

# ORCHARD LINK NEWS

## Come to our Annual Gathering!

On Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> April at Kentisbeare

This year our Annual Gathering is based in East Devon and the day has been devised by Nic Butler of the East Devon Coast and Countryside Service – who are corporate members of Orchard Link.

As usual we have a packed, informative day on offer, with plenty of opportunity to meet with other members too. We've been invited to an orchard at middle Clyst William owned by the Gimber family. An ancient orchard in the process of restoration – the Gimbels also share their orchard with friends who use it for music, camping and help gather the crop.

We shall also be visiting Thornhayes Nursery – where Kevin Croucher produces over two hundred varieties of Devon and Cornish apple trees plus many other fruits and ornamental trees for sale. On a tour round the nursery Kevin who is a true expert, will explain how he produces trees by budding and grafting and will answer your questions on fruit tree growing.



A visit to Kevin's own orchard is particularly informative as you can see several old varieties growing on different rootstocks and see just how they look several years on from planting.

We will provide morning coffee and a hot pasty lunch with pickles and cider at Kentisbeare Village Hall and if you are an Orchard Link member you are entitled to **two free tickets** to this popular event. Additional tickets are available to non-members 5.00 per person but need to be booked in advance and as numbers are limited, priority will be given to members.

So don't delay – either complete and post back the enclosed invitation sheet – or if you don't have one with your newsletter – write to us at the address on the back of this newsletter and don't forget to tell us if you would like a vegetarian or meat pasty.

We look forward to seeing you there!

**Inside;**  
**Community orchards special feature**  
**Devon apple trees for a royal orchard**  
**New legislation protects old orchards**  
**Last chance to prune!**

## **Orchards for the Community**

As traditional orchards can become less viable areas of a farm, so these often neglected patches of land offer opportunities – as informal parks, play spaces and nature reserves for the community. In many places, it's taken just a questioning mind and a spark of inspiration for locals to approach a landowner and request to buy or lease an old orchard which may be of little use to the owner but a well loved feature locally.

Owned or rented by a parish council, trust or residents' group a community orchard can offer so many possibilities to those living nearby. In Stoke Gabriel, on the Dart, Church Orchard offers a pleasant place to wander and sit with a children's play area, a link to the mill pool and riverside, its also known as the focus for the village's wassail celebrations. Pruning courses have been held to encourage local people to manage the trees and thanks to the Countryside Agency's Countryside Stewardship grant scheme, the parish council receives some help towards this. This is in addition to the apples, most of which are collected and used locally for cider. The windfall eaters and cookers are taken by local folk for a pie or two.

In Devon and Cornwall, most local authorities and countryside services will help with advice and usually provide trees or cash if local people propose to take on an old or plant a new orchard for the community. Much more than an open space, successful community orchards involve as many people in the local community as possible in caring for, using and enjoying them. They are a blessing to those with small or no gardens, a social open space and can

be the focus of celebrations, Apple Days, barbeques, wildlife days, apple pressing days, conservation tasks and used as outdoor classrooms.

If you need inspiration, visit Stoke Gabriel's Wassail next January, see Lustleigh crown their May Queen on 6<sup>th</sup> May or take your cue from those who have helped to create new orchards at Kingsbridge school and in Ashprington, near Totnes.

### **Ashprington Orchard**

Seven years ago local residents of Ashprington., near Totnes decided to plant their own new orchard at the bottom of newly created playing fields and a children's play area. Around fifty trees were planted – all of local varieties and many were bought in memory of a loved one, as a gift or to celebrate a birth.

Enthusiastic parishioners and the Playing Field Group - who plant new trees and mulch around each tree every year, are still looking after the orchard and field. Local residents Jay Green and Alison Williams encourage everyone to use and enjoy the orchard and are hoping to plan a village wassail next year. As a community orchard all parishioners are welcome to visit and taste the developing results!

### **Growing Apples for Teacher?**

Catching them young – Kingsbridge Primary School planted its own traditional orchard on 28<sup>th</sup> February. The trees for the school's millennium orchard were provided by Kingsbridge Women's Institute. Members helped the children plant Sugar Loaf, Farmer's Glory, Pigs Nose and other Devon apple trees together with Dittsham Ploughman Plum trees. The organiser of this project, Kathleen Trute and member of the Women's Institute commented, 'as both the children and the trees grow, our orchard heritage will be enjoyed by future generations'.

## **Devon Apples Given Royal Seal of Approval**

Traditional Devon apples could soon be finding their way to the royal family's table. As part of this year's Jubilee celebrations, Devon's gift to the Queen is an orchard to be planted for her in the grounds of Sandringham. 76 apples – each a special Devon variety have been carefully cultivated and will be planted later in the year – to give the Queen a piece of Devon's orchard heritage as a tribute in Jubilee year.

Schools throughout Devon have been involved too and in the process have been learning about some of the rare traditional varieties of apples in the country. Set the task of finding out more about and illustrating apples to be planted in the royal orchard, children have been researching old varieties and making a link to traditional orchards. The best illustrations will be chosen to be included in a book for the Queen and the Schools whose illustrations are chosen will all receive their own Devon apple tree to plant in their grounds.

Closer to home, it is hoped to plant an identical orchard containing the seventy varieties of trees somewhere in Devon. A location has to be decided but it will be open to the public and could form an invaluable reference collection for anyone wishing to see and compare many of our traditional local varieties.

We will let you know when a location has been decided, but in the meantime, congratulations to Kevin Croucher at Thornhayes who is producing the royal apple trees. You can catch a glimpse of Her Majesty's apple trees if you come to our Annual Gathering in April!

## **Sweets from the freezer**

If, thanks to borrowing Orchard Link's press, you have containers of lovely fresh apple juice as well as apples and blackcurrants from the orchard and garden, you might like to give this intriguing recipe a try! Amazingly it works and could also give older children something to do over those Easter holidays...

### **Apple & Blackcurrant Pastilles**

*Makes about 750g*

600g cooking apples  
150g blackcurrants (frozen are fine)  
150ml apple juice, cider or water  
500g granulated sugar  
juice of 2 lemons  
½ tspn mixed spice

Lightly oil a 20cm square tin. Prepare the blackcurrants, chop the apples – there is no need to core or peel – and put them in a pan with the juice, cider or water. Cover and cook gently until the pulp is soft enough to sieve.

Strain the puree into a clean, preferably non-stick pan, and add the sugar, lemon juice and spices. Simmer the puree steadily, stirring it often, until it is very thick. It is ready when a spoon drawn through the mixture leaves a permanent groove.

Spread the paste in the prepared tin and leave it to set for at least 24 hours. Then turn it out on to a tray dusted with granulated sugar. Leave it to dry for another 24 hrs before cutting it into individual sweets. Flat squares and cubes are traditional shapes for pastilles, but using a set of canapé cutters, circles, ovals and many more shapes are possible.

Dredge the pastilles in sugar and let them dry completely over several days in an airing cupboard before packing them.



## Market Gardening in the Tamar Valley

As reported in the last Summer's edition of this News, a project is underway in the Tamar Valley to research and record the Tamar Valley's history of market gardening and its lasting impact on the areas landscape. The Tamar Valley has a strong tradition of market gardening. In its heyday, the Valley was covered with orchards and plots growing daffodils, strawberries and cherries. Today, although a fraction of the size, the industry lives on.

Led by the Tamar Valley Service and Calstock Development Trust, the project will research the history of the industry, including its contribution to the social and geographical development of the area, and will survey the features remaining in the landscape today such as orchards, daffodils, glasshouses and packing sheds.

The Cornwall Archaeological Unit is giving technical support to the project including a comprehensive history of market gardening over the last 200 years using map evidence, which will be presented as digital maps. They will also help to write a Management Plan to ensure the survival of these features and to set out methods to assist the survival and expansion of the remaining horticultural industry.

A steering group of knowledgeable local people has been established and consultants are carrying out community based survey and research work. A number of people have now come forward to be volunteers and are helping with a range of work from mapping out in the field to gathering oral history. All this consultation and field work is due for completion by June 2002, and the Management Plan by August. In the meantime if you would like to find out more about the project or would like to be a volunteer (training will be given) contact the Tamar Valley Service on 07822 610676.

## New Legislation Helps Protect Orchards

New legislation in force from 1<sup>st</sup> February will mean that permission may need to be sought to remove orchards. The wide ranging Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) regulations will apply to all uncultivated or semi natural areas of land, which includes grassland with tree cover, such as orchards, parkland and wood pasture. The new EIA legislation applied by DEFRA seeks to protect areas of special importance to the landscape and wildlife but does not apply to farmland under full cultivation.

The legislation will make landowners consider the environmental effects of say, land reclamation, draining wetlands or cleaning trees and scrub. It therefore will have an effect upon those who own traditional orchards if owners wish to really intensify planting, clear large areas of scrub, infill a pond or ditch or spread large quantities of fertiliser or lime. In these cases an application to DEFRA will need to be made and could be modified or refused. Most who own a traditional old orchard with the wildlife it contains will welcome the new legislation as we do – as at last old orchards are being recognised as landscape features wildlife areas worthy of managing and conserving.

For a free leaflet giving full details of the new EIA legislation call 08459 556000 or write to:

DEFRA Publications

Admail 6000

London

SW1A 2XX

Or email at: [defra@iforcegroup.com](mailto:defra@iforcegroup.com)



## **Mulling on the Bramley**

*When new member Celia Steven recently joined us we discovered that we had a link to perhaps the most famous apple of them all. So a warm welcome to Orchard Link Celia and here she tells her story.*

Being the great grand-daughter of Henry Merryweather has made me realise what an amazingly observant young man he must have been. He could obviously spot a good apple a mile off, and did so when he was only seventeen years of age; result – the Bramley apple, the most well loved apple this country has ever produced and justly named the King of Covent Garden. Not only that but it is still commercially viable today and used in households everywhere because of its flavour and versatility. Bramley Apple Pie is a firm favourite as a sweet dish, even more delicious with a generous dollop of clotted cream! And there are many other varied and diverse products enhanced by its unique flavour, not least some of the East Coast ciders.

In 1872 I became aware there was a bit of a problem, which arose when it joined the foreign market. The bureaucrats of Brussels had, in their wisdom, allowed no suitable category in their regulations for this great apple. Something had to be done about this and, with a healthy dash of persuasion in listing the aid of various bodies of people, a statement was finely made by the Minister of Agriculture Mr Godber confirming Government support, and this matter was corrected. He also planted a Bramley tree in a new orchard in Nottinghamshire, with a plaque marked the event.

The original Bramley tree still flourishes in a garden in Southwell, home of the Bramley's, the tree now being nearly 200 years old. Bramley apples are freely marketed and I think Henry, or the old 'General' as he was popularly known, would be justly proud if he could see this apple still going from strength to strength, and as



and as popular as ever.

Since I retired to the West Country, and now live in Buckland Monachorum, where I have been made so welcome, I am able to continue the work I started in 1972. Not only that but I have been able to get involved in other aspects of apples and their uses. One such project is the establishment of a Community Orchard at St Andrew's School in the village. This was started by the planting of a Bramley apple tree in their grounds. The orchard is both educational and environmental in the concept and enables children to get involved in all aspects of fruit growing, its value for the future, and gives them an awareness of the heritage behind Tamar Valley fruit production. A Bramley letter – boxing walk assisted in raising the funds needed.

Wonderful chefs abound in the South West and they have created many fabulous dishes to feature on their menus, making full use of the unique flavour and versatility of the Bramley and demonstrating further why this apple is so famous amongst people everywhere who enjoy good food.

The use of Bramley's in all these many products ensures continuing supplies from the fruit growers of this country and helps to safeguard orchards for the future, so important today.

## **Rabbiting On**

If you or your friends have rabbits – give them some stout pieces of apple wood when you prune your trees. Apparently the densely grained wood is ideal for rabbits to gnaw on, and helps to keep their ever growing teeth short. It may even save on expensive and regular trips to the vets to keep rabbits teeth filed down!

# WHAT'S ON?



## **March:**

Thursday 7<sup>th</sup>

Those with orchards in North Devon are welcome to join in with 'Save our Orchards' group meetings. Held at the Old Coaching Inn, South Molton – 7.30pm. Call Michael Gee for details on 01271 374180

Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> and Sunday 24<sup>th</sup>

Orchards and Grafting course at Keverall Farm, near Looe. Led by Oak Wright. £50. Tel: 01503 250135

## **April:**

Saturday 11<sup>th</sup>

Join North Devon 'Save our Orchards' group members on a tour around Sheppey's Cider, Taunton. Cost £5 – Booking essential. Contact Jane Schofield, Leusdown Farm, Black Dog, Crediton, Devon, EX17 4QQ

Saturday 13<sup>th</sup>

Don't miss Orchard Link's Annual Gathering at Kentisbeare. See the front cover for details.

## **May:**

Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup>

North Devon 'Save our Orchards' group meeting (see March 7<sup>th</sup> for details).

Mayday Monday 6<sup>th</sup>

See the May Queen being crowned in Lustleigh's old parish orchard. Around 2pm.

## **July:**

Saturday 13<sup>th</sup>

Orchard Link will have a display at the South West Woodfair. A day long event at Roadford Lake featuring stalls, displays and activities to do with wood – from wood turning to tree felling. We would welcome a hand on the stall and the chance of seeing members there.

## **Celebrate apple trees for the Jubilee**

As many local communities plan to plant a young tree for the Jubilee this year, Parish Tree Wardens in the South Hams are highlighting some of the most distinctive and beautiful trees alive in their patch during Jubilee year. The idea is to create a snapshot in time of favourite trees and to inspire others to plant and care for young trees so that they will grow to be local landmarks.

Community Tree Officer, Julia Pugh is inviting everyone to submit photos of a favourite local tree for a collage poster to be compiled by the end of the year. As the South Hams is rightly famous for its traditional orchards, Julia is hoping that some photos of apple trees can be included. So, to all Orchard Link members who live in the South Hams, please get snapping and let's ensure that some of the districts wonderful old apple trees are celebrated in the Jubilee Tree poster too!

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## **Last Chance To Prune.**

By the time you read this there will only be a week or two left in which to prune apple and pear trees. So if you're sitting at the breakfast table reading this, you now know what to do for the rest of the day!

More seriously, if you do only have limited time, do some minimum pruning tasks. The first thing to think about is the 3D's. any wood that is dead, diseased or damaged should be removed, where practical. The only disease you will be able to see during the pruning season is canker, recognisable as flaky or warty growths on the bark. These growths can eventually girdle the branch, killing everything above the canker. So, where possible it is really worth pruning out the canker to stop it spreading: this happens particularly in wet weather and during the spring.

After the 3 D's, the next priority is the removal of rubbing plus crossing branches. While doing this, it is worth including branches that will be crossing during this summer's growth. Canker often develops where branches rub together. Areas that are over crowded can be thinned allowing more space for healthy apples to develop.

After cutting out rubbing and crossing branches, the next priorities are branches growing into the centre of the tree, general shaping of tree, thinning of overcrowded spurs and pruning to encourage spur formation. As you can see from this list, it is important to produce a healthy, well shaped tree before worrying too much about pruning for fruit production.

Often people ask me whether it is really worth pruning; well I would say yes wouldn't I, but it is true. The first reason, particularly looked for formative training of young trees, is to produce a stable tree with well spaced

branches. The second reason is to remove canker, and to remove conditions in which scab and canker thrive. The third reason is to produce larger and healthy fruit.

And finally, a reminder to keep the grass from growing around your young trees; tests have shown (sounds like a washing powder advert) That leaving grass growing around young trees severely affects their growth. Herbicides, mulch mats or patient hand weeding will do the trick. Not long now until pink and white blossom appears, beautiful in its own right and promising so much

Ben Pike, Devon Orchard Services.

## **Advice for Tamar Orchard Owners**

If you live in the Tamar Valley area and would like advice on establishing or restoring an old orchard, the Tamar Orchard Volunteers can help.

Organiser, Sheila Camplin has years of experience from her own and working in other orchards and is happy to offer advice on planting new apple trees, pruning older trees or establishing hedges around your orchard. Call her on 01822 833804

## **Keep in Contact**

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Devon.

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Email- [trudy.turrell@south-hams-dc.gov.uk](mailto:trudy.turrell@south-hams-dc.gov.uk).

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