



ORCHARD LINK NEWS



When All is Safely Gathered In

At the close of the harvest season, Orchard Link has managed to collect and sell at total of 45 tonnes of apples which would otherwise have gone to waste. The credit must largely go to our ever enthusiastic, helpful and unflagging Harvest Co-ordinator Nicola Herbert. Thank you Nicola!

However a Harvest Co-ordinator's life is not an easy one.....

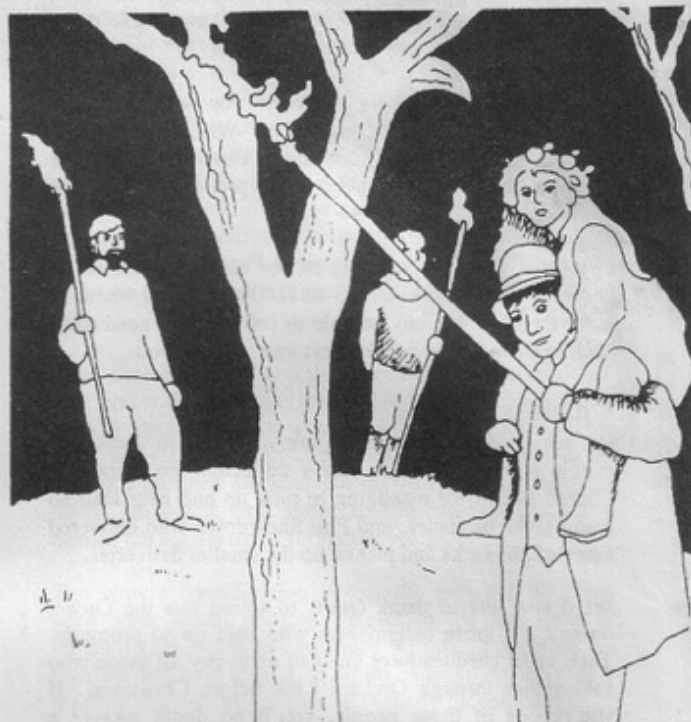
Starting off as Harvest Co-ordinator is an early and a glut year for apples is rather a baptism by fire. Following our first season last year, the local press and radio were keen to cover our second season and summer publicity meant that by early September the phone was red hot and apples were often left on Nicola's doorstep.

Taken by surprise, local apple juice and cidemakers were not ready to start pressing, so Nicola had the job of selling the mainly Bramleys to local shops, commercial pie makers and storing some for a week or two, to turn into juice.

The trouble with harvesting apples from many and scattered orchards is the unpredictability of it all. Some orchard owners provide the fruit in carrier bags, some need an open backed lorry to collect it. Many called to say 'I've got sacks of fruit', only to leave Nicola, large trailer attached to her car, staring at three carriers by a gateway.

If variety is the watchword for Devon orchards, then we have it, from beautifully hand picked fruit to mushy black ones (not acceptable to anyone I'm afraid!) There are cidemakers and juice makers who require specific varieties and others who are happy to receive mixed bags, as long as the fruit is of reasonable quality. Juggling fruit, journeys, timings and demands is an art in itself, let alone dealing with all those Harvestline enquiries. Despite all the stress, long days and an aching back, Nicola is keen to return and co-ordinate next year's harvest for us!

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Come and celebrate a Wassail. Learn to Prune, see 'What's on' page 5.

Dig Yourself a Ploughman!

Mr and Mrs Bond, who live in the heart of Dittisham village are fortunate to have a lovely old orchard of damsons and Dittisham Ploughman plum trees. The fruit, which was thought to have been brought to Dittisham around 200 years ago in a German ship which landed up the Dart, once grew in every cottage garden. The plums are dark and luscious, the trees fruit prolifically and like all plums sucker new trees. This trait is now causing problems for the Bonds, whose orchard has now become a 'thicket' of young plum trees.

Thanks to a European landscape grant through the Coast and Countryside Service, they'll be able to employ some professional help to prune their old apple and plum trees and clear and single out the thicket of plums. In the process, lots of young plums trees will be available free to any Orchard Link members who would like a few. Be prepared to dig the trees yourself and of course they should be lifted and replanted during midwinter when the trees are dormant.

If you would like a few of these beautiful local plum trees, simply call Mr and Mrs Bond on 01803 722320.

INSIDE

- ◆ First time cidemakers – see how they fared this Autumn.
- ◆ Bees and plum trees for your orchard.
- ◆ Learn to prune courses on offer.
- ◆ Help find Devon's lost varieties



Harvest Report

A Learning Curve

Following this year's harvest season, we all learnt some valuable lessons and will be passing on tips to those who use the collection service next year, to help you and Orchard Link get the best from your apple harvest. We'll also be talking to local Cidermakers who bought the fruit, to understand their requirements for next year and so make matching fruit to buyer easier.

Meanwhile, we're asking those of you who used the service for your comments and ideas. With your cheques, you'll be receiving a feedback form. Please take a minute to fill it out as it really helps us to prepare for Autumn 2000.

Finally, if you still have any of our sacks, please let us know. Call Trudy on 01803 861140 to arrange where to leave them, or we may be able to collect. We need them back to clean and re-use for next year. Thank you.

Unsung Heroes

On behalf of all at Orchard Link we'd like to thank two people who helped this year's collection go smoothly, Conrad Batten for managing to pick up and help load so many sacks of apples, and Phil Sheardown who delivered many of our sacks and picked up the smaller deliveries.

We'd also like to thank (starts to sound like the Oscars doesn't it?) those cidermakers who paid up so promptly. Their swift cheques have enabled us to pay all those who sold apples through Orchard Link before Christmas. If you're one of those people, you'll no doubt receive a cheque in your member's Christmas card!



A New Place to See old Varieties

New owners of Dittisham Fruit Farm Mr and Mrs Fildes are planting a traditional orchard full of Devon varieties on their farm. Open to the public as a 'pick your own' fruit farm, the new orchard will give people the chance to see and taste local old fashioned varieties of apples.

The planting scheme has been assisted by a European funded landscape grant through the Coast and Countryside Service, and with their help, occasional training days will be held to demonstrate the pruning of young standard apple trees.

If you're around Dittisham in the Spring or Summer, why not call in at the fruit farm, which is at Capton, about a mile before the village, and see the orchard for yourself?



Photo: Kevin Kealey

Apples for Owls

Several people who gave us just small quantities of apples simply asked us to give any proceeds 'to charity'.

Although the grand total raised from these odd carrier bags of apples was just £10.61, we've sent it to the Barn Owl Trust based at Ashburton. Part of their advisory work is to encourage farmers to leave areas of longer grass, in which mice, shrews and field voles, the Barn Owl's staple prey species, live and breed. With fertilised and silaged fields there's precious little rough grassland left in Devon. So if you have a rather 'unkempt' orchard, you may actually be feeding resident barn owls!

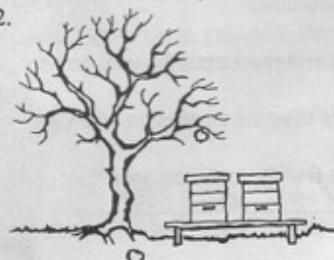
Always keen to catalogue barn owls throughout Devon, the Trust would like to hear from anyone with barn owls on their land. They also run a programme of talks and fundraising events Devon-wide and produce a newsletter and some very useful advisory sheets. Call them on 01364 653026 for further details.



Busy Bees on Offer!

Would anyone like some colonies of bees in their orchard? Adrian Kyte is looking for a new apiary site for his bees, preferably not too far from Totnes. If you don't have resident pollinators in your orchard and would like some, give him or his wife Fiona a ring on 01803 868186.

If you are interested in keeping bees yourself and want to know where to start, Totnes and Kingsbridge Beekeepers should be able to help. T&KB is a friendly group (beekeepers are particularly good at helping each other out), which holds regular meetings and has an open meeting each summer for people interested in the craft of beekeeping. The group is a branch of the Devon Beekeepers Association. If you are interested, don't wait until next summer, contact the secretary, Jim Stevenson on 01752 896644 or the chairman, David Shingleton on 01548 830552.

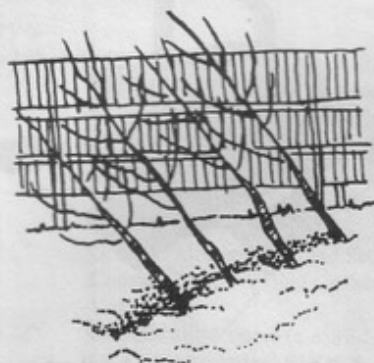


*Seasonal orchard advice from Ben Pike of
South Hams Orchard Services*

Planting Bare-rooted Trees

The majority of fruit trees are planted bare-rooted. This means that they are field grown in the nursery, then lifted as needed. They will come to you with their roots completely bare, often just wrapped in a fertiliser sack. Obviously tree roots are not designed to remain uncovered so swift action is necessary.

Should it not be possible to plant the trees straight away, either because the soil is waterlogged or frozen, or for personal reasons, then they should be heeled in. This means digging a temporary trench in which to place the roots until you are ready to plant. The soil should be gently firmed around the roots.



The preferable option is planting. I have often visited sites to find numerous holes dug ready for the trees to arrive, often with water sitting in the bottom. This is not a good idea as it destroys the soil structure and any sitting water can start to rot the roots.

If your soil is poor it may be worth adding some nutrition, well rotted manure, leaf mould, compost, or a proprietary soil-enricher are all suitable. Don't overdo it however, as apples trees are not heavy-feeders, and roots planted in a richly filled planting hole will not feel the need to escape to discover the wider world outside. This is important as widely spread roots are necessary for the stability of the tree.

This brings us to a contentious issue: to stake or not to stake? Current thinking leans towards not staking unless necessary. Trees on an M25 or MM111 rootstock, planted as maidens in a reasonably sheltered position will not need staking. Trees planted on more dwarfing rootstocks, in exposed positions or planted as larger trees may need staking, especially if two or three of these factors apply together. Even if staking is necessary, only a short stake will be needed, say 40 to 50cm underground and 50 to 80cm above. The idea is to encourage the tree to support itself with its roots, not to rely on the stake as a crutch.

If the planting area is grassed, then first strip off the turf; this can be chopped up and used in the bottom of the hole. Dig a hole a fair bit bigger than the size of the rootball. Place the roots in the hole ensuring that the top of the soil comes to the same place as it did in the nursery (you can

usually still see the mark at the bottom of the trunk). It is vitally important that the graft, (the joining of the rootstock and the scion, often visible as a knobbly lump) is above the soil level.

At this stage quickly inspect the roots for damage and cut beyond any damage with secateurs. I say quickly because it is important not to leave the roots exposed too long, even three minutes exposure on a raw windy day could kill a tree. The next step is to backfill the hole, firming the soil gently.

If you are staking then place the stake between the main roots on the side of the tree where the prevailing wind comes from. Hammer the stake firmly home and then continue the backfilling, occasionally holding the trunk and shaking the soil around the roots. Firm the soil with your foot (this doesn't mean jump up and down on it), and fit a tree tie between stake and tree, and the job is almost done.

I say almost because two things remain to be considered. The first is that you may need to protect your trees. This could be against rabbits who can kill trees by nibbling the bark, use rabbit guards. Or it could be because you are choosing to keep stock in the orchard to keep the grass down, in which case more sophisticated protection is needed during the tree's formative years.

The second consideration is that the tree will probably need some initial pruning. Refer to the last issue of Orchard Link News for guidance on this. Following the planting the best idea is to warm yourself in front of a roaring fire with mince pies and brandy for company.

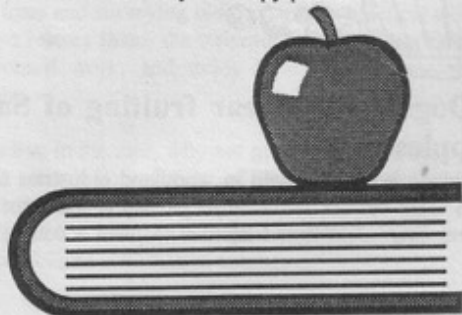
Book Review

Orchards – A Practical Guide for Management.

A long promised publication from the County Council, this is a pack of 12 sets of notes on orchard care and management. Largely created by Cathy Fitzroy, who up until 1997 was Devon County Council's Orchard Advisor and now is a Director of Orchard Link.

Concise and easy to understand, I found the separate sheets on wildlife, pests and diseases, pruning, propagation, new planting etc. informative and useful.

At £5 it's a quick and invaluable distillation of the knowledge in much wordier tomes, and so I think good value. Better still, is to buy a copy through us and then the small profits from the sale go to help Orchard Link. Simply send a cheque for £5 made payable to Orchard Link and we'll send you a copy post free!



Home cider making – The proof of the pudding

I've been looking through the Autumn 99 edition and, seeing the book review on 'Real Cidermaking on a Small Scale' and the advert for home presses at £60, I thought I'd let you know about my first efforts at apple squashing! I'd encourage everyone to have a go at making their own apple juice. It's lots of fun, simple, cheap and tasty.

I hired a crusher cum press (very similar to the one in the advert I think) from a homebrew shop in Newton Abbot. This cost the princely sum of £8.50 a day, although if you're canny about when you pick it up this 'day' can be stretched to a weekend. I collected a variety of apples of unknown, but local, provenance from various friends and a remnant orchard. These were all chopped into quarters and thrown into the crusher where, with a few deft turns of a wheel (and only a few squirts of juice in the eye) they got chobbled into tiny fragments. From the crusher the fragments fell straight into a bag waiting in the press. Some turns on the screw and, as if by magic, beautiful golden juice began to flow at the foot of the press! It's amazing how the juice just floods out, although I discovered that a strong-armed boyfriend is a big help to squeeze out the last few drops of precious liquid.

Having obtained genuine Devon apple juice there are four things you can do with it. Drink it there and then as a tasty reward for your hard labour (depending on the apple variety – one of our mixes was more than a bit tart!). You can put it in the freezer and drink it later. You can make it into apple wine, which I'm told by the above mentioned boyfriend is delicious (I never got the hang of wine myself). Or you can turn it into scrumpy! Being rather keen on a spot of cider, I decided to give this a go, but having waited in keen anticipation for several months for my creation to ferment to maturity, I have to say it was not a great success, the term paint stripper springs to mind. Although making apple juice is dead easy, I think I've still got plenty to learn about cider making.

So I think I shall treat myself to a copy of the cider making book, and have another go with a hired press next year. If I get it right next time, then it might be worth investing in a press of my very own...

Mary de Lemos, Teinbridge District Council



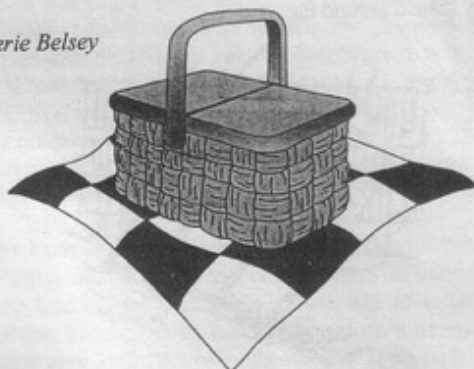
Top Dogs – First year fruiting of Saw Pit Apples

I have always been interested in woodland industries and therefore when the Orchard Campaign sent round a list of apple trees four years ago, I decided to plant a couple of

Saw Pit trees for my field at Coomery in Cornworthy Parish. The idea was that a Saw Pit would stand near by. However the ground remains unturned and for the first time the Saw Pit trees have fruited. These trees are Cornish in origin and come from The Tamar Valley. H V Taylor describes them as being similar to Green Newton Wonders and says that the flavour can be sweet in a sunny year. This was certainly the case this year. Although they do not ripen to be very red they are a very sweet juicy apple and must not be judged on appearance. The trees have quite a distinctive profile; their branches spreading vertically rather like a cherry tree does.

Saw Pit, Saw Pit,
Sounds too dry to eat
Saw Pit, Saw Pit
It's luscious and sweet.

Valerie Belsey



Orchard Link went to Market

In the Quay car park in Kingsbridge you could scarcely find a parking place. People thronged to the 'market' area at the top of the Quay and we had hardly got our stall set out when people were delving into our sacks of apples eager to fill up a bag for 50p.

It was our first experience of selling at the new Farmers Markets. Nothing had prepared me for the level of interest in both our own and all the other stalls which sold local food and produce, from organic sausages to honey and cakes, fish to flowers. By 10.00am I was heading back to Nicola, our Harvest Co-ordinator's house near Loddiswell for more apples, we'd sold out of the four large sacks I brought! By lunchtime, almost 200 bags of cooking and eating apples had gone from our stall amidst loads of enquiries about Orchard Link.

Sold from the sack, blemishes and all, our customers were happy to buy real local food and what's more they enjoyed shopping amidst the friendly sociable atmosphere.

Being able to meet the people who grew their vegetables, made their bread or kept the animals from which their meat came is an attractive alternative to the pre-packed far travelled foods on offer in most supermarkets. Although Farmers Markets can't replace the supermarkets, I hope that on market days they experience just enough of a decrease in trade and customers, to make the managers take notice of the wishes of many consumers, to have contact with producers and to have the chance to buy local foods.

What's on?

For Coast and Countryside events call 01803 861140. Tamar Valley Orchard Volunteers courses call 01822 833804. Dartington North Devon Trust call 01272 326365 and South Hams Organic Gardeners Society SHOGS - Liz Collins or Anna Brindley 01548 853220

December

Saturday 4th

Pruning Course at Chanleigh Barton Dartington North Devon Trust.

Sunday 12th

Pruning Course at Chanleigh Barton Dartington North Devon Trust



January

Saturday 15th

Millennium Orchard Wassail. Wassail Stoke Gabriel's apple trees Morris dancing, mummers play, storytelling, singing and a midwinter barbeque. 7pm onwards Stoke Gabriel. Call the Coast and Countryside Service.

Sunday 16th

Orchard Management and Pruning Course. Tamar Valley Orchard Volunteers.

Saturday 22nd

Composting Course (a useful skills for orchard owners) SHOGS.

Friday 28th

- Sunday 30th

Course 'Restoration and Management of Traditional Orchards' at Slapton Ley Field Studies Centre. (see article)

Saturday 29th

Pond management. Full day course. SHOGS.

Sunday 30th

Learn to Prune Course at Berry Pomeroy near Totnes (only a couple of places left!) Coast and Countryside Service.

February

Sunday 14th

Orchard Management and Pruning Course. Tamar Valley Orchard Volunteers.

Saturday 26th

Grafting Course, bring wood from trees you'd like to propagate. Winkleigh, N. Devon. Dartington North Devon Trust.

March

Saturday 18th

& Sunday 19th

Organic gardening. Weekend course. SHOGS.



Course offers Pruning and Management Skills.

Tom Hoblyn, who used to be a partner in South Hams Orchard Services has a wealth of orchard knowledge, much of it gained in South Devon. Now studying and working at Kew Gardens, he will be leading a weekend

course entitled 'Restoration and Management of the Traditional Orchard' at Slapton Ley Field Studies Centre from Friday 28th to Sunday 30th January.

With a day of hands on pruning and a tour, the weekend should provide a good grounding for anyone with an old orchard to restore. If you are an Orchard Link member, you will have received details with this mailing. If you are not and would like information call 01548 580466.

Dig In!

Many orchard owners are also keen organic gardeners, so I've included details of the South Hams Organic Gardeners Society (SHOGS) and a number of courses which are run at Tresillian in Kingsbridge. SHOGS members are aiming to create a demonstration organic garden at Tresillian (behind the Community College in Fore Street) and have monthly work sessions, to which all are welcome.

If you'd like to assist a very worthwhile local project, meet like minded folk and pick up some good organic gardening tips, call Anna Brindley or Liz Collins on 01548 853220.



Volunteering in the Valley

Once the most prolific apple and cherry growing area in the Westcountry, the Tamar valley, like the rest of Devon and Cornwall has suffered from a decline in orchards. Still full of nurseries and knowledgeable and interested folk, it has provided many of the old Devon varieties now sold by specialist nurseries, some propagated back from the brink of extinction.

Keeping this heritage of orchards, apples and cherries alive, are the Tamar Valley Orchard Volunteers, a small informal group who help and encourage others to plant and restore traditional orchards. From identifying local trees and surveying old orchards to practical work days to restore them, the volunteers undertake a range of orchard work, and enjoy their interest into the bargain.

If you live in the area, why not give them a call and see what's on. For details of the group and their programme of work days, call Caroline Villiamy on 01579-37042. You can also join in with their range of very useful and informative courses

Modification Madness?

Not content with rearranging the complex DNA of soya and maize, the GM scientists are unleashing their experiments on trees. By altering the genes of forestry trees they hope to remove much of the lignin which needs to be removed when turning wood fibres into paper (it also keeps the tree standing upright and strong!). Scientists are also trying to make certain species herbicide tolerant, to increase yields or pest resistance.

As with so much of the GM work on food crops, however, it's been found that it's seldom possible to switch one gene without affecting other aspects of the plant, and with almost no controlled trials before the genetically modified plants are grown in the environment, we really won't know the long term effects upon us, wildlife or the countryside for a long time.

Citrus fruits including limes have been the subject of recent trials, where scientists have attempted to remove the limnoids which can make the fruit bitter and less desirable in juice. These same limnoids are however important for the trees own defences against feeding insects, and for us they have been found to have anti-cancer properties.

Apples are next in the queue for treatment, a situation which we find ludicrous as we campaign to save some of the thousands of old varieties which are becoming extinct all the time. Study these naturally occurring cultivars and you'll find every useful property science may desire, insect and mould resistance, flavour and tolerance of all kinds of local climates. Their genetic make up is unchanged, their fruits have been eaten, wholesomely for generations. How misguided that just some of that funding for GM science isn't diverted into researching the qualities of fruit that we already have.



Lost Varieties: The Hunt Continues

Each year Dartington North Devon Trust appeals for information on 'missing' apple varieties for their Pomona - a survey and description of Devon's apple varieties. Each year they find a few to add to the list. Orchard Link members may be able to help the hunt for old varieties. Can you locate or do you have any of the following?

Barum Beauty, Beech Bearer, Billy White, Bowden's Seedling, Broomhouse White, Butterbox, Cerif, Cockagee, French Long Stem, Golden Ball, Green Bittersweet, King Manning, Lincoln Horn, Long Bit, Pear Pine, Pound, Rawlings, Reynold's Peach, Royal Wilding, Spicey Pippin, Stone Pippin, Sweet Bramley, Sweet Cluster, Thin Skin or White Sheep's Nose.

Please let Michael Gee know if you have access to these varieties (tel 01271-326365). He will make arrangements for propagation. If you know of the variety but don't know of a living tree, still please get in touch. If you have apples that could be photographed, please get in touch at once!



Devon Apples 1999

The Trust have again expanded their list of traditional varieties, 'Devon Apples'. It provides a list with brief description of nearly 200 varieties. Recent information on apple varieties has been incorporated. There is information on disease resistance and commercial suppliers of the different varieties that are listed. 'Devon Apples' is available by post for £3.00 from: Dartington North Devon Trust, 4 Taw Vale, Barnstaple, Devon, EX32 8NJ.

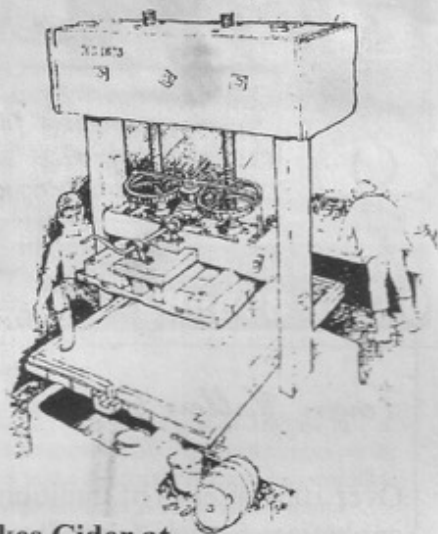
Pomologists Stockings!

If any orchard enthusiast friends are writing their letters to Santa, I'll bet they'll be including, or would certainly welcome the following:

- ♦ A fruit tree, perhaps a very local variety or a crab apple, always a good pollinator and a source of gorgeous jelly. See the nurseries in the inside back page.
- ♦ A really good pair of secateurs, to save them damaging (young trees especially) with the ragged unclean cuts that less than sharp secateurs give. My favourites are by 'Felco'. Expensive but last a lifetime.
- ♦ Books, perhaps Sally Tims' new volume 'Apples, A Social History' £4.99 from National Trust Shops or a favourite of my own 'Burcombes, Queenies and Collegetts' the distilled knowledge of Tamar Valley expert James Armstrong-Evans with vibrant zingy impressionist paintings by his partner Mary Martin around £10. ISBN no 0.9527641 05. I'd also recommend the concise clear and colourful small book 'Farmhouse Cider and Scrumpy' available from Orchard Link for just £2.99 or Devon County Council's new Orchards Management Pack (see book review) also available from us for £5.
- ♦ Cider, local of course!
- ♦ A great gift which lasts a whole year is membership of Orchard Link! Just send us £15 and the name and address to whom membership is to be sent by 20th December and we'll send them a current newsletter and Christmas card from you. What could be easier!



Remember the historic cider press featured in Autumn Orchard Link News? Now it's found a home. Read all about it in the Spring issue.



Charlie Makes Cider at Churchwards

At the beginning of the summer, my sister and I and our two families moved to Yalberton Farm, a beautiful farmhouse with lots of outbuildings and two small orchards, previously the home of Churchwards Cider. We hadn't bought it for its cider history, in any case the machinery had been sold, but as the summer came to an end and the apple trees became laden, we decided to continue the tradition.

Instead of buying a small Vigo basket press, some romantic notion persuaded us to buy parts of the legendary Charlie Kingdom's old press and masher from a friend's farm up on Exmoor. Hidden in the goat's shed under a pile of hay, only some metal parts of the twin screw press and masher remained. All that it needed were the timber elements replacing! Five weekends later Alan and Barry, with a little bit of help from our friends, had reconstructed the press and erected the 10' tall frame, with new ash racks, whilst Susie and I had taken on the task of bringing the rusty old masher back to life. The old barn, had gone back in time and the modern hydraulic machinery of the commercial Churchwards Cider, had been replaced by a cumbersome twin screw press and hand operated masher.

The apples were falling fast, and a date had been set for the inaugural pressing. Every container in the house had been requisitioned; an old bath had been set up for washing the apples; the old oak barrels were steamed, and the task of collecting apples had begun.

The day dawned raining and windy, but as friends began to arrive, the sun came out and the apple gathering began in earnest. Assisted by the mulled cider, the old equipment slowly came to life; the great flywheel on the masher acquired momentum of its own and the pulp was shovelled and transferred to the press. Layers of apple pulp parcelled in cloths separated by ash racks were stacked up to form the six cheeses. A huge pressing board was laid

on top and then the metal cogs were turned by hand to bring the beam down on to the board. A long metal bar was then used to turn the central cog. As the cheese began to compress, the apple juice began to flow and cups appeared as everyone gathered for a taste of the sweet gold liquor. It worked! After the initial excitement at transforming apples into juice, the team began to work out improvements. An old Hoover was set up to provide draught for an impromptu forge and a blacksmith friend forged the end of the bar to engage with the winding collar. Constant repairs to the masher kept it running at near full speed.

The machinery was kept fed with a stream of sacks of apples and by the third pressing of the day we had half-filled a barrel, about sixty gallons so far. By evening cider house ruled, the party was in full swing, although a few of the worst affected staggered on with the pressing. The next day numbers were severely reduced and we had to rely on some of the older children to wind the mill. By the end we had a full barrel and spare to top it up.

A few days later, concerned that the barrel had not begun to ferment, we added some yeast, set up some heaters and covered the barrels with old sleeping bags. The effect was dramatic, the ferment throwing out the bits of pulp. Now all we hope that we haven't produced 200 gallons of cider vinegar!

By new Orchard Link member Jackie Gillespie

Lofty Ideals

Do you have a sound apple loft which you are not using? If so, are you willing to rent it out, for a small consideration to a newly formed organic food processing company? One woman and her preserving pan! Please let me know. Many thanks. GM Laver. Tel 01803 865653.

Continuing Support

We'd like to say a big 'thank you' to all those members who have renewed their subscription this Autumn and welcome to all our new members.

Following the success and popularity of our first members event, the cidemakers picnic in September, we're planning another for the summer. Hope to see you there!

Orchard Link News is produced by Orchard Link. It is free to members. For details on membership contact Trudy Turrell at Orchard Link, Follaton House, Plymouth Road, Totnes, Devon, TQ9 5NE. Tel 01803 861140.

Visit our Web site on:
[Http://telematic.ex.ac.uk/fc-mlp.htm](http://telematic.ex.ac.uk/fc-mlp.htm)

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