

ORCHARD LINK *NEWS*



Apple Day at Malborough & South Huish Primary School

by Pauline Stidston

"That was the best day I have had in school". This was overheard as groups of children enjoyed themselves during a day of apple related activities to celebrate Harvest.

We started our special day with a walk to Yarde Farm to visit the orchard and to learn about aspects of growing different kinds of apples. Mr and Mrs Browning, the owners, were there to welcome us and showed us around pointing out the different varieties and ages of trees, the children were very keen to explore and ran about tasting a range of apples. One or two of the apple varieties were a bit sharp but most were eagerly consumed. The children were then encouraged to collect apples to take back to school for pressing later in the day. Soon a few apples grew into a small mountain which Mr Browning kindly offered to take to school for us. Whew! That was a relief. The drive from the house to the main road is extremely steep and little legs would have found it hard work carrying heavy bags of apples as well. Before we started on the walk back to school, groups of children were shown the old cider press and parts of the lovely house, which has been beautifully restored. Back at school the children were offered some delicious apple dishes for lunch cooked by Ruth and Heather who were rewarded later with bottles of freshly squeezed apple juice.

The afternoon was carefully organised so the children could take part in cookery, art lessons, apple games and learn some of the lovely old apple manes. All this and apple pressing as well!

The apple press had been hired from Orchard Link and we were very fortunate to have Mr Jack Rhymes and Mr Warwick Harwood to help us through the complexities of making apple juice. Everyone joined in the process of washing the apples, chopping them up, making a "cheese" and finally filling the bottles with juice. The whole day was thoroughly enjoyable and we are very grateful to all the people who brought in apples and containers.

We would like to say a special 'thank you' to the parents who came with us to Yarde and helped to take care of all of the children. We would also like to thank all of the adults who helped during the afternoon with the pressing. Without these people, the children would not have been able to experience such a wonderful day. Lastly we thank Mr and Mrs Browning, Mr Rhymes and Mr Harwood who made the whole experience possible.

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Programme of Orchard Link Winter/Spring 2008-9 Events

<u>Date</u>	<u>Day</u>	<u>Event</u>
29 November	Saturday	Orchard Link working visit to Brimblecombe
30 November	Sunday	Winter Pruning Course
7 January	Wednesday	Orchard Link Committee meeting Church House Inn, Harberton
25 January	Sunday	Winter Pruning Course
11 February	7:30pm	Informal meeting, location as above
18 March	7:30pm	Committee meeting, location as above
13 May	7:30pm	Committee meeting, location as above

To find out more information on:

Pruning courses contact Charles Staniland c.staniland@lineone.net

About any event call us on 07792 664710 or see other contact details on page 16.



**GIVE SOMETHING SPECIAL FOR CHRISTMAS:
INTRODUCE A FAMILY MEMBER OR FRIEND TO
ORCHARD LINK**

The Committee wants to increase Orchard Link's membership. Over the past 2 years we have developed an organised committee, a stronger financial base and ideas for our future. We want to broaden our services and our support for members and we'd like a larger membership to work with us. We would like you, our members, to recruit new members for us by buying membership(s) for family and friends as Christmas presents at a reduced first year cost. We think Orchard Link membership will prove to be an original and enduring solution for your gift problem.

Who do you know who owns an orchard, or has a few fruit trees at the bottom of their garden, or maybe just has an interest in orchards, who might even be living out of Devon but likes to keep in touch: we do a friendly newsletter that drops through Orchard Link members' letterboxes three times a year. And all for just 2/3 of the normal annual rate, £12 instead of the usual £18, for the remainder of this membership year!

To get your Orchard Link membership gift voucher please send a cheque for £12 made out to Orchard Link with the name and address of the person you would like to present a year's membership. We will then return a 'Voucher' for you to give to them. They will receive the current newsletter from us and enjoy the benefits of Orchard Link membership including two free tickets to the Orchard Link Annual Gathering.

This 'Introductory' offer is open until 30th January 2009 so please act promptly. Please send a cheque for £12 and a stamped addressed envelope for the voucher to:-

Orchard Link Membership Offer

c/o Charles Staniland
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It is worth collecting cut grass so that it doesn't add to nutrient levels, encouraging 'coarse' weeds such as docks, thistles and nettles.

3) Hedgerow management

Not cutting hedgerows too tightly or too early in the season will provide shelter for your trees, berries and other food for birds, and a good habitat for bats. It is good however not to let hedgerow trees get so large that they shade the orchard. Fruit trees are very light sensitive, growing away from tall hedges, often becoming unbalanced in the process.

4) Fallen-over trees

Fruit trees often blow over yet carry on living. They will then provide useful cover for wildlife low to the ground as well as continuing to be productive. They may not look as tidy, but will provide a useful habitat

So, in all these cases it is a question of balance between a tidy orchard and one that provides useful habitats. The choice is yours! Natural England now provides much useful information for traditional orchard owners, including more detailed information on orchard wildlife (TIN020). There are 9 different leaflets called TINS that can be downloaded from www.naturalengland.org.uk

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Haragon Payne Trees for Sale

Orchard Link has adopted the rare Haragon Payne as its own apple variety. Haragon Payne is a lovely 2nd-early eating apple that keeps a little while and appears to be healthy. Now, thanks to the endeavour of Orchard Link treasurer Mick Godfrey, we have some trees for sale. Mick has Haragon Payne trees available on both MM106 (semi-dwarfing) and M25 (standard) rootstocks at the bargain price of £8 each. Please call Mick on 01548-821156. He also has a few other varieties available.

Dangerous Dads 'n Apples

by Ian Blackwell

Totnes Dangerous Dads meets monthly with activities aimed at fathers and male carers who have children under five. The group is funded by the Totnes Children's Centre and is very successful with over seventy dads on the database after just one year in operation. On Saturday 11th October the Dangerous Dads went to Lower Hood Barton in Dartington. The orchard is a traditional walled Devon cider orchard. The owners, Leonard and Davina, offered us the site for the afternoon in return for a donation to Oxfam - £45 was taken on the day. Co-ordinator Ian Blackwell hired the Orchard Link mill and oak press. Graham Peters, a regular on Dangerous Dads and an orchard owner, helped out with the pressing. The day was a huge success, thanks to the glorious weather and ideal site. There was an excellent turn out, with 25 dads, carers and 42 children in all. A 'Dangerous Dads Home Brew Festival' is planned for March 2009 where dads and their partners will be able to sample the cider from the apple juice made on the day.



photo by Ian Blackwell

Events like these are immensely important to communities. From the feedback, it is clear that this kind of event has a number of important outcomes for the participants - outcomes that perhaps often go unrecorded and therefore unnoticed. For example, not only was the event fun and a great social occasion but the day also

helped with early learning skills. As one dad reported, "My 3 year old was able to explain the whole apple juicing process to his nursery teacher the following week which really impressed me." Whilst another said "My son learned how juice is really made and how much work it is - also the difference between 'fresh' and 'from concentrate'". Thankfully the Government is slowly realising the benefits of events like these and has published a report called 'Learning Outside the Classroom' - the sooner children have apple pressing, muddy walks and den-making as a regular part of the curriculum the better.

Canoe Adventures

Our long time meeting chairman, Phil Sheardown, retired his position at the AGM with our thanks for a job well done. His company, Canoe Adventures, made a generous donation to Orchard Link's funds. Canoe Adventures runs some of Europe's largest canoes (for a crew of as little as 2 people or as many as 12) along South Devon's creeks and estuaries. Choose a river, choose a breakfast paddle, an all-day picnic trip or even a moonlight mystery tour and you provide the motive power and are guided by one of Canoe Adventures expert steersman. Certainly sounds like a treat to give yourselves, families and friends when all that orchard work is up to date.



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South Devon

Advertisers A number of specialist firms are kind enough to place advertisements in Orchard Link News. These firms are probably familiar to those of you with orchards but each time you use them please remember to tell them that you saw their advertisement in Orchard Link News and that you appreciate their support for us.

Look out for this plant in your orchards and gardens. All parts of ragwort are poisonous and a hazard for grazing livestock. Animals tend not to eat the plant when green but do when it is dried in fodder. The effect is cumulative and likely to lead to the death of the animal with cattle, horses, ponies and donkeys the most prone. In the past it was not tolerated on farmland or roadside verges and so was relatively scarce. Today less of our countryside is under the control of farmers and it has become a serious pest. Unfortunately it is very successful in our climate: plants flower in summer and each plant produces tens of thousands of seeds



Figure from Defra publication "Identification of Injurious Weeds"

which can remain dormant for up to 20 years. Ragwort is a toxic plant and suitable precautions must be taken when handling both live and dead plants. Refer to the guidance at www.defra.gov.uk and particularly the Code of Practice for preventing the spread of Ragwort. Cornwall CC also provides advice: they spend £50,000 a year controlling ragwort in their roadside verges!

Of course, nothing in nature is ever all bad and ragwort is the nurse plant for the black and yellow caterpillars of the cinnabar moth. Apparently they ingest the plant's chemical defences which in turn makes them distasteful to birds. I have seen these caterpillars demolishing stands of ragwort on the chalk meadowlands at Harting Down on the South Downs way.

The chalk was laid down in the Cretaceous era and then forced slowly upwards. If the chalk had been more resistant to the elements the mid parts of Surrey and Sussex could have been 800m mountains. As it is the chalk centre slowly dissolved and eroded to expose the Weald and to leave the North and South Downs at its edges. So instead of mountains we have the downlands and at Harting Down walks through its treasured chalk grass lands with thin, dry soils and myriad orchids, breathtaking views to the Hogsback and the Isle of Wight and winds funnelling across the downs to keep things cool even in summer.

Past the ragwort stands there are evergreen juniper bushes with fragrant black berries (used to flavour gin!). Juniper is our only native member of the Cypress family and it is only found in any number on the steeply sloping chalk grasslands. If you follow the path off to the south you'll find a dew pond and yew woods. There are many isolated yews throughout the country but the surviving yew forests are found on these chalk downlands.

Indeed, Kingly Vale, near Chichester, is said to be the finest yew forest in Europe and was one of the first National Nature Reserves to be set up in Britain. First you must find it – poorly signed and well hidden – and then be prepared for extraordinarily entwined and twisted trunks and black areas beneath the trees where nothing green can grow and you need something warm for the chill even in summer. Look for the red arils or fruits – the only non-poisonous part of the yew so that birds (especially mistle thrushes) may eat the fruit and disperse the seeds for the tree.

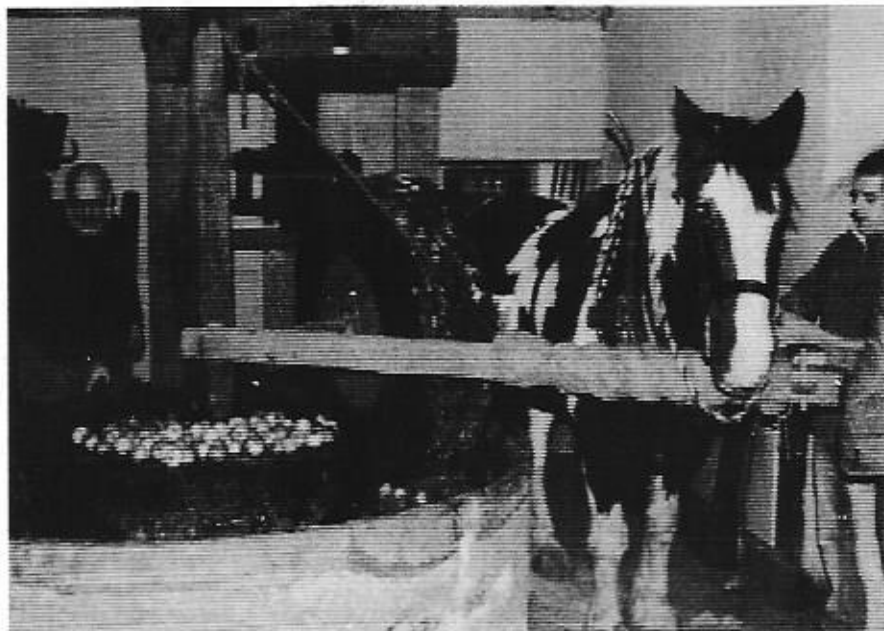
In many respects Juniper resembles the Yew and is even known as dwarf yew in some places and they frequently grow together on the Downlands.

So on the Downs let the caterpillars control the ragwort but in your orchards and paddocks, please do take care of it (safely) yourselves.

Gloucestershire Diary

by Jacqueline Sarsby

On 25th October, I went to Gloucester Folk Museum to watch Mr Checkers crushing apples in a traditional, stone apple mill. It was Apple day at the Museum, and Mr Checkers is a 21 year old Shire X Irish Cob belonging to Faye Williams of Tibberton. This is about the third year he has driven the mill, and he was, if anything, a bit blasé about it, stopping rather pointedly near the display of Gloucestershire apples every time he came round to it, and obviously hoping for a mouthful! Where else, I wondered, can you still see a horse-driven mill like this?



Traditional stone apple mill

Photo J Sarsby

More typically, I've seen the great stones made into a rockery in the garden of an old farm. Today, I took down my photographs from an exhibition in the Museum called 'Apple of My Eye'. It was a wonderful opportunity to put up pictures of cider-making with straw in the proper Devon way (which I took at Spittle farm, Chulmleigh) and to contrast it with cider- or perry-making using 'hairs' made of horse-hair, as used to be the case in Herefordshire and Gloucestershire. I enjoy noticing the different ways that people do things in different places, and I think I am going to have more of an opportunity to do this, because my village, Uley, hopes to set up a

twinning with a village in Normandy. They have a museum of cider-making in the French village, so it sounds like a good area to me! There must be a lot of interest in orchards, and indeed, a nearby town (or village) has just had a 'Fete de la Pomme'. It seems to me that one could have a very interesting and successful jumelage if an orchard group here twinned itself with an organization which was mad about apples in Normandy? Having something especially in common would seem to me to be a good basis for crosschannel friendship, better than the rather randomness of the usual twinning process. [Ed note: jumelage is French for twinning]

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Do You Need Exercise?

by Mick Godfrey

Do you feel the need for some exercise alongside interesting people, the chance to learn new skills and achieve something worth while? Look no further than **Devon Rural Skills Trust**. Forthcoming courses include hedge-laying and stone walling and take place on Saturdays between 9.30am and 4.30pm. The cost is £25 per course or £15 for DRST members. For a full list of courses and dates see www.devonruralskillstrust.co.uk or phone me 01548 821156 (evenings best).

Tavy & Tamar Apple Group's Apple Fest by Brian Lamb

For six years the Group have organised the Bere Ferrers Apple Fest at the Public Hall; a day of enjoyment and fun dedicated to the apple. The needs of apple growers are catered for with apple identification and advice, demonstrations of grafting and pruning in the orchard next to the hall, juice pressing and pasteurisation, and apples and trees are for sale. And for those just wanting apple products they can buy pies, juice and even toffee apples! Probably the major draw is the hydraulic press where the public can arrive with a carrier bag of apples and go home with bottles of the golden liquid. We also provide hand-operated crushing and pressing equipment where young people under strict supervision learn to crush and press their own apple juice. There are competitions for apple pies, the longest apple peel, apple animals, apple bobbing and even for apple poems!



Bere Apple Fest

photo by B Lamb

The Public Hall is beautifully decorated and run by our 'staff' of 45 volunteers wearing old-time country outfits and creating a terrific atmosphere with lots of personalities. Free admission but you are 'invited' to purchase a raffle ticket with prizes which this year included a bottle of House of Commons Whisky (for which we had no

hesitation in breaking our apple-only rule). There are a number of commercial traders but only dealing in apple products. Devon Rural Skills provides a hands-on rural crafts display staffed by Maureen Stagg and Mick Godfrey and they also provide information on Orchard Link (Mick doubles as Orchard Link's treasurer) and we must not forget the assistance from Orchard Link over the years - thanks Trudy, Ben, Charles, and Mick.

After the Apple Fest we were able to bring forward plans to formally turn Tavy & Tamar Apple Group into a 'proper' organisation with a committee and we have embarked on a fundraising campaign to raise £10,000 to buy our own equipment for our use and to hire out to trained operatives, to run courses and continue with an annual conference and more.

I will finish with one quote: "This is the first committee that I have been on where everybody works on the day." By the way after we have closed and cleared up we all sit down to a fish and chip supper with apple juice and, you guessed it, cider.

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Editor's Notes

Tony Harber

On page 15 you will read of the new Devonwide website. However, please don't neglect our own Orchard Link website which is now much reworked and improved at www.orchardlink.org.uk. I'm afraid my Santa Claus on p3 when reduced to black and white looks more like Scrooge in his night cap but the thought's the same: **Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all our readers!**

Chairman's Corner

by Ben Pike

This is the time of year when those of us directly involved with the core work of Orchard Link take a deep breath and look back at the last two hectic months. We have attended seven events in this time, four of which involved us in pressing apples into juice.

On the surface all went well; we pressed around 1400 litres of juice in total of which half was sold bringing around £700 into Orchard Link's coffers. Many old friends were seen at the events and many new ones came across Orchard Link for the first time. Where we had difficulty was in finding apples to be pressed. Despite sending emails to members asking for apples, I had to spend the evening before events visiting orchards to pick up apples so that we didn't run short. It made me wonder if we have become a victim of our own success; perhaps we have helped so many members to press their own apples that they don't need to bring them to our pressing events. If this is the case, perhaps we should concentrate on fewer shows. We held our own Apple Day at Sharpham House this year. It was a great event, but we only had 5 members helping. We are here to respond to our members' needs, so do let us know what you would like us to be doing.

On this note, our previous financial difficulties have eased thanks to the hard work of many committee members, so we are now looking at how we can improve what Orchard Link offers to you our members. This will be discussed at the next meeting on January 7th, so do come along, or email us at info@orchardlink.org.uk. One idea that has been proposed is small-scale visits to members' orchards. Let us know if you would like to offer your orchard for a visit.

There are several areas where we would like some help. Miles Every is having to stand down from the post of **Events Secretary** due to his work commitments. Hence we are looking for someone to pull together the various training and pressing events that we run. Trudy Turrell and I are both happy to teach and support a newcomer to this role. We would also love to have a **Publicity Officer** to advertise Orchard Link's events to the wider world. It would only require a few hours a year but would help take the load off the shoulders of those who are already doing so much. You will read elsewhere in this newsletter of the great new website devon-apples.co.uk. It would be very helpful if someone new could act as a liaison person to this site. Please think hard if you could help; Orchard Link is only as good as we make it.

A heartfelt thanks goes out to all of you who have helped at events and behind the scenes to make this season so successful. A special mention goes to George Arnison who has worked tirelessly to hire out our presses, bringing in over £1200 as result.

Finally to my favourite moments of this apple season. Both were at the Apple Day at Sharpham. The first was when a man arrived to ask where he should put his apples for pressing. Not seeing any apples, I asked him if they were in his car. "No, they're in my pocket he replied", at which point he pulled out a plastic bag from Tesco's containing 5 Golden Delicious apples. Good to see someone taking our request for apples seriously! The other moment was when a child threw some of the apple pulp at another helper and a full-scale apple pulp fight ensued to the great amusement of those watching.

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devon-apples Website *from an email from Adam Montague*

This is a new website created by Cider with Roadies and the Common Players with the intent to become the place to find out everything there is to know about apples and growing them in the South West. The site aims to be the first place to look for information if you have an orchard, a garden with a tree or two, or want to know how to start one. It has been designed to allow users to add information in the form of articles, photos, even videos, and to post questions on the site for other users to offer answers. There are eight sections to the site:

Apple Core - a directory of Devon and other West Country apples complete with photos for identification purposes. There are also details of West Country plums and cherries. This part of the site can be updated and added to if new varieties are found, better photos submitted or new information comes to light.

Apple Source - a commercial directory of apple related products and services for example to help locate a particular tree, services such as tree pruning, or equipment sources such as presses.

Apple Tree - a collection of articles offering advice on orchard planning, growing, cider and juice making.

Apple Roots - the place the apple has in Devon history and folklore.

Tree of Knowledge - a place to post questions, or share your knowledge and offer advice.

Beneath the Tree - apple events in and around Devon. From apple days to pruning courses, to wassails.

Seed Links - links to other apple sites which may be of help.

News - Apple news, photos of events, even video for the Home page.

The following helped Cider with Roadies and the Common Players with the website and its development: Ron Barter of Brimblecombe Cider, Ben Pike of Orchard Link, Jane Paye of Orchards Live, Andrew Sinclair, Adam Powel of Adams Apples and Kevin Croucher of Thornhayes Nursery and the site was built and designed by Volicol.

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