGING...

Or so the song goes, and at Orchard link we are always developing and responding to members' ideas, grants and new initiatives. When we started around seven years ago, we were very lucky to have a European grant, something which enabled us to try out a host of orchard saving and apple marketing ideas, and to purchase our presses and equipment. The grant also meant that we could pay for some of the time that people put into Orchard Link, and that we were not dependant on the little we could earn from members' subs and press hire to run the organisation. We're proud to say that thanks to the support and dedication of several people and to the interest of members, we have managed without any grant aid for four years - no mean feat when unexpected bills, such as repairing the mills mid season, come our way!

Now Orchard Link's finances are tighter, and we are having to watch the pennies, relying more on volunteers to undertake the bulk of our work. What we lack in cash is made up for in loyal members and enthusiasm though and it seems that the time is right for members to take a more active role in helping to steer Orchard Link, also in working together to offer mutual support and social events.

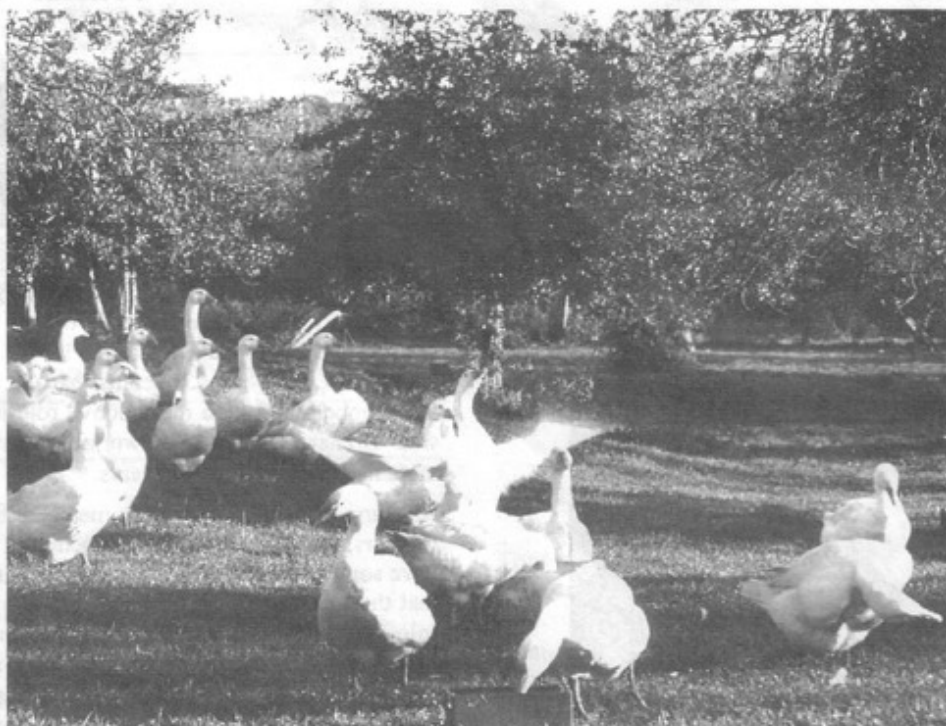
As many of us have now been members for a number of years, we know many other members socially and have some good ideas for future projects too; it seems that there is a great opportunity to take a more active role in what is now a well known and well respected organisation. Those in the regular 'work team' would like to invite all members to form a support group, which could for example organise social/training events in each other's orchards. Perhaps a harvest supper in the autumn, as suggested by Jacquie Sarsby, or a trip to a cider-maker? To ensure we can still staff the farmers' market and other show stalls, how about a gang of volunteers? And perhaps we can all help raise a few funds, to keep Orchard Link's wide variety of work going and keep subs and press hire fees to a minimum.

A members' group will be proposed at the next Annual Gathering, so do come and get involved, meanwhile: your ideas and feedback please! This is a wonderful opportunity to be more involved in YOUR organisation. Times may be a changing, but I hope for the better.

In this issue:

- ❖ Advice on tree guards
- ❖ Wassailing traditions
- ❖ Canker resistance
- ❖ Grafting service

In the next issue Trudy will be giving information about grants for orchard growers.



Wassail, Wassail, Orchard Link Members!

What exactly is wassailing?

'Wassail!' or 'Good health to you!' sounds like a seasonal greeting but also a toast, and in one of the wassail customs they passed round a bowl like a loving cup, drinking from it, and wishing each other good health. This custom is known as the 'wassail in the hall', but there are other kinds of wassail too, and if you come from a county like Gloucestershire, you may be used to something quite different, and be surprised by what people call 'wassailing' in Devonshire. Perhaps it needs explaining. In Gloucestershire and very many other counties, the main emphasis was often on the wassail bowl. A group of men, often farm-workers, carried a wassail bowl around the big houses in the village or town, expecting to have it filled with either spiced ale or cider. They sang encouragement to their hosts with verses:

*'...Wassail, wassail all over the town
Our toast it is white and our ale it is brown
Our bowl it is made of the white maple tree
With the wassailing bowl, we'll drink to
thee...' (the Gloucestershire Wassail)*

The wassailers would offer to drink to the master if he gave them food of various kinds:

*'...Pray God send our master a good piece of
beef
And a good piece of beef that may we all see
With the wassailing bowl, we'll drink to thee.
And here is to Dobbin and to his right eye
Pray God send our master a good Christmas pie
A good Christmas pie that may we all see
With the wassailing bowl, we'll drink to thee...'*

In some counties, people filled the bowl with money as well as drink, or the bowl was decorated, but in all these kinds of wassail, it was the bowl which mattered. It was almost a kind of ritualised, communal begging bowl, an adult's 'trick and treat', when the poor were allowed to make demands on their richer neighbours, but also essentially the aim was to have a jolly drink together. The verses often drew attention to the cold and mud which the singers endured while the people they visited were sitting comfortably by the fire. Sometimes they spoke of beer and corn, and sometimes of apple-blossom, depending on where you were, and wassailing was often around Christmas or New Year.

But in Devonshire, a county of small farms, nearly all with their own orchard, the apple trees were the main focus as well as a jolly drink. Cider was food and drink, wages for the farm-worker and income for the farm, and so, apples were important, but also an uncertain crop. Nowadays when we wassail, we still bless the apple trees. We wish them good health and a fine crop of apples. Traditionally, we encourage them on Twelfth Night, which is, according to the Old Calendar, 17th January, and this year we shall be wassailing at Stoke Gabriel on 21st January.

I have been looking up what is known about the Devon wassail. The 17th century poet, Robert Herrick, is supposed to have been writing for Devonians when he advised:

*'...Wassail the trees, that they may bear
You many a plum and many a pear:
For more or less fruits they will bring
As you do give them wassailing...' (Ceremonies
of Christmas Eve)*

This doesn't sound like the cider orchards we think of as being typically Devonian, but Hooker, writing in 1600, mentions that farmers in the coastal parishes of Devon made and sold a good deal of cider to victual ships and that there was also, *'..Greate abundans of all kindes of frutes
aples pearces quynces and suche lyke wallnuts
medlers and others innumerable...'*

By the late 18th century, we find an account of wassailing in the South Hams in the Gentleman's Magazine (1791):

*'..In the south hams (villages) of Devonshire, on
the eve of the Epiphany, the farmer, attended by
his workmen, with a large pitcher of cider, goes
to the orchard, and there encircling one of the
best bearing trees they drink the following toast
three times: -
"Here's to thee, old apple-tree.
Whence thou mayst bud, and whence thou mayst
blow!
And whence thou mayst bear apples enow!
Hats full! Caps full!
Bushel-bushel-sacks full,
And my pockets full too! Huzza!..'*

It goes on to describe how the men are refused entry by the women when they return home, however bad the weather may be, until a man guesses what kind of special, unusual morsel is cooking on the spit. When one of them finally hits on it, the women throw open the doors, and the winner is given the morsel as his prize. By the 19th century, accounts come thick and fast including a tough rhyme from the South Hams, which is more of a threat than a blessing:

*'...Apple tree, apple tree
Bear good fruit,
Or down with your top
And up with your root...'*

Sometimes they describe the farmers going into the apple orchards with their guns, encircling the oldest tree, chanting and making merry, and then firing their weapons at the tree, to come back to the same lack of a welcome, described above. At Cornworthy in 1805, they sang a song which reminds one both of the Gloucestershire and the Devonshire traditions with both the merriment and the joyful encouragement of the trees:

*'..Huzza, Huzza, in our good town
The bread shall be white, and the liquor be brown
So here my old fellow I drink to thee
And the very health of each other tree.
Well may ye blow, well ye bear
Blossom and fruit both apple and pear.
So that every bough and every twig
May bend with a burden both fair and big
May ye bear us and yield us fruit such a stors
That the bags and chambers and house run
o'er...'*

There are wonderful web-sites on the subject of wassailing. Try: -
www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/5567/wassail,
which is full of interesting information.

And now, welcome to the Newsletter!

Jacquie Sarsby.

WHAT'S ON?

Contacts for events :-

Charles Staniland - pruning courses for Orchard Link- 01364653169.

Bicton College - 01395 562400

Tamar AONB Unit - Stephen Russell 01579 351681

JANUARY

Sunday 15th Learn to Prune - A hands-on day course to tackle large apple trees led by Charles Staniland at Berry Pomeroy. 10.30am- 4pm. £20 or £15 to Orchard Link members. Call Charles by 8th Jan to book.

Wednesday 18th Fruit tree pruning workshop at Bicton College East Budleigh. Booking essential.

Saturday 21st. Orchard Wassail at Stoke Gabriel- see the feature in this newsletter. Meet outside the Victoria and Albert Inn at 6pm, wassailing starts around 7pm. Adults £2, children £1, families £5. Bring a torch

Sunday 22nd. Learn to Prune, at Dartington Primary school orchard. Details otherwise as 15th January. Please call Charles and book by 15th Jan.

Tuesday 24th Learn to prune, near Exeter with Charles Staniland. Call South West Forest on 01409 221896 for details.

Sunday 29th. Learn to Prune - at Stoke Gabriel. Details otherwise as 15th January. Call Charles by 22nd Jan to book.

FEBRUARY

Wednesday 1st. Fruit tree grafting workshop at Bicton College, East Budleigh. Call for details.

Sunday 5th Learn to prune. In 2 orchards near Bere Ferrers, with Charles Staniland. 10am (meet at Bere Ferrers church hall) till 4pm. Bring lunch or buy a snack at the local pub. Booking essential. £15 per place. Please send a cheque to 'Caradon district Council' to Tamar Valley AONB Service, Cothele Quay, Cotehele, St Dominic, Cornwall. PL21 6TA.

MARCH

Saturday 18th. Hard Graft- practical grafting workshop led by Adam Powell of Adam's Apples for Orchard Link. Learn to propagate new trees of old and favourite varieties- bring graftwood - 2 rootstock supplied. Grafting knives available- bring your own if you have one. Rootstocks, apple trees and knives on sale on the day. 11 am- 3pm. To be held at Ashprington village hall - full details on booking. £15, or £10 to Orchard Link members. Booking essential. Call Adam Powell on 01404 823185.

SOUTH DEVON AONB MAKE PRUNING COURSES WITHIN REACH.

Our thanks to the South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Unit, who have generously assisted with our pruning and grafting courses this winter.

New 'working at height' regulations meant that we had to have a supply of long handled tools and hard hats to continue teaching pruning. Thanks to the AONB Unit we have now purchased a good selection and shall be able to continue to offer these popular courses, which also feature in the Coast and Countryside events leaflet, to everyone in South Devon. They have also supported the grafting workshop on 18th March. See their web site: www.southdevonaonb.org.uk

WASSAILING AT STOKE GABRIEL

How do traditions actually start? If you've been to the Wassail at Stoke Gabriel, a Dart side village between Totnes and Paignton, you might think that villagers had been re-enacting the evening of old customs for centuries. In fact Stoke Gabriel's wassail, whilst being authentic in its customs, has only been practised for 13 years in the village.

It came about when working for the then Coast and Countryside Service, we realised that along with so many orchards and apple varieties, the tradition of wassailing the apple trees on twelfth night was fast disappearing too. After consulting with experts, reading old accounts, talking to Morris men and historians and finally attending two traditional wassail ceremonies, at Stoke in Teignhead and Carhampton in North Devon, we discovered the elements of a traditional Devon wassail. It was only after working with Stoke Gabriel parish, who in the late 80's when nobody had even heard the words 'community orchard', had a perfect one, used and loved by all the locals, that the idea for setting up a wassail came about.

Stoke Gabriel's orchard then sent its fruit to Churchward's Cider. (The apples were, incidentally picked up by the village scout group.). The cider which inspired the setting up of the local Churchwardens Morris team, was sold in the village's two local pubs. It didn't take long before I went into the school to talk to the children about orchards, teach them the wassail song 'We wassail thee old apple tree.....' and they provided us with our first wassail queen. Add to these ingredients a local storyteller and local mummers - who acted out an ancient 'pantomime' of a kind traditionally played in village streets on twelfth night - and we had an experimental wassail evening.

What we could not have predicted was the numbers happy to stand out of doors on a cold January night, or the enthusiasm of locals who supported the evening. We had no choice but to do it all over

again next January. And now, 13 years on, the local community organises the wassail themselves, which will ensure it stays a tradition.

If you have never been to a wassail, I urge you to attend Stoke Gabriel's. This year it is on Saturday 21st January from 6pm starting from the Victoria and Albert Inn.

Wassailing, a link with our past.

Although I have attended over 10 years of the Stoke Gabriel wassail, I still feel a thrill when, standing in the candlelit orchard, I witness the wassail queen giving cider to the dormant trees. As people gather and sing around the trees and guns are fired into the cold night air, you feel suddenly connected to those generations who planted and cared for the old orchards such as these.

Although we do not need cider or apples as our great grandparents did, nor do we need to placate the gods with midwinter offerings of the harvest, as they may have done thousands of years ago so that spring would come again, wassailing the trees reminds us of the changing seasons. As this year reminds us, despite all our technology and knowledge, we can experience a poor apple harvest, and nature is still in control. Our forefathers understood all this so well; watching the weather and the seasons as their livelihoods depended on it. They knew that there was good reason to celebrate the crop and wish for a harvest of 'Hats full, caps full, three bushel bags full, and a little heap under the stair!'

Trudy Turrell

What Future for Dartmoor Orchards?

The Lustleigh Orchard must be one of the most interesting orchards left in Devon, and a beautiful one too with old trees thickly covered in mistletoe. Next to it is the Village Hall, and here the Dartmoor Society held a debate on Saturday 1st October 2005, taking as its subject, the future of Dartmoor orchards. The morning was devoted to 'the Background', and Dan Keech who co-authored the *Common Ground Book of Orchards*, (well worth buying for its text and also for the beautiful photographs, many by James Ravilious), began by talking about orchards in many parts of the country. It is good to hear about other groups who also cherish their fruit trees, and I was happy when he mentioned some of the enthusiasts I want to mention in the Newsletter this year. Tom Greeves talked about the history of Devon's orchards. He has already written an article about the history of orchards on Dartmoor in the *Dartmoor Magazine*. It was called 'Temples and Idols - Dartmoor Cider Orchards', (*Dartmoor Magazine* No. 60 Autumn 2005 pp. 8 - 10) and I would thoroughly

recommend reading it if you were unable to attend the Lustleigh debate.

The afternoon included talks by Celia Steven, the tireless advocate of the Bramley seedling, two very different cider-makers, Ron Barter from Brimblecombe's at Dunsford and Jim Coyne from Little Weeke, Chagford, and two speakers, Rupert Lane and Clare Stride, who were well fitted to give advice about advice and grants for the orchard-grower. But the jolliest moment of the day was our trip to the orchard outside, where Barry Sessions told us the history of Lustleigh orchard and how it is used today. Some of the trees were bright with red apples, and Barry picked one and cut it in half for us to see the pattern of marks in the flesh: there could be 12 marks, or there could be 10; only locals seem certain. They call this apple 'the 10 Commandments' in Lustleigh, but it is 'the 12 Apostles' in Moretonhampstead. I hope my memory serves me correctly and I got that the right way round!

JGS



'Graft a Tree' Service

Are you concerned that your favourite, ageing, decrepit cider apple tree's days are numbered, or perhaps the neighbour's plum tree produces a wonderful crop, or Auntie Flo's cooker keeps until March whilst yours only produces scab and canker?

As a service to fellow Orchard Link members I can graft you a replacement tree using MM 106 or M25 rootstock for apples, St Julian A for plums or Colt for cherries.

Scion wood needs to be harvested December/January and stored cool ready for grafting in March. For this season one needs to act quickly or think about it at your leisure for next year. Contact me on 01548 821156, evenings best, for more details.

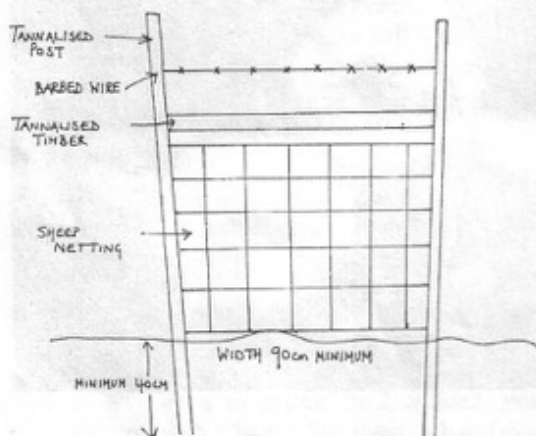
Mick Godfrey

THE BUILDING OF THE GUARD

Other creatures also enjoy your fruit trees; it is not so much your fruit that they are after, but a few tasty leaves and a tree trunk that acts as a rubbing post. When you have an itchy backside, what could be better than a nice apple tree to have a good scratch against?

There are two types of hazard that we need to protect against, one imposed and one self-imposed. The self-imposed one is animals that we bring in to our orchard to keep the grass down. Hopefully this will just be sheep rather than cattle or horses. To my mind, horses should definitely be kept out of an orchard, and cattle preferably kept out. Horses have too long a reach and also tend to poach the soil. Cattle have similar properties just less so; they can also be rather aggressive towards objects around them such as trees or tree guards.

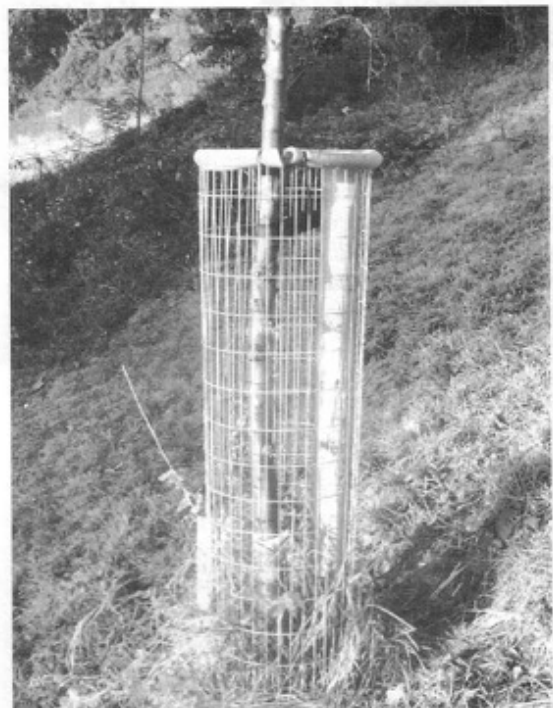
The basic four post sheep guard is shown in the drawing below:



The posts should preferably be 6 feet long, and tannalised rather than treated. One or two strands of barbed wire can be placed above the sheep netting to prevent animals climbing up or reaching over the guard. The sheep netting should be pulled as taut as possible. A disadvantage of any guard is the difficulty in getting inside the guard to carry out the early years pruning of the tree. One way to get around this is not to staple the final length of sheep netting, but to drive in some galvanized nails on the last post and hook the sheep netting over them. This way this section can be opened to gain access to the tree. One disadvantage of this guard is the difficulty of

constructing it on sloping ground. It is most apparent when trying to wrap the sheep netting around the posts, but the whole operation becomes twice as hard. If you must have cattle in your orchard, then a stronger and larger version of the same guard can be used. This would also apply to the imposed hazard of deer; tall guards will be necessary unless you only have small deer. Because you cannot exclude the deer while constructing the guards, you will literally need to plant a tree and then build a guard around it straight away.

The other main type of guard is made of galvanized weld mesh as shown in the photo below:



The second stake is needed to stop animals twisting the guard around. The major advantage of this type of guard is its ease of construction and its cheapness. If you are paying someone to build your guards, they will certainly cost more than the trees, so cost can be an important factor. The materials for a weld mesh guard will cost in the region of £11. The major disadvantage of this type of guard is that the trees rub against the top of the guard. This can cause a considerable wound on the trunk, which can be invaded by canker. Death is a possibility! The picture opposite shows damage caused in just a few months of neglect.



The way to get around this problem is to use pipe lagging around the top of the guard, and more importantly to tie the tree to stop it rubbing. Cut up inner tube is the best material that I have come across for this. Pruning inside the guard is difficult. As a 6-foot high person, I find that I can reach inside a 4-foot high guard but not a 5-foot high one.

Thornhayes Nursery suggest a form of guard half way between these two forms, similar to the four post guard but with only three posts. My feeling is that this combines the disadvantages of both types of guard, more difficult to construct and still causing rubbing.

So, in conclusion, there is no perfect form of guard; it is just a matter of weighing up advantages and disadvantages to arrive at the form that suits you best. If it all looks too daunting you could always buy a lawnmower! Finally don't forget to protect yourself against the humble rabbit using a spiral guard or something similar.

Ben Pike

Canker Resistance

A new Orchard Link member has requested information about canker resistance in cider trees, so we would welcome information from members about which varieties are either prone or resistant to canker in your orchard. Member, Kevin Frost, has an orchard he calls 'Canker Orchard' because it is so infested. The only variety that remains constantly free of canker is

Pig's Nose 3. It is always useful to have information from members, rather than the theoretical information in books and catalogues. Egremont Russet, for example, is usually described as canker-resistant, yet I have seen trees absolutely riddled with canker. Please send your information to Ben Pike, preferably by email: ben@sharpham.plus.com or you could use the Orchard Link phone no.

Ben Pike

Old Orchard Notes

In the autumn, I went to see two of our members who had hired one of our presses and were busy pressing their apples to make cider in big 60 gallon casks. Their experience of cider-making goes back more than half a century, and they are a wonderful source of tips on orcharding. When other people were grubbing out their orchards, they were planting and they say: 'You've got to get the ones that suit your patch'. 'Browns' are apples that have done well over Yealmpton way; they have done well at Berry Pomeroy too. 'Lanes Prince Albert', they told me, is a good cooker and keeps till Christmas. 'Quarrenden', I learned, was a nice early eating apple, called 'Qualender' when they were children. They were the first apples to come: 'We was after them before they was ready, we and the birds!' In those days, they always had apple pies for tea on Sundays: 'Ah, it's Sunday!' you'd think as the pastry opened and the hot, sweet smell of apple rose from the dish.

My cider-makers are bold grafters too, cutting through the stem of an apple tree when it is dormant, if they think it needs replacing, and grafting a new scion under the bark in April, 'when the Blackthorn's in flower'. Some of their trees have been grafted with several different apple varieties. I noticed that when the trees are young, they tie the branches to guide them to make a nice shape. And how long, I wondered, do they keep the stake to support the tree? 'Time the stake's rotten,' they told me, 'he should be ready to stand on his own.'

JGS