

ORCHARD LINK *NEWS*



Apple pressing at West Alvington Primary School

There must be a few thousand gallons of cider bubbling away in the South Hams - not to mention the freezers bulging with frozen apple juice - following the record use of Orchard Link's pressing equipment this autumn. Some of the juice that didn't get frozen was produced at West Alvington Primary School on 6th November - the pressing was part of a day about using the natural environment that was organised by EcoActive. The apples were collected from local orchards by children, parents and friends, pressed in the school playground, and each child drank that juice as soon as it was in their bottle!

As well as being introduced to the process of turning apples into juice the children participated in washing apples and feeding them into the mill, building the cheese, tightening the press and watched the juice being collected and poured into their own bottles.



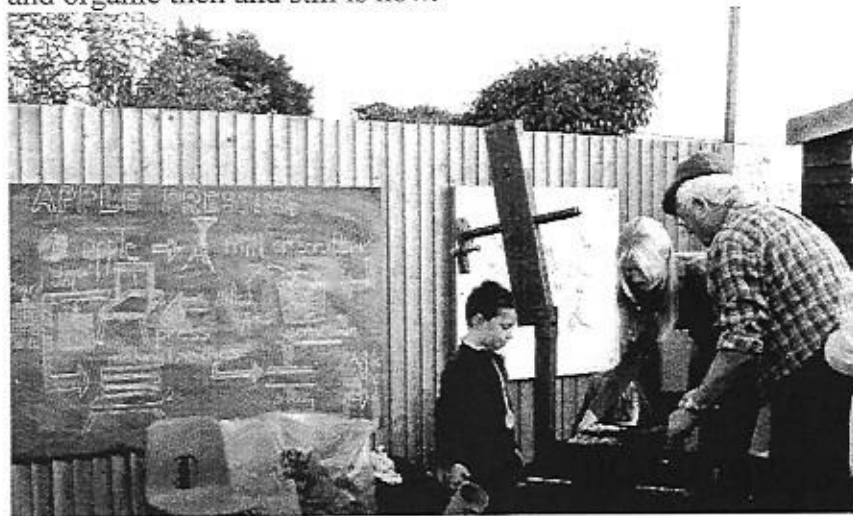
Author Peter Cowper keeps a close eye on proceedings

In charge of the press that afternoon was Jack Rhymes, a long time cider maker who lives in West Alvington. The Kingsbridge Gazette (23rd November 2007) reported the event under the headline "Back to basics lesson for children shows life's simple pleasures". And, from the photo in the paper of a cheese being built, the pleasure was evident in the faces of the two children working under Jack's supervision.

Catherine and I enjoyed the afternoon as we supervised the milling operation. Every child fed in a few apples each. The milled apples then went to other children who were working the press with Jack, whilst adults from the school and EcoActive workers organised the

filling of bottles. There was no hesitation in drinking the 'locally produced' juice, and bottles were topped up so there was some to take home at the end of the school day.

Jack was impressed with the milling done by the Orchard Link's mills which helps speed up the pressing. The children were impressed with the way the juice poured out of the press. We were impressed by the fact that the way apples are pressed in Devon has changed so little over so many long years. It was local, sustainable and organic then and still is now.



Apple pressing on the blackboard

There are an increasing number of experienced local cider makers like Jack Rhymes who are in contact with Orchard Link. Another, Mr Pearce, helped on the Orchard Link stall at Kingsbridge Farmers Market. They and Orchard Link can form a direct link to a tradition that 'fell out of fashion' but which, left alone, has remained – local, sustainable and organic, even though it doesn't have a certificate!

Peter Cowper

Peter thinks that there is an opportunity for schools to organise similar events either like the West Alvington one or like the one organised in 2006 by Diptford Primary School PTA so if you know of a school in or near the South Hams that might be interested contact Orchard Link: info@orchardlink.org.uk

What's on?

Contacts:- **Orchard Link** events call 07792 664710.

Orchards Live events (North Devon area) call Jane Schofield 01884 861 181 or visit www.orchardslive.org.uk

APRIL

Saturday 12th - Lectures at **RHS Rosemoor** by apple expert Barrie Juniper:-

11am - 'The mysterious origin of the English apple'- a tale of travels along the silk road in search of our apples ancestors;

2.30pm - 'The Tradescant orchard in the Bodleian library'- learn about the Tradescant family -17th century nurserymen and see amazing old coloured prints. Special rates of £4 to Orchards Live members- call Orchards Live for details.

Saturday 19th -Top grafting course with **Orchards Live** at **Thornhayes Nursery** near Cullompton. Learn to graft onto an established tree or create a family tree with different apple varieties on one tree: £10.

JUNE

Saturday 7th Orchard Moth Watch: Come and see how many moths species can be found in **Holbeton's** community orchard - with moth lamps and expert guidance from Roy McCormack of **Devon Moth Group**. Meet at 8pm in the orchard (signed from Holbeton village hall where you can park), finish late. There will be a break for hot chocolate and cakes in the village hall. Adults £3, children £1.50, refreshments extra, no need to book. An **Orchard Link** event.

JULY

Sunday 13th Orchard Link Annual Gathering: visit member Sue White's orchard in Chudleigh Knighton, then lunch and on to Brimblecombe near Dunsford in the afternoon. See page 9.

Sunday 27th Orchard Link: Pruning orchards in summer- learn to renovate old apple trees and improve fruit production at a hands-on course with Charles Staniland near **Totnes**.

10am-1pm. £16 or £12 to Orchard Link members. Booking essential, call Charles on 01364 653169.

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The PTES Traditional Orchard Survey

The following letter has been received from the South Hams Tree Officer:-

"Having been either previously or currently involved with the PTES Traditional Orchard survey, I am writing to let you know about an additional orchard project that is happening in Devon that will be of interest. The Cider with Roadies project, together with Natural England, is investigating the use of apples from Devon's traditional orchards. They are planning on holding a meeting later this year for orchard owners to discuss economically viable ways to use apples and thus help to conserve the orchard habitat.

"I have attached a revised orchard owners' questionnaire for you, together with a letter explaining the aims of project. If you are still undertaking PTES surveys and require the revised questionnaire together with copies of the letter to give to orchard owners, please let me know and I will put copies in the post to you. In the meantime, please make any orchard owners you meet aware of this project and of the future meeting."

Continued on p6

Miss Polly Stone, Tree Officer, South Hams District Council,
Follaton House, Plymouth Road, Totnes TQ9 5NE
polly.stone@southhams.gov.uk
Tel: 01803 861382 Fax: 01803 861478

Anita Burrough, Orchard Project Officer, People's Trust for
Endangered Species & Mammals Trust UK, 15 Cloisters House, 8
Battersea Park Road, London SW8 4BG
anita@ptes.org www.ptes.org Tel: 020 7498 4533

We have received a notification in similar vein from Cider with
Roadies also promising "... a meeting later this year for orchard
owners to look at ways of helping traditional orchards 'pay their
way'." If you would like to attend please contact Adam Montague
email:adam@ciderwithroadies.org or telephone 01392 881400.

We have included the revised forms as the centre pages of this
newsletter. If you do not want them just tear them out. Ed.

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A message from Trudy Turrell, Orchard Link Chairman

In late May my partner and I are expecting a new addition to our family, a brother or sister for our daughter Freya, and I will take a year's maternity leave from many of my Orchard Link duties. Ben Pike, vice chairman will become acting chairman and other members of our hard working committee will take on additional tasks. At the same time, we are very sad to lose Jacquie Sarsby who has tirelessly written and produced much of Orchard Link News and masterminded fabulous social events and recent annual gatherings, turning get-togethers into gastronomic feasts! Jacquie has moved to Gloucestershire, but will still keep her orchard and snowdrop meadow in Blackawton, so will visit regularly and she hopes to maintain an involvement with Orchard Link.

Tony Harber will edit the newsletter and will be dependent on you for contributions, so if you have attended an Orchard Link event and would like to share your experience, if you have a story to tell about local fruit, orchards, pressing, brewing or if you would just like to suggest a subject that might be covered then contact Tony who will be delighted to hear from you. (apharber@tesco.net)

We hope to continue Jacquie's great example for social events. Colin and Mandy Speakman will help to organise future events and will need the team of volunteer cooks and helpers who have worked so well together for past events. Being involved with an event is great fun- so if you fancy being part of the team for just individual events- do give Mandy a call.

Finally a reminder that our committee meetings are open to all members so please drop in and have a glass of cider with us. Meetings are very enjoyable, held at the Church House Inn, Harberton, near Totnes, start at 7:30pm and there's lots of scope for joining in. Last year this group of volunteers worked to ensure that Orchard Link had a future and to stabilise our financial situation. If Orchard Link is to continue its success we really do need more of our members to be involved on its committee, in events and stalls and in hiring the press equipment.

The next meetings are scheduled for 30 April, 25 June and 3 September. If parking at the pub is full just follow the signs to the parish hall car park at the top of the village. Note it in your diary and come as soon as you can.

Trudy Turrell

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Gloucestershire Diary

Gloucestershire is a real orchard area. I keep seeing fragments of orchards here in the village: mature trees tucked behind old houses where they haven't sold off a garden for development. Closer to the River Severn, down in the Berkeley Vale, it's all plums and damsons, and I'm told that in places the soil is 6 feet deep. Shropshire used to be the place for plums, but there are local varieties here, not known elsewhere, and some of them have lovely names like 'Rowell's Pruin' and 'Shit Smock'! Google 'Gloucestershire plum varieties' for varieties + photos.

The other evening, I went to the Gloucestershire Orchards Group AGM which had an attendance of about 90 people. Lots of enthusiasts were there including Charles Martell (who has helped to make a collection of perry pear trees at Malvern and a mother orchard of Gloucestershire apples), Jonathan Briggs (who is the acknowledged expert on mistletoe), and Sarah Juniper, who is the daughter of Barry Juniper (who has done interesting DNA research into the origins of the European apple). Like Orchard Link, GOG were considering whether to become a charity and like us they rent out equipment. The Chairman emphasized that they didn't want to be just a club of orchard-growers, but a campaigning voice for orchards in the county. They discussed the importance of

research into the history of orchards and fruit varieties, and they are involved in a survey of wildlife in orchards. I was going to sign on for another of their events, but shortly after this I sprained my ankle, and have been hobbling about, mostly at home, ever since!

Jacquie Sarsby



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Ben Pike's Report (Orchard Link Acting-Chairman)

Brimblecombe A few weeks ago, I drove into a farmyard advertising cider for sale, walked into a large, corrugated iron-roofed barn, and my jaw dropped. In an instant I had stepped back in time. Cider has been made in this barn for 400 years and I imagine very little has changed; only the low energy light bulb gives away the present day. The wooden press is 250 years old and the pressing still done with straw. Downstairs is a wonderful collection of old cider-making equipment. Ron Barter, the owner, has invited us to visit Brimblecombes during the **Orchard Link Annual Gathering** in July (see page 4).

We also plan to visit member Sue White's orchard in Chudleigh Knighton. Sue and partner Harry also collect cider-making equipment. Lunch and talking will happen at a yet to be decided venue in the delightful Teign valley. We will send a mail-out for you to book places when the final details have been decided. Don't forget that you are entitled to two free places if you are an Orchard Link member.

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We have also been invited to help with the pressing at Brimblecombe's on Saturday, 8 November. It is a great chance for members to use some wonderful old equipment, and, of course, to buy some cider.

The Teign valley was also the setting for a grafting course last month. 14 people gathered at Ashton Village Hall to learn the finer points of how apple trees are produced. All members left with at least two trees that they had grafted. Thanks go to Adam Montague for running a most informative course. One attendee amused me by introducing me to the game of apple conkers. She grows a local variety called Hollow Core, which as the name implies allows you to place a finger through the middle of the apple. As a result her children play the rather messy game of apple conkers which I imagine doesn't need any explanation.

This year, as well as pressing apples at other people's events, Orchard Link will be holding its own pressing day at Sharpham House near Totnes, in conjunction with Sharpham Outdoors. Another cider-making course is being planned at Kevin Frost's orchard near Kingsbridge.

So there is plenty of action in the pipeline; what we need is help from members to put it all into place. With Jacquie Sarsby departing for Gloucestershire and Trudy taking maternity leave, we need your help. Please let us know what you can do to help. Tony Harber has kindly taken on the role of newsletter editor, but we are still in need of someone to help with secretarial work and also help with organising events. Otherwise, just come along to a committee meeting and see what we are up to. Orchard Link is only as good as you and I can make it!

Plans are afoot for an extensive website of Devon apples, largely due to the efforts of Adam Montague of Cider with Roadies. He has secured funding for the project, which will include a Devon Pomona, with photos of many varieties. Please let me know if you know of an unusual variety that you think should be included. There will also be descriptions of, and links to, all the appley businesses in Devon.

Sorry that I haven't written the usual "technical" article; there just seemed so many other things to say. I'll try and get back to it next issue.

Ben Pike

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Photographs on pages 1,2 &3 by Peter and Catherine Cowper.

If you would like to write something for the Newsletter, tell the editor:
Tony Harber, telephone 01395 445392, email: apharber@tesco.net
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