

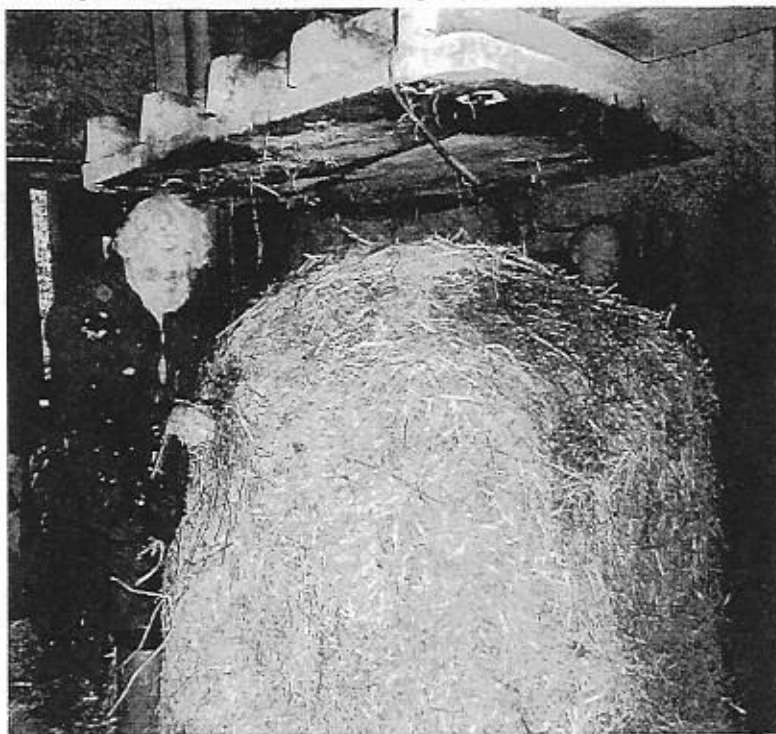
ORCHARD LINK *NEWS*



Brimblecombe Pressing Day

T Harber

Some of our members returned to Farrants Farm on a bitterly cold late November day to see Ron Barter weave his magic with apples and barley straw. The miniature haystack that you see below is packed with enough apple pulp to produce between 300 and 350 gallons of juice. It took approximately 90 minutes to build with 6 or 7 willing helpers. Ron carefully rolls barley straw around the edges and pulp is shovelled into the centre. Barley straw is used rather than the original reeds as it is softer and binds more easily. Unlike the Orchard Link presses that most of you will have used what you see here is just the first step in a lengthy process.



Ron Barter adding final touches before pressing *photos T Harber*

Next the stack is carefully pressed over a day or two to the level in the second photograph realising 250 to 275 gallons of juice. The press is raised and the corners of the stack are cut using the tool in Ron's hand. The compressed pile is dense and tough and cutting into it is no easy task. The barley stems quickly blunt the cutting edge which must be resharpened frequently. The cut corners approximate to one half of the original pile and each is carefully fitted into position on top of the remaining pile to make a neat stack of double the height. Pressing is then resumed and a further 60 to 75 gallons produced. Ron currently does one pressing a week although two would be possible.



The stack after initial pressing and the corner cutting tool

Ron was asked why the apples in the many sacks that he had ready for future pressings were in such good condition this late in the season. He believes it is partly due to the cider varieties having higher acidity and higher tannins (his orchards have Browns, Fair Maid of Devon and Slap ma Girdle amongst other varieties) and partly because the orchards are 500 feet above sea level and so the apples mature more slowly with the cooler temperatures. The mill driver is an electric motor but the mill itself is at least 90 years old and was originally steam powered. Ron revealed that he was an electrical engineer before becoming a farmer.

All of Ron's orchards are organic with Soil Association approval for the past six years and he has recently acquired a pasteuriser with a view to adding bottled apple juice to his varieties of Brimblecombe cider (which include two vintage ciders). We would like to thank Ron and his wife for inviting Orchard Link back again to watch and in some small degree to help out with the process.

Orchard Link Membership Questionnaire

Your chance to win one year free membership!

Included with this newsletter is a short questionnaire on current Orchard Link events and membership benefits. Please take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire and return in the stamped addressed envelope provided. This will greatly assist your committee in planning future events and membership benefits. All returned completed questionnaires will be entered into a draw with the winner receiving one year free membership.

Your views are important for the future of Orchard Link

Orchard Events in the Local Area

Orchard Link Spring/Summer 2009 Events

To find out more information about any Orchard Link event check our website www.orchardlink.org.uk or contact Ben Pike on 07792 664710. For pruning courses contact Charles Staniland 01364 653169 c.staniland@lineone.net

Date	Day	Event
18 th March	Wed 7:30pm	Orchard Link Committee meeting Church House Inn, Harberton
13 th May	Wed 7:30pm	Committee meeting venue as 18 March
15 th May	Friday	Orchard Link Blossom & Cider Evening, Ugborough, nr Ivybridge 18:30 start. Contact G Arnison 01752 895034.
14 th June	Sunday Details to Members in May	Orchard Link Annual Gathering: Underhill Discovery Centre and Member's Orchard Beeson, Beesands near Kingsbridge.
8 th July	Wed 7:30pm	Committee meeting venue as 18 March

Date	Day	Event
25 th July	Sunday 10am-1pm	Summer Pruning Course Totnes Area £12 members; £16 non-members
14 th August	Friday	Fowelscombe (nr Ugborough). Evening Orchard walk and talk + see appropriate renovation. Supper available. Numbers limited, call Mick Godfrey on 01548 821156 before 1 st August.
9 th September	Wed 7:30pm	Orchard Link Annual General Meeting Church House Inn, Harberton
19 th September	Saturday	Apple Festival at Cornworthy (midway between Totnes and Dartmouth)
13 rd October	Saturday	Orchard Link at Kingsbridge Farmers Market
11 th October	Sunday	Orchard Link at Avon Mill Garden Centre's Autumn Festival, Loddiswell
18 th & 19 th October		Orchard Link at the Sharpham Festival

Tavy & Tamar Apple Group Events

Contact Brian Lamb 01822 841309 email briankay1@tiscali.co.uk

25 th July	Sunday	Summer Pruning Day, £12
8 th & 22 nd August	Saturdays 10am-3pm	Apple Machinery Training Days. Learn to use crushing, pressing and pasteurisation equipment. £5
3 rd October	10am-3pm	Tavistock, Apple Juicing Day, Guildhall Square
10 th October	1:30-5pm	Bere Apple Fest, Bere Ferrers Church Hall, free admission

The **Agroforestry Research Trust** has a series of events including conducted tours of its forest garden at Dartington. It also has a comprehensive website which is well worth browsing. 2009 tour dates still available at the moment of writing are Sunday 21 June, Saturday 25 July, and Sunday 23 August and 27 September. For contact details see the Agroforestry Research Trust advertisement on page 7.

Brogdale and the National Fruit Collection *T. Harber (using Brogdale website info)*

Orchard Link is a Friend of the Brogdale Horticultural Trust whose aim is to protect and promote the National Fruit Collections and inspire a love and appreciation of fruit in all its many forms. The National Fruit Collections are held at Brogdale Farm just outside Faversham, Kent. It became the home to the National Fruit Collection in 1952 and consists of 160 acres of orchard holding over 4,000 fruit varieties: around 2,000 apples, 500 pears, 280 cherries, 300 plums, 50 hazelnuts, 150 gooseberries, 200 currants (black, red, white and pink), as well as small collections of vines, quinces, medlars and apricots. The Collections are our national fruit heritage: the varieties that have been grown in gardens and orchards for centuries and which have shaped local communities and our landscapes. They are a living gene bank, which forms part of the UK's contribution to global food security and both a national and international genetic resource.

The Collections belong to Defra. The University of Reading in partnership with FAST (Farm Advisory Service Team) provide scientific curation and horticultural management. When it assumed control of the Collections, the University said that it planned to research molecular characterisation and noted the potential for the selection of genotypes (the genetic constitution of the fruit) suitable for use in a changed climate." FAST, which gives technical support to fruit growers, is responsible for day-to-day maintenance of the Collections.

Brogdale Collections provide the public facilities which include access to the Collections through guided walks. These take place regularly throughout the day lasting about an hour. Knowledgeable guides take you to the most interesting and attractive parts of the orchards at any particular season. Alternatively there are self-guided walks. The farm buildings have been converted to accommodate local rural craft and produce businesses and refreshments are available.

Orchard Link, through its status as a Friend, holds two tickets for entry to the Collections. These are available to members on a first come, first served basis. If you do borrow them to visit the collection please return them promptly on your return. Perhaps you'd like to record your impressions and photographs in an article for the Newsletter.

The tickets are also good for free entry to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Bedgebury Arboretum, one of the finest collections of conifers in the world, and a number of other venues including Rosemoor.

Vigo

T. Harber

Navigator had spent the best part of an hour finding a way through the spider's web of back roads that is the Blackdown Hills and we were now heading safely towards Honiton and lunch. Suddenly I braked violently and swerved off the road into a factory site. "Why?" she demanded. "Vigo" I said. After a moment's thought she hazarded a guess: "Orchard Link?" "Well, yes. But it'll only take a moment." With a sigh she reached for her newspaper. Inside Vigo I introduced myself to Amanda Farmer. She kindly gave me a tour, showing me all the latest equipment for small orchard owners for juice and cider. I was particularly interested in the new centrifugal mill (discussed in more detail below) a bright yellow machine manufactured from food grade plastic and capable of milling 1,000 kg of apples an hour and a Hydropress which uses mains water pressure to produce juice virtually effortlessly.

vigo

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Then back up to the spacious office area. On one side a display of the latest books on apples and cider. On the other a display of publications from Orchard Link, Orchards Live and Somerset CC's Orchard Newsletter which included all of our recent newsletters. Very impressive, Vigo's goal is to provide their customers with the most up-to-date information so they will be able to get the best results from their purchases. But I also got the clear impression that Vigo is as dedicated to the preservation of orchards as we are. And in only about 30 minutes or so I was back on the road.

If you've not been to Vigo's new quarters on Dunkeswell airport it is well worth while. Though it is easier to look at their comprehensive website and of course they have postal catalogues available. One item we have discussed at Committee is the new Speidel centrifugal mill. No longer stainless steel but plastic!! So we asked Vigo "Why the change?"

Vigo responded:-

The new mill is a vast improvement over the old Italian mills for the following reasons:

1. Using the new mill with motor running, whole tubs of apples can be poured into the hopper at once. With the old mills jamming was a constant problem.
2. The new mill's 2.2kW motor is significantly more powerful and is proving much more reliable than the old Italian mills.
3. The pomace is chopped finely, excellent for maximum juice yields from the new Hydropress as well as more traditional basket and rack & cloth presses – giving juice yields of up to 60-75% depending on the variety and ripeness of the fruit.
4. The new mill has no sharp edges and is much safer to use. The old mills were poorly finished and indeed often needed work by Vigo before they were sold on. The new mills are easy to clean – the curved edges of the hopper mean that there are no dirt traps.
5. The food grade plastic used in the Speidel mill is recyclable and the manufacturer has a strong commitment to good environmental practice.

By virtue of items 1 and 2 the time and effort spent on milling fruit is significantly decreased – the mill's capacity is 1000 kilos of fruit per hour. Last year Vigo sold over 90 of the new mills and had nothing but positive feedback about their efficiency and ease of use.

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The Apple Doctor

B. Pike

Instead of the usual technical article, here are some questions and answers that arose at the recent Orchard Link open meeting in Harberton.

Q: My young apple trees on M25 rootstock are predominantly growing upright with little fruit. What should I do?

A: Firstly, trees on an M25 rootstock (large or standard trees) might only start to produce a significant quantity of fruit when they are approaching 10 years old. It is good practice not to encourage too much fruit when the trees are young so that the tree can put its energy into producing strong growth.

Secondly, consider the natural habit of the variety you are growing. Many varieties are naturally upright when young, becoming more spreading as they age. Although the normal habit of apple trees is to produce most fruit on more horizontal branches, some varieties will produce good crops on darts or brindles (similar to spurs) originating from upright branches.

If you still think that you need to encourage your trees to spread outwards, pruning to outward facing buds or branches will help. You can also tie down branches to a peg in the ground, but think whether you ever saw a mature tree that was not producing enough fruit because it was growing too upright.

Q: I have a lot of canker in my orchard. How should I deal with this?

A: Firstly, the choice of variety is very important; many varieties, particularly local ones, show a good deal of resistance to canker. If you have planted a tree that has a lot of canker, it might be worth replacing the tree, as it will not prosper, and will also help to spread canker to other trees in your orchard.

However there are steps you can take to reduce the amount of canker you have. The first and most obvious step is to prune out any canker, making sure to disinfect your secateurs regularly. Canker is a fungal disease that thrives in damp conditions, so any steps you can take to reduce the humidity around the trees will improve the situation. This could be keeping grass short and pruning over-crowded trees to allow good airflow through the trees. Canker is also thought to thrive on badly drained and acid soils, so liming and

attention to drainage may improve the situation. Soft sappy growth produced by high nitrogen feed is more susceptible to canker.

If you spray for scab, this will have a secondary effect on canker. Likewise, the cultural controls above will also have an ameliorative effect on scab.

Q: Should I be painting pruning cuts with a wound paint?

A: Current thinking says no, apart from members of the *Prunus* genus i.e. plums, nectarines, peaches and cherries. This is largely to exclude spores of silverleaf disease. What is more important is to make sure that pruning cuts are clean. A sharp pruning knife can be used to tidy up cuts that are ragged, such as when pruning a branch that has broken.

Q: Should I be clearing grass from underneath my trees? If so, how can I do this?

A: For young trees and those on more dwarfing rootstocks, this is definitely good practice. Research has shown that young trees establish much better when an area around the trees is kept clear of grass. This is because grass competes with trees for nutrients and water.

Hand weeding could be employed, but will you keep up with the job during those busy summer months? Alternative methods are deploying a mulch such as woodchips or manure, or spraying carefully with a herbicide such as glyphosate, but the most effective and least time consuming method is to fit a mulch mat. These are made from woven polypropylene or from biodegradable materials such as wool waste.

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I discovered a slim volume in the Sidmouth Public Library: *Child of the War, An Evacuee in Devon* by Wally Herbert published by Third Age Press. In 1940 nine-year old Wally was evacuated from a London suburb to Cheriton Fitzpaine, to a farm when the horse was still the primary motive power and wheat was harvested and stored in ricks (carefully thatched) awaiting arrival of the traction engine for threshing. The following extract relates to the apple harvest and is quoted with Mr Herbert's permission:-

"There were three apple orchards at Peach Hayne consisting altogether of about five or six acres. Most of the trees were old: they were never pruned and some were very tall indeed. They were a mixture of types . . .

"As summer reached its height, apples began to fall; it was a time for the children to equip themselves with buckets and engage in the very tedious task of 'picking up apples'. Sometimes the long grass was carpeted with green fruit; as my fingers grasped the slippery, sometimes rotting, apples I would disturb a wasp, earwig, spider or slug. I hated it. When our buckets were filled we emptied them into old fertiliser bags that were stacked against tree trunks. As autumn progressed the number of filled bags would grow until some trees had as many as 12 to 13 bags of putrefying fruit propped up underneath them.

"Cidermaking was a just reward to the monotonous task of picking up decaying apples. As soon as the butt cart returned from the road with the empty milk churns we would go into the orchards and load the bags of rotting apples which were surrounded by wasps. The bags would be stacked in the barn and the apple crusher cleared of hen droppings. The barn engine would be cranked up, the driving belt manoeuvred across the pulleys and the crusher would begin its yearly ritual.

Strong men would lift each bag to empty the apples into a hopper at the top of the machine. With a series of magical shakes the machine would grind the apples to a pulpy mess which would issue from a chute for collection by bucket. At this stage my job was to hurry out to the field where mangels were growing and seek out two beetroots which had been specially planted. These were passed through the crusher to help give the finished product a reddish-brown glow.

"The next step in the process was to lay the crushed apples on the pound which stood in a lean-to shed adjacent to the barn. The pound consisted of a wooden bed, about six foot square with a screw perhaps four inches across and rising seven feet. Straw was laid on the wooden bed and a layer of crushed fruit placed on top, then the ends of the straw were folded inwards to hold in the apples and a fresh layer of straw laid; then more fruit and more straw until the narrowing pyramid reached the height of about six feet.

"At that point a wooden platform would be revolved down the central screw until it firmly settled on top of the pyramid. By now precious liquid was beginning to flow into a channel surrounding the pound and into a tub. At first, gentle pressure would be applied over the platform by a large spanner but as increased pressure was required to keep the liquid flowing this was replaced by a huge iron spanner about 12-feet long and four or five men would give it a half turn every hour or so. As the tub began to fill, so it would be emptied by buckets into waiting barrels and hogsheads. The process continued for a week with we children taking peeps at the tub at different times of the day to satisfy ourselves that it was not in danger of overflowing.

"Our favourite pastime was to take a clean piece of straw from the pound and suck up the juice as it swept along the channel towards the tub; it was deliciously sweet and, of course, as yet not alcoholic, but we were warned not to drink too much as in that state it was a very potent laxative.

"When the flow of juice ceased the dried-up residue on the pound was loaded onto a cart and scattered on the fields as fertiliser and the process began again until all the apples had been used.

"As the barrels were filled they were manhandled across the yard and into a corner of the old house where they fermented, yielding evil smelling foam from the bung-hole for several weeks before Mark decided that the contents were fit to drink. In an average year we filled eight or nine hogsheads (about 450 gallons), enough to provide liberal drinks for all those who called at the house or worked on the farm for 12 months. . . The year most talked about was 1939 when 26½ hogsheads were produced."

The book is still available direct from Mr Herbert at No.9 Button Street, Frome, Somerset BA11 3DR for a very reasonable £6.60 post free and if you have an interest in farming before mechanisation took over it is well worth a read.

Questionnaire The Committee is concerned that Orchard Link provides a programme of events that is of interest to members. Nothing is more embarrassing than for us to organise something and then find that nobody turns up. Please help us to get this right. We've developed a questionnaire that lists the things that we think that you might like to do and we've left plenty of space on it for you to add other ideas. It is enclosed with this newsletter together with a stamped, addressed envelope and if this isn't enough to get you dashing to the post box we are offering one year's free membership to one lucky person drawn from those who return them to us. We'll collate the information and advise you of the findings at the Annual Gathering and in a future newsletter.

The Gathering: This year's Gathering will include a tour of a member's orchard followed by a tour of Underhill Discovery Centre. Bring family and friends along to learn about sustainable farming and living, see an eco-barn built from straw bales and fitted with solar panels and enjoy lunch in the company of like-minded people. Perhaps move on to an optional cream tea at Beesands and explore the coast road to Slapton Sands and beyond. Full details/applications will be posted to Members in May.

Email addresses We are increasingly keeping in touch using emails. Our secretary finds that whenever she sends information out in this way some are always undeliverable. If members aren't receiving occasional emails from us then it is because we do not have your current email address: **please** update us. And of course if your details change in future please tell us that too.

Sheila Conversely, if your email details are correct you will have heard from Sheila O'Connor. She helps Chairman Ben Pike with routine Orchard Link business. Her husband Mark Pidgeon is an Orchard Link member. She also works with World Wildlife Fund and the Global Institute of Sustainability (based at Arizona State University (USA)) working from her home in Galmpton. Sheila, Mark and daughter Clare have a small, young orchard and access to a very old orchard plus ponies, alpacas, poultry and a handful of other animals.

Classified Ads I always enjoy my local paper's small ads so when someone mentioned storage boxes for sale it seemed a good idea for the newsletter. If you've any surplus items too good for the tip that are loosely connected with orchards send details about them to me via my email address with contact details. Similarly if there are things that you want, of course. **Note:-** Orchard Link will just provide newsletter space for these advertisements. We do not vouch for the information nor are we a party to any deals arising. Also, space is limited so we reserve the right to be selective about entries.

What, where, why & how to prune in Winter

Maggie

On a Sunday in January a group met at John Watson's farm at Orcheton Quay and later at Dick Ensor's farm at Widland, (both near Modbury) to find out more about winter pruning in the orchard.

Group members ranged from a lady with a single tree to a nurseryman and a landscaper. Charles took the group through the techniques of winter pruning, emphasising the importance of building and maintaining tree shape with a view to light and branch competition.

The orchard owners didn't seem to mind the group, with untrained eyes and newly acquired knowledge, marching towards their precious trees wielding saws and cutters. Within a few minutes we were standing knee deep amongst the debris of our efforts and feeling a little nervous, but receiving a 9 out of 10 from Charles.

One particularly pleasant surprise for me was that you don't always have to remove branches or make directional cuts to achieve the desired tree frame. It's often better to encourage branches to grow in the direction you want by tying them with twine or using weights to encourage vertical branches to grow more horizontally. This can save pruning work later on -and less to clear up!

In all, a very informative day for us all and our thanks to Charles and to Dick and John for their 'loan' of interesting orchards. We look forward to the follow up summer pruning session on Sat July 25th.

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Dartmoor National Park Orchard Scheme

Dartmoor National Park has an ongoing scheme to assist in orchard renovation. If you have a suitable site within the Park boundary you may be able to get grant aid. The following is taken from an email to Orchard Link's Tony Harber from Brian Beasley, the Park's Trees and Landscape Officer:-

Traditional apple orchards have been a feature of Dartmoor for many years. Unfortunately, in recent years their numbers have been declining and to prevent further loss the Authority are running an orchard restoration scheme. Grant aid of up to 50% is available for the creation of new orchards and re-planting existing orchards on land not entered into an existing agri-environment scheme. Anyone who is interested in planting an Orchard within the National Park should contact Brian Beasley, Trees and Landscape Officer, contact telephone number 01626 831002.

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The Bramley Apple Tree

T. Harber

2009 marks the bicentenary of the Bramley apple tree. As tradition has it, in 1809 a young girl, Mary Ann Brailsford, planted a apple pip in her garden in Southwell, Nottinghamshire from which the first Bramley tree grew. In 1846 a local butcher, Matthew Bramley, bought the cottage and garden and in 1856 a local nurseryman, Henry Merryweather, asked to take cuttings from the tree with a view to commercial sales. Bramley agreed but added the proviso that the apple bear his name - hence 'Bramley's Seedling' and the first recorded sale was in 1862. The apple was first exhibited before the RHS (Royal Horticultural Society)'s Fruit Committee in 1876 and rated Highly Commended and after that the variety won a series of

awards including a RHS First Class Certificate in 1893. In 1900 the original tree blew down in a storm but survived and is still bearing fruit today. During the early 1900s Bramleys were extensively planted and in 1944 a census of commercial orchards in England and Wales identified more than one third of six and a quarter million trees as Bramley's Seedling justifying the apple's nickname as the King of Covent Garden. Something like 90% of cooking apples sold today are still Bramleys.

As a part of the 200th Anniversary celebration of the Bramley Apple RHS Rosemoor will present the "English Apple Art Exhibition" with over 70 original watercolours by West Country artist Rosie Sanders commissioned to illustrate the RHS book "The English Apple" published in 1988. Rosie has been awarded five RHS gold medals for her botanical painting. The Exhibition runs from 3 October to 18 October 2009 at the Lecture Hall at Rosemoor and if you are artistically inclined there is a companion event "Painting English Apples: Botanical Art Masterclass with Rosie Sanders" on 17th and 18th October.

At home our single mature Bramley produced mightily, certainly over 1000lbs in a good year with individual apples weighing up to 1lb. Apple pickers will be aware of the way in which many pairs of apples grow tightly to each other and need to be picked one in each hand with a gentle twist, taking care that the earwigs who thought they'd found a good home don't drop into your hair. Well, our pairs of Bramleys would just keep right on swelling until the stems gave way, then woe betide us or our Burmese cats or free range hens who'd strayed under the tree as 8 or 12 ounce missiles came hurtling down from 40 feet up cannoning into other apples on the way to produce a positive hail of big apples.

Windfalls apart we picked the crop by hand, using my "supermarket bag" method: a long ladder and a rope of about the same length with a shopping bag tied to each end. Up I'd go, tie the ladder off then pick a bag of apples and carefully slide the rope through my hands to land the first bag gently onto the ground, which magically brought the second bag up to hand. Partner then unloaded the first bag into the laundry basket while I filled the second. She worked some distance away from the ladder as a dropped apple or two on my part could wreak havoc if they landed in the part full laundry basket not to mention onto her. Then we selected the best apples for storage, which we wiped, wrapped in paper and boxed. The remainder we pressed and used for cider. Yes Bramleys, though I had two other varieties of apples which ripened separately. I fermented and clarified the three varieties separately and then had the pleasant late winter's task of blending to taste.

References: The Bramley: A World Famous Cooking Apple by Roger Merryweather 1982 Newark and Sherwood D.C. Matthew. Wikipedia.

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If you would like to submit an article for a future newsletter or if you have comments or suggestions please do not hesitate to contact the editor: Tony Harber: 01395 445392 or email: apharber@tesco.net.

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