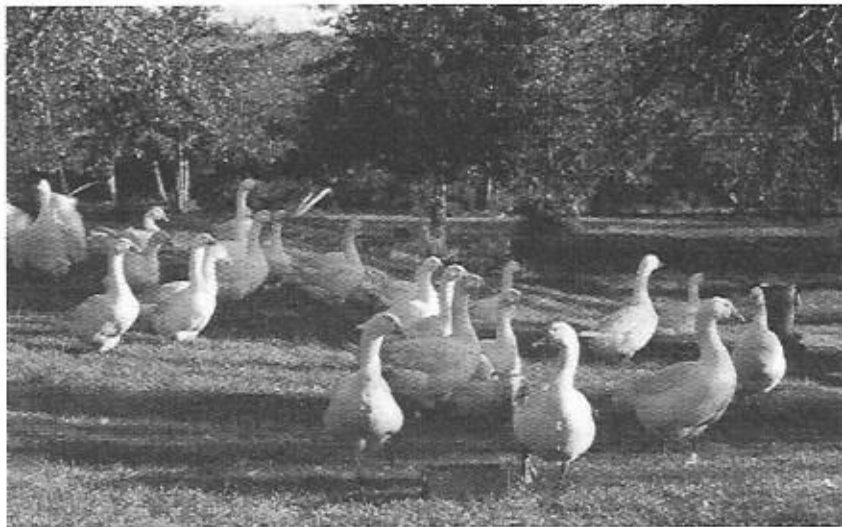


ORCHARD LINK *NEWS*

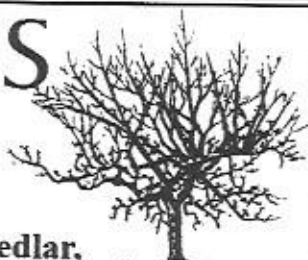


HELP SAVE YALBERTON'S ORCHARDS!

You have met these geese before: they are in the beautiful orchards on the western edge of Paignton, in the Yalberton Valley. Now the orchards are under threat. Mike Fox of Torbay Council has put forward proposals to make the valley a site for urban expansion, 'Paignton West', a new town with 800 houses where cider orchards now grow. Will you help save them? Here's how....



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EDITORIAL

At Yalberton, the cider apple orchards are like a green oasis beyond the ugly sheds of an industrial estate, creeping out over the fertile fields. Cider is still made in the old cider-house, and sold from the farmhouse. The valley was recognised in the Local Plan as an area of great landscape value, but beware! orchards are not formally protected under planning law; they are the most threatened habitat in the UK. In Devon, in the last 50 years, we have lost over 90% of our orchard land, and a great deal of it to development. Paignton, itself, once had at least 300 acres of orchards (as Tom Greeves said at the Apple Harvest Supper!)

The residents have formed the Yalberton Valley Action Group, and started to campaign to save the valley. At a Public Meeting Mike Fox admitted that the proposals to make Yalberton the 'preferred option' for an 'urban extension' were never shown to or agreed by elected councillors. They were drawn up, apparently 'behind closed doors' to enable the Council to make a bid for Government money. The Meeting was packed and could not contain all the locals who had come to protest. Unanimously they asked them to remove this proposal from the 'growth point plan', but it is still an option which the Council will be considering.

Torbay needs urban regeneration, surely not extension over the countryside at Yalberton, or at any of its possible extension sites: not more traffic gridlock, not the loss of more wildlife habitats, not flooding from more building in the valleys. Our countryside matters, and so of course do our orchards. They need our protection. The Yalberton Valley Action Group ask you to write to: Mike Yeo, Strategic Director for Community Services, or Mike Fox, Assistant Director, Environmental Policy and Strategic Planning, Community Services, both at Roebuck House, Abbey Road, Torquay, TQ2 5TF and/or Nick Bye, the Mayor, Town Hall, Castle Circus, Torquay, TQ1 3DR.

See also www.saveyalbertonvalley.org.uk

But in the long term, we must also campaign for better protection for orchards, this most threatened habitat throughout the country.

Jacquie Sarsby

WHAT'S ON?

Contacts for events:

Charles Staniland. (pruning courses) tel. 01364 653169.

Orchard Link events - see address and tel. no. on back page.

Orchards Live : Jane Schofield. tel. 01884 861181.

This is the time of year when people need their hedging skills, and we are including some courses from **Devon Rural Skills Trust**. Their Courses are £15 per day for DRST Members and £25 per day for Non-Members. For full details, booking and to check availability, ring Mick Godfrey after 6.30pm, tel. 01548 821156.

JANUARY

Wednesday 10th · Core Group Meeting at Church House Inn, Harberton: all Orchard Link members are welcome. See Ben's notice about this, below.

Saturday 13th Orchard Wassail at Stoke Gabriel. Join a traditional wassail in Church Orchard with a wassail queen, morris dancing and singing under the trees, then warm up with a barbecue and storytelling in the Scout Hall. From 6pm. Meet at the Scout Hall next to Church Orchard, Stoke Gabriel, near Totnes. Adults £2, children £1.

Saturday 13th. Hedge Steeping (Laying) at Sherford near Kingsbridge, a Devon Rural Skills Trust Course. See note at top of page for booking.

Sunday 14th. Occombe Orchard Wassailing. Join a new wassail ceremony at Occombe Farm, near Paignton. Make glass jar lanterns then join a musical lantern procession to the orchard. Bring a mug for hot soup. Apple juice and cake on sale. 3 - 6pm at Occombe Farm. Free. Call 01803 606035 for further details.

Sunday 14th. Learn to prune. A hands-on course with expert, Charles Staniland, at an orchard near Totnes. 10.30 am - 4 pm. £20, or £15 to Orchard Link members. Please call Charles Staniland (at top of What's On) to book.

Friday 19th. Wassail at Yarde Orchard near Great Torrington. N. Devon. Traditional ceremony followed by food and dancing. 6.30pm onwards. Call Orchards Live for details.

Saturday 27th. 'So you want to plant an orchard?' An overview of how to plan and plant a traditional orchard. 10.30am - 1pm at the village hall, Thelbridge, near Witheridge, N Devon. £7.50. Call Orchards Live to book.

Saturday 27th. Stone facing, at Rudolf Steiner School, Dartington: a Devon Rural Skills Course; see note at beginning of What's On.

FEBRUARY

Saturday 10th 'Learn to graft' practical course led by Kevin Croucher of Thornhayes Nursery. Landkey Village Hall, N.Devon. 10.30am - 3pm. Call Orchards Live to book.

Saturday 10th Hedge Steeping (Midlands Style) at Aish Ridge, South Brent: a Devon Rural Skills Course, see note at beginning of What's On and call Mick Godfrey.

Saturday 24th Formative pruning of young apple trees. Practical course at Landkey, N. Devon 10.30 - 3pm. Call Orchards Live to book.

Saturday 24th Hedge Steeping (Laying) at Millcombe Farm, Blackawton: a Devon Rural Skills Course, see note at beginning of What's On and call Mick Godfrey.

MARCH

Sunday 4th. Do come to 'Apples at Beeson Farm'.

Robin and Veronica Cross invite Orchard Link Members to a Spring Social Event at Beeson Farm, Beeson, near Kingsbridge. There will be a talk by Dr Jerry Cross, a leading top fruit research specialist from East Malling Research, lunch of pasties, (traditional or veg.), apple crumble, cider and apple juice, followed by judging and sampling of home-made wine, cider and apple juice. See the insert for booking. Cost: £6 per person. Numbers limited to 25, so book early! Partners welcome of course.

Another Core Group Meeting

After all our recent pleas to have more help with the running of Orchard Link, we held our first Core Group meeting at the Church House Inn in Harberton during August. It was very pleasing that about 8 people came and a number of offers of help were received. One new area of work was the offer from Warwick Harwood to research the existence of some rare varieties that were distributed by SHDC during the late 90's.

So pleased were we by the success of this meeting, that we decided that it's time for another one. The location will be the same, and the date is **Wednesday 10th January at 8pm sharp**. All members of Orchard link are invited to have a say in what we are doing, offer help, or simply drink a pint of cider.

B. P.

A HARVEST OF HELP

As I sat enjoying the wonderful Apple Harvest Supper, it seemed a fitting way not only to celebrate a bumper apple season, but all those who have volunteered their time and energy to enable Orchard Link's stalls and pressing days to happen. For only at events and farmers markets do we show a 'public face' and it is from meeting members at pressing events or stalls that so many of us have joined Orchard Link.

At farmers markets and other events where we have the press in action, people can see apples being pressed at first hand. Those with just a few windfalls can bring them to be pressed, others can sell some dessert or cooking apples on the stall and many more individuals can get a unique taste of apple juice - as fresh as it comes! We can only run these stalls if members are willing and available to volunteer to staff them and sadly at our first farmers market of the season in Kingsbridge, we had to cancel our stall as we did not have enough volunteers to run it - apologies if you brought apples to press.

On a very positive note though, thanks to help from some established members and several new ones, we were able to run pressing events at Totnes Farmers Market in October, Kingsbridge Farmers Market in November, Avon Mill Garden Festival and to

6.

have a stall and great display of local apples at Cockington Apple Day. We hope we can keep Cockington as a regular fixture - it was such a well attended event, which generated lots of interest.

So a big thank you to everyone who helped to make the season such a success. Thanks to volunteer cooks, many members enjoyed a fabulous supper and each others' company. Let's raise a glass of cider to those who made all those enjoyable events happen.

Trudy Turrell

Cockington Apple Day Food Festival

Just a word more about this immensely popular day at Cockington Court. Visitors came in their hundreds, perhaps thousands: they packed the marquee, tasting all kinds of local food, and drinking at the apple juice and cider stalls; they watched apple-pressing in a huge, ancient-looking press, and walked in the gardens, sniffing the roses, admiring the organic vegetables and, in the house and stableyard, discovering all kinds of crafts. We had a stall in the house, and a number of members manned it over the course of the day: thank you to everyone! And thank you to Ben, who had brought a box full of local varieties of apple and written their names on them, which made them less beautiful to look at, but easier to identify! JS

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OUR APPLE HARVEST SUPPER: 11th November.

What a lovely evening! Stoke Gabriel Village Hall is well run and equipped, and it was just the right size for our first Apple Harvest Supper. While we were all meeting and talking, we drank apple juice (pressed with our own press at Kingsbridge and frozen for a week) and a wine cup; we had tables decorated with autumn berries, leaves and candles, and we had some delicious dishes, whether you were a meaty person, a fish aficionado, or just liked your vegetables. And if you appreciated puddings, there were SUCH beautiful puddings to regale you! Thank you Anne Bulbulian, Ursula Letschert and Marian Perkins for making such splendid food and working so hard both beforehand and during the whole course of the evening. Thank you Michael and Elizabeth Farley, Mick Godfrey and Maureen Stagg, who all helped with setting up, arranging and laying tables. Lots of people helped and that made it particularly nice, informal and friendly. Thank you to Dr Tom Greeves who came a long way for us both to give a short, illustrated talk about the history of orchards in Devon. This was after supper when everyone was feeling well-fed, but nobody nodded off and fell into their pudding-bowl, so I think our talk went well too! I hope if you were there, you enjoyed it, and that this will not be a unique event of its kind for Orchard Link.

Jacquie Sarsby

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Tremlett's Bitter and Gin at Ranscombe

Jackie Stephens may already be well known to you if you come to Kingsbridge Farmers Market and, like her, help with the apple pressing, bottling or giving out information to apple juice drinkers. But on 17th September, O.L. members were invited to explore her orchard at Ranscombe Manor, replanted after the terrible storm of January 1990. One hears less about this storm on the media because it did not affect the South East severely, but it affected Devon badly, and Jackie's orchard was flattened, with only 5 trees left standing. Jackie wasted no time but set about replanting, and now, 15 years on, the fruit trees are well-grown, many with a fine crop of apples.

Among the trees she showed us were a Rosemary Russet, a beautifully shaped tree, bearing well, which was "a great favourite for early autumn", a Tremlett's Bitter cider apple covered in dark red fruit, a Sweet Coppin which was one of the surviving, original orchard trees, and a Catalac pear which will keep in store, Jackie told us, until April. She had planted several varieties of perry pear, which were doing very well, a Red Pear, a Blakeney's Red, a Winnell's Longdon, (not so successful) and a Gin. "The most delicious apple for juicing", Jackie told us, "is a cider apple called Frederick, a Monmouthshire apple, covered in dark red, very small apples." But my favourite tree was the Medlar, with its masses of curious fruit. Thank you to Jackie Stephens for taking us round her beautiful orchard. JS

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HARVESTLINE REPORT *Ben Pike*

As you will all know there has been a fantastic crop of apples this year. While this has been good news for most people, it has meant that many orchard owners have had problems trying to sell their apples. The Harvestline has had lots of calls from people wanting to find a home for their apples, and only one from a cider maker wishing to buy some. Last year it was the other way round! That's the beauty of dealing with a natural product.

Many people have continued with existing arrangements that Harvestline has set up over the years. Some of these have been with juice and cider maker Real Drink, set up by Steve Mittler of Stoke Gabriel. Steve has now sold his share of the business to his partner Rebecca Jack. They have been able to find plenty of orchards with unpicked apples in the Stoke Gabriel vicinity. Coupled with existing arrangements, they are no longer looking for new orchards to source apples. They will however press, pasteurise and bottle your own apples for around £1-40 a 75cl bottle. You can reach Real Drink on 01803-782217

When I attended a meeting arranged to set up a new orchard group in the Tamar Valley, I came across Cornish Orchards who run a juice and cider making business from Duloe near Liskeard. The good news is that they will pay £150 a ton for apples! They will also take a mix of cookers, cider and eating apples as long as they are reasonably clean. Although Liskeard is too far away to take a small quantity of apples, it may be worth members clubbing together to

take a quantity there. Anyone interested in doing this could call the Harvestline number (07792-664710).

One of our members has alerted us to a cider maker that has missed our radar up until now. They are Brimblecombe's from Dunsford. They make organic cider in a 14th century barn where cider has been made for the last 400 years, still using the traditional method of pressing through straw. Farm tours are available from Easter until October. We shall try to arrange an Orchard Link visit for next year.

Peter Cowper has done a great job this year looking after the presses and mills that we hire out. They are getting a little long in the tooth and we shall have to look at replacing them soon. Sadly we will have to increase the hire charges next year to finance this.



[Hedgerow management in the rain, Diptford, October 22nd.2006. The Editor got soaked to the skin and went back to toast her toes at home. Hardier souls stuck it out.]

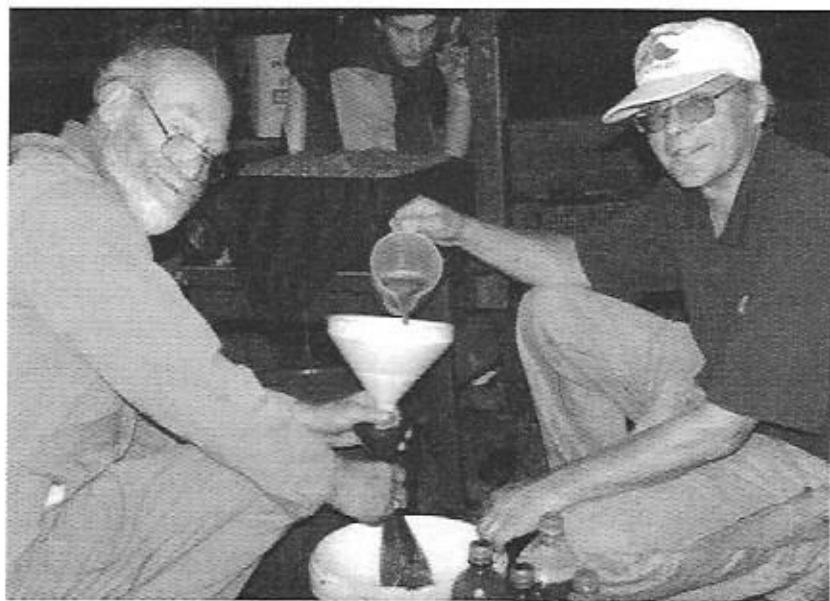
Cider Making and Juicing at Beeson Farm

This year saw the revival of cider making at Beeson Farm, which is near Beesands in South Devon. In 1998 and 1999 we planted a one acre, North-facing, hilly field with fruit trees. This included a mixture of sweet, sharp, bittersweet and bitter-sharp vintage cider apple varieties, and among them, Sweet Coppin, Sweet Alford, Broxwood Foxwhelp, Hangy Down, Brown's Apple, Scarlet Crimson, Kingston Black, Brown Snout, Frederick, Tom Putt, Pendragon, Stoke Red, Sops-in-Wine and Major. We aimed to re-establish a typical South Hams orchard landscape grazed with sheep, as a setting for the farm barns which were being converted to holiday cottages. (See www.beesonhols.co.uk) In bygone days, all the apples at Beeson Farm were pressed at Lower Farm where the old disused press still remains.

After blossoming magnificently last Spring, the orchard produced the best apple crop to date. In early September as the apples started to fall, we held a collaborative, collecting, milling and pressing event with another Orchard Link Member, who had a two acre orchard near Lannacombe Mill, replanted 15 years ago, and on three sunny afternoons, the apples were gathered in.

Vigo in East Devon had just taken delivery of 200 forty-gallon ex-urum casks from Scotland, and we ordered two along with racking pipes, hydrometer, a 225 litre ex-fruit juice container, airlocks, manicubes, bungs and yeast. Despite being delivered to Norfolk by mistake, they arrived just in time. *Real Cider Making on a Small Scale* by Pooley & Lomax indicated that we would need 800 lbs of cider apples to provide enough juice to fill one barrel. It warned us that if we put in cookers we might well have a very acidic outcome. Thinking we might be short on cider apples, we contacted Ben Pike, and he put us in touch with another orchard owner at South Pool, who was unable to harvest and use their crop: we found this a jolly useful service. There followed another two hours of picking and shaking trees.

We hired the Orchard Link mill and small press for two weekdays at a total cost of £35 and set them up in an old unconverted barn used for table tennis. The first day of milling and pressing got underway at 10.30 am and went on until 7.00pm with a 2 hour lunch break !



Our German guest family in the adjacent holiday cottage also took an active interest in the process. As advised by the Real Fruit & Drink Company at Stoke Gabriel, we poured the apple juice into the plastic fruit juice container to allow settlement overnight. Then it was racked off into plastic bins and carried to the farmhouse cellar where it was poured by jug into the barrel. This was laid horizontally above the ground on the old, farm pig stretcher/ butchering block which we found in the barn !

Five people were a good number to man the mill and press, which proved easy to use and quite adequate for our small enterprise. By the end of the second day the five of us had filled two 40 gallon casks and had very large quantities of juice for drinking and freezing. A useful point to note is that a one cubic foot block of frozen apple juice will yield 5 gallons of juice, so a 6.5 cubic foot freezer will provide a year round supply of apple juice.

The stable temperature of 15° C at night and 16 in the day in the cellar seemed ideal for the fermentation, but to guarantee success, we added a starter bottle of yeast to each cask. A vigorous fermentation is underway with the casks being topped up regularly with apple juice to ensure air contact is minimised. Before fermentation started, we measured the specific gravity of the juice

which indicated that if all the natural sugars were fermented out and no extra sugar added, we would have a cider of 5 % alcohol by volume. We have yet to take decisions on further racking and how to finish the cider for consumption. A very good time was had by all and we hope to judge the success or otherwise of our endeavours by Christmas!

*Robin, Veronica, Warwick, Jill, Geoff, Barbara, Brian,
Jennifer, Jonathan and Lilian.*

OUR FIRST YEAR AT APPLE TREE COTTAGE

Apple Tree Cottage and its two and a half acre orchard is in Stokeinteignhead in the Teign Estuary and is owned by my sister, Linda and myself, Debbie Osborne. When Ben Pike rang and suggested that we might like to write a short piece for the Orchard Link Newsletter about our first year as orchard owners, I wasn't sure we had that much to write about. Then I thought about the last year and realised I was being modest! When you spend so much time working on your land, you forget the real tangible achievements – it all just blurs into one big mass of hard work!

Our main achievements this year have been, firstly, gathering in our second harvest of apples (the first harvest was done 2 weeks after moving in, so, being late, we lost quite a few apples) and, secondly, getting an agreement with the Rural Development Service, now Natural England, under the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme. Apparently we are the 'smallest' agreement in Devon! Although the form filling was slightly daunting, the process was actually not that painful and the 'Men from the Ministry' were really human and very helpful. One of the conditions under our HLS agreement is that we will work to restore our orchard which has grown a little sad after years of neglect. It has been a bit difficult to decide on which varieties to plant when you don't know what you have as existing stock, but we think we have got the mix right. We have also decided to go organic, have registered with the Soil Association and are now in conversion.

We harvested about a tonne of apples this year – a mixture of eaters, desserts and cider apples. We don't know all the varieties – we know we have Annie Elizabeth, Ashmead Kernel, Bramley and Pig's Nose - and we have sold these to Milltop Cider Makers in Combeinteignhead, just up the road. It is very exciting to think that in a couple of months time our apples will be enjoyed by many happy cider drinkers. By next year we hope to know a little more about our tree varieties as we have sent off a few to Brogdale Horticultural Trust in Kent for identification. We fully expect many to come back as unidentifiable as there appear to be so many very local and old varieties which no-one has ever named.

In between the orchard-related work, vegetable and soft fruit growing and full time jobs, there has been the new and wondrous world of animal husbandry. We installed 9 ex-battery chickens and 4 rescue sheep onto the smallholding and up until 2 weeks ago we were congratulating ourselves on having avoided all the usual nasty bugs, worms, flies and other gross things. Then we got red mite and fly strike within the same week – tiny red spiders I can cope with but maggots.....! Anyway, all is well again now and the slightly overweight sheep are heading up to new pasture areas in the orchard, now that the apples are gathered for another year.

Debbie Osborne

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PRESSING ENGAGEMENTS

This autumn has been one of the busiest for Orchard Link's presses and mills - it has certainly kept Peter Cowper busy. He has skilfully booked the equipment from one hirer to the next and kept it all in almost constant use, so a big thank you for all that hard work and ingenuity. Peter Cowper reports that:

'The first hiring was on 12 September 06, the last will be 25 November 06. In that time, the equipment was being used on 41 days. It seems that probably a lot more than 2,000 litres of juice was produced, as well as a large, unknown quantity of cider which is on the go in barrels at the moment.

The small press was used on 17 hirings. On 2 hirings only, the mills were used. The big press was used 4 times in all. There were public pressings at Avon Mill Garden Centre, Totnes Farmers Market and Kingsbridge Farmers Market. The small press and mills were stored at the Old Rectory in South Pool and the large press was stored at Avon Mill Garden Centre. We would like to thank the owners of both places for their help in providing storage premises.'

T. T.

**Contact Orchard Link at:
ORCHARD LINK, P.O. BOX 109,
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Or ring 07792 664710

Don't forget to visit our web-site at:

www.orchardlink.org.uk

You can e-mail us there or at

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To hire a press or mill,

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