

ORCHARD LINK NEWS

Orchard Link

Fowlescombe Farm visit

by Tony Harber

On a Friday in August around 40 people including children arrived for a most enjoyable, indeed a fascinating tour of the Fowlescombe Farm estate. Richard and Barbara Barker farm a steep-sided valley with the flat valley floor at such a premium that even the cattle barn is oddly shaped just to fit into the available flat ground. The estate covers 191ha (about 470 acres) and includes the ruins of buildings dating back to at least 1537. The estate was in the hands of the Fowell family for 2 centuries until they inherited Dartington Hall and moved there, selling the estate. The new owner extended the estate and expanded the house to create a fashionable estate and kept a pack of deerhounds. In time it fell into disrepair and lies today as a listed ruin.

Richard and Barbara entertained us with stories of the white lady in a coach who disappears into the old ruins, and the kennel master who starved his dogs prior to a hunt, went out to quiet them the night before the hunt and all that was found of him the following morning were his boots: a folk yarn since set to music. Much more entertaining than our usual run of the mill orchard stories.

The Barkers are devoted to organic practices and the survival of rare breeds and keep Aberdeen Angus and Devon Ruby Red cattle, Manx Loaghtan and Hebridean sheep and rare breed goats and poultry. The sheep are kept for their natural lives and their wool is used in a range of products which can be purchased. Wildlife conservation is high on their agenda and in terms of endangered species the estate supports barn owls, skylarks, brown hares and several species of bat including lesser horseshoe. The barn is used to winter over the cattle, more to protect the land from the cattle rather than them from the weather. In the spring it is used for sheepshearing then at the end of June the cattle are back in again for TB testing.

There are two orchards, a new one near to the main farm buildings and more intriguingly, an old terraced orchard which the Barkers are just starting to restore and have yet to get close to all of the trees themselves. The new orchard was planted 8 years ago including varieties such as Kingston Black, Lucombe's Pine, and Farmers Glory but it has not been

entirely a success, with problems with exposure and vole damage though the more sheltered trees do better.

We were also shown the £19,000 4kW windmill, required by the planners to be at the foot of the hill instead of on top, where it could have generated possible four times as much green energy. The evening was rounded off with a fine meal supplemented with apple juice.

Many thanks to Richard and Barbara, to Mick Godfrey for organising the event, George Arnison for setting up and pressing juice and everybody who helped make this such a successful evening.

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The English Apple by Rosie Sanders

Editors note: I have to start this article with an apology to Rosie. In our Spring 2009 newsletter, the Bramley apple article referred to 'The English Apple' and stated that Rosie was commissioned to illustrate it for the RHS. This is entirely incorrect; in fact Rosie researched, wrote and illustrated the book entirely on her own account, spending six years on the project. So, Rosie, my apologies. Every cloud has a silver lining though, for as I bowed my head Rosie kindly took the time to tell me of the plans for republishing her book. I might add that for those of you who have not seen it the original book contains the best apple illustrations that I have seen.

The following is condensed from two emails from Rosie:-

The English Apple was published by Phaidon Press in 1988 and has been out of print for a number of years due to Phaidon's change of ownership. However, last year, thanks to Simon Maughan and Diana Gilding of the RHS at Rosemoor, a publisher was found who wanted to republish it. The publisher is Frances Lincoln and the new book is due for publication in September 2010.

When I was first approached about it, I wasn't sure whether I would have the time to devote to it as the original book took me six years to complete. I had always thought that if I were to do another edition, I would like to add more apples, some that were omitted from the original book and some recent introductions and I knew that would take a considerable time. However, I am really excited about the new book and have been working on it for months. It has been completely re-designed, brought up to date and vastly improved. There will be 144 cultivars in the new book, to be called 'Apples', the paintings and text will be on one page and the cross sections will be life size. I think it will be a really beautiful book.

I did have an exhibition up at Rosemoor recently with all the original illustrations and people left their names if they wanted to be advised about the book nearer the time. I am happy to do that for your readers if they want to leave me their names, etc. They can email me at info@rosiesanders.com.

All the best, Rosie

ORCHARD LINK EVENTS

November 2009 - March 2010 by Ben Pike

27th November: Lecture Bees and Honey A talk by Jeremy Wells, Orchard Link member and beekeeper, at The Old School Centre, South Brent TQ10 9BP at 7:30pm. Cost £3 at the door; free to Orchard Link members. See www.southbrent.co.uk for directions. Call 07792-664710 for booking.

28th November: Training course Pruning mature trees With orchard expert Charles Staniland. Venue to be announced. Cost £10 for members; £15 for non-members. Call Charles on 01364-653169 for details and booking.

16th January: Event Wassailing at Stoke Gabriel. Start at 4:30pm, 5:30pm procession to village orchard. Refreshments, entertainment. £2.50 adult, £1 child. Bring lantern and torch (Lantern making workshop 10 January 10am-midday in school hall, booking essential). Lots more details at www.stokegabriel.co.uk or contact Monique Rawlings 01803-782585 or Tiffany Nieuwoudt 01803-782394.

24th January: Training course Planting and pruning young apple trees 10am -3pm at a venue in the Teign Valley, with orchard expert Adam Montague. Cost £15 (£10 for Orchard link members). Call 07792-664710 for booking and directions. Numbers limited so book early.

7th February: Working party Fowlescombe (near Ugborough) Come and help prune young trees under the guidance of Ben Pike at this beautiful organic farm in the South Hams. 10am - 3pm with soup provided for lunch. See www.fowlescombe.com for directions. Bring pruning tools.

13th February: Working party Plant a traditional orchard on Barn Owl Trust land at Ashburton. Come and help the Barn Owl Trust plant a new orchard of traditional varieties of apple trees on its conservation land between Ashburton and Dartmoor. You can learn a little about how to conserve or encourage barn owls on your own land as we work in the fields of the Lennon Legacy Project where they already have two pairs of wild barn owls! 10am-3pm. Free event. Wear warm and waterproof clothes and boots. Numbers are limited- so please book a place by calling 07792-664710. Parking is limited at the Barn Owl Trust - so please meet in North street car park in Ashburton and car share to the Trust if you can. Directions to the Trust on booking. Please bring a spade and a packed lunch.

28th February: Training course Grafting Professional grafter Adam Montague will lead us through the mysteries of grafting apple trees. Each participant will leave with at least one apple tree of their own making. This is an excellent and enjoyable way to 'save' your treasured tree. 10am - 3pm at The Old School Centre, South Brent. Call 07792-664710 to book and for advice on suitable graft wood if you wish to bring your own. £22 (£18 for Orchard Link members).

Orchard Link Meetings (all at The Church House Inn, Harberton)
All Orchard Link Members welcome to all meetings.

9 December Informal dinner at the Inn at 6:30pm from ordinary menu followed by Committee meeting starting at about 7:30pm.

20th January 7:30pm Committee meeting

17th February 7:30pm Brief Committee meeting followed by informal orchard discussion. Please come along with your questions ready and join in what last year was an enjoyable discussion.

17th March 7:30pm Committee meeting

There are further orchard-related training courses and events to be found on the websites for Orchards Live (www.orchardslive.org.uk), Tamar and Tavy Apple Group (email briankay1@tiscali.co.uk) and Thornhayes Nursery (see below). Also, publications such as The Landsman have an extensive listing of events in the area.

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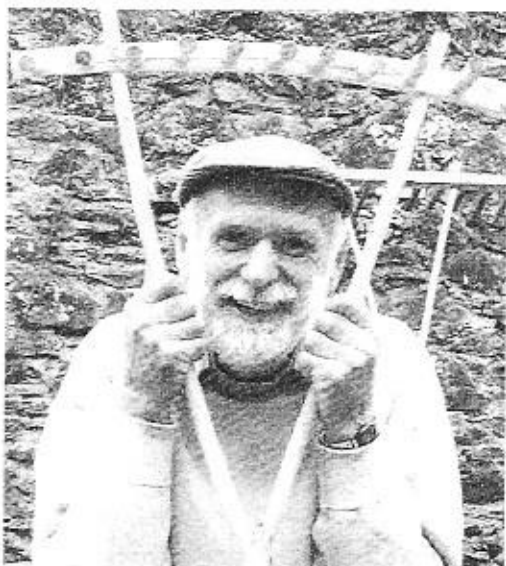
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Strictly Come Pressing

by Tony Harber

The 2009 Orchard Link pressing season has come and gone. A big thank you to everyone who attended our events, whether you were a volunteer, one of those who brought apples for juicing or if you just stopped by and



chatted with us. Our volunteers put in lots of hard work: publicising the events, organising delivery and setting up of mill and press, washing arrangements, power supply, setting out Orchard Link's library and publications, producing the juice, bottling and selling, answering a myriad of questions and last but not least clearing up afterwards.

Cornworthy Apple Day was a new event this year. They hired and operated our large press and mill and we ran an Orchard Link stall. An excellent turnout in the grounds behind the Hunters Lodge Inn was

entertained with a programme of events including folk songs and they produced a neat little volume: "The Apple Book - a collection of our community's apple wisdom, favourite recipes, old cures and odd concoctions". Old cures for hair loss, acne, high blood pressure were all here - clearly apples, cider and vinegar were panaceas in the days before the NHS. And recipes for the like of Dartmouth Pie and Yakima Iced Apple Tea. Perhaps I'll donate my copy to the Orchard Link library for you to peruse when you come to help out at next year's apple events!

The **National Trust** organised an **Apple Day** at Parke, Bovey Tracey. The Trust hired and operated our press and we ran the Orchard Link stand. A lovely location with an opportunity to walk around a walled garden under renovation by a group of local volunteers. My abiding memory is of a cycling family arriving 20 minutes after closing time. Their little girl burst into tears at missing everything but was placated by a gift of an apple left by someone who had bought it along for identification. Mick Godfrey (pictured above by Ray Willis), our treasurer, usually wears two hats at these events - he also represents **Devon Rural Skills** - and indeed he represented both organisations again at the **Bere Apple Fest**.

Avon Mill Garden Centre's Autumn Festival has many attractions including ourselves pressing apples. This had its dramatic moments, too for I was called at 10pm the night before to be told that the people using the press on the day before the show had conscientiously used their hose (fitted with

a brass tap) to flush the running mill - and the tap had fallen off into the mill, breaking the upper blades (future users please don't do this!). Fortunately a few late night calls to our friends at Tamar and Tavy Apple Group and Tamar Volunteers tracked down a spare unit at the Volunteers which we collected the next morning. And the hirer for the big press after Avon Mill kindly volunteered to make a trip to Vigo to collect a new mill the following day - thank you Bridget. Our final pressing event was the Sharpham Autumn Festival and Apple Pressing Day now in its second year and also becoming very popular. Any event there is well worth visiting for the beautiful location.



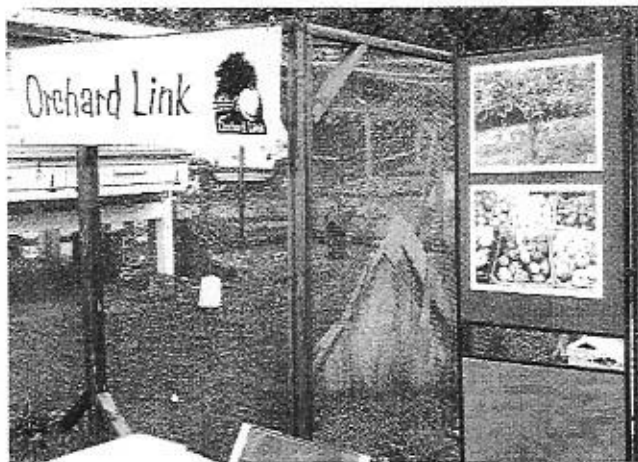
The photo (by Ray Willis) is of one of the helpers for the next pressing. One visitor here was from Turkey - his local climate is much the same as Devon's and he has planted apples, pears and kiwi fruit, with the latter doing best. Now he wonders if cider could be made from the apple crop.

We rounded off the season by being present at Otterton Mill's Apple Festival. The picture on the following page shows some of Orchard Link's new display panels (prepared by Gill Gairdner) with the Mill's chicken behind. These birds had their moment of fame last year during the flooding following Ottery St Mary's serious hailstorm when they had to be rescued by boat.

There is a puzzle for the committee though: by and large the volunteers at these events are only a few of our members. A day of apple pressing requires a goodly number of volunteers which we did not always have this year so we were forced to turn to different ways of presenting ourselves - a pity since we had to forgo the income that we get from juice sales. At some events this year we gratefully accepted help from non-members who rolled up their sleeves and joined in.

The puzzle:- if the few of us that do turn out to help get as much pleasure as we do why ever don't more of our members take the opportunity to enjoy some healthy autumn exercise and a few hours of good company by joining us? Not always, but mostly, it is the same faces that turn up to help man the pressings, that run your committee, that plan and organise

your events, that maintain and organise the rental of equipment, even that write the articles for this newsletter. There is a risk that if anything happens to the present stalwarts, be it a move away from the area, illness, you name it, that Orchard Link will reduce below the minimum number of active members needed for the organisation to run at all. So please, come to meetings



and events when you can, and when the Newsletter lands on your doormat next year make sure that you turn to the Events list, choose one or a few events, mark your calendars and let the Events Secretary, Ben Pike, know that you really do want to support Orchard Link. Ben wants me to apologise for him as he struggled with organising the events at the same time as moving house and not having broadband or landline communication for some weeks. He feels that he let one or two people down by not communicating with them. But again, if we had more active members we would have been able to appoint a deputy to help him.

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Cooking Apples

by Ben Pike

In the mid 1990's, South Hams Environment Service (in the guise of Trudy Turrell), helped to save many local apple varieties. They searched out farmers and cidemakers who knew the names of local apples, took graftwood and sold the resulting trees on to members of the public. Many of these trees are now bearing fruit, and it is most enjoyable to track down these trees and sample their fruit.

Many of these trees are now in public orchards such as the community orchards in Totnes and Dartmouth. Others are hidden away in private orchards where, in many cases, the names have become confused or lost. It is amazing that only 13 years after some varieties were 'saved', they are in danger of disappearing again. Owners of orchards change and maps get lost and before long, we are back to square one. Some varieties that I am yet to locate are Bottletopper, a tall oblong shaped green cooker, Jackson's Cider, Quallender and Queen Anne. Another mystery to be solved is to find the true Totnes Apple. Is it the green apple that we have growing at Sharpham, or the red flushed apple that Thornhayes Nursery sells?

This year I have been making an effort to taste as many cooking apple varieties as possible, particularly as many of the trees at Sharpham are bearing fruit for the first time. One that I tried for the first time was Golden Noble, originating from Norfolk about 1820. When I came to the tree, just one apple remained and that had been pecked by birds. I bit into the 'clean' side to be greeted by a wonderful, sharp but flavoursome, juicy lemony taste. This apple is sometimes called the best cooking apple; I shall have to wait another year before trying it cooked, but this has certainly whetted my appetite.

Many people wanting to plant an orchard still choose Bramley's Seedling as their first choice culinary apple, yet there many varieties that will do better in Devon. Newton Wonder would be one, much less prone to scab and canker than Bramley's, yet still cooking to a puree. Annie Elizabeth, Golden Noble and Peter Lock are all varieties that don't need much sugar when cooked.

Another variety that I tasted for the first time was Grand Sultan, a North Devon cooking apple that made superb baked apples. Mere de Ménage (maybe a synonym for Blackrock, a Cornish apple) was another first timer. This dark red apple is beautiful to look at, but I wasn't so impressed with its taste, finding it rather sharp and not full of flavour.

King Byerd is another good Cornish apple. It crops heavily, making a good cooking apple before Christmas, sweetening to an acceptable dessert apple in the New Year. Hocking's Green is another Cornish apple with similar characteristics. There are plenty more good West Country cooking apples, Plympton Pippin, Ponsford, Woolbrook Russet, Farmer's Glory..... why plant Bramley's?

In Search of English Apples

by Ray Willis

Hopefully many of our members are now enjoying this year's crop of home-grown apples but what if we need to buy apples where would these have been grown?

Until quite recently there had been a steady decline in the proportion of English apples sold in shops and supermarkets. Today with global markets, refrigerated transport and cheap foreign production English apples only make up some 35% of the total apples sold during the English season.

So where do all of those imported apples come from? A snapshot survey of local shops and supermarkets confirmed that many apples on display were imported. Not surprisingly, France was most often the stated source of imported apples but other sources included Italy (where total annual production now exceeds that of France), Belgium, New Zealand, USA, Chile and South Africa. It was surprising to see apples from the southern hemisphere since these would have been treated and placed in long-term controlled storage for months. Imported varieties of apples included Golden Delicious, Braeburn, Granny Smiths, Ariane, Empire, Pirouette, Jazz, Gala, and Pink Lady.

English apples made a slow appearance, possibly since our season is a little behind that further south where there are higher temperatures. Some early varieties of English apples including Lord Lambourne, Spartan, Discovery and Worcester Pearmain were seen in local shops. Later varieties available from the end of October included Royal Gala, Egremont Russet, Cox's Orange Pippin, Falstaff, Ashmead Kernel and Dons Delight. Also included were the more recently introduced varieties Jonagold and Jonagored (both based on a cross between Jonathan and Golden Delicious) and Kanzi (means 'hidden treasure' in Swahili) a cross between Gala and Braeburn. The Cox is still the most popular English apple with little foreign competition and the Bramley still reigns supreme as the most widely available cooking apple.

Producers of English apples were mainly located in Kent and Herefordshire but at least three Devon producers were identified.

The major supermarkets are now more actively promoting English apples. For example Sainsburys reported that they expect to sell about 50 different varieties of English apples in this season and the company is working with the East Malling Research on natural ways to control pests and diseases.

English apple producers are campaigning for greater supermarket support and the ultimate goal of 100% English apples during the season. This year it is claimed that following a harsh winter and a late warm spring English apples have good sugar and juice levels and excellent texture.

We can all support English apple producers by checking where apples are produced and choosing English apples wherever possible.



Local fruit for sale High Street Fruit & Veg Budleigh Salterton Ed photo

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Commercial Fruit Growing in the 20th Century - part 2

dictated by Derrick Rowland, edited by T Harber

... concluding our story of a fruit farm manager ... The first episode ended with my returning to Wiltshire to marry. Well of course we needed a house to live in and so I found a job in Hampshire which included a "tied" semi-detached cottage. My new employer was an elderly man who lived alone in a little cottage fending for himself and seemingly living on apples and garlic. Our cottage had neither gas nor electricity and cooking was on a coal "range" incorporating a small oven. The single water tap was fed from a tank on stilts about a mile away and we had a shock one morning when workmen turned the water off to clean the tank out.

The farm was principally an orchard although the elevation of 700ft meant that it was not the best for growing apples. The trees had been planted in about 1920 by a farmer trained at Wye College in a method where each row was designed to ripen later in the season than the previous row. There was a wooden building with a thatched roof which served as a fruit store, and the farmer's delivery method was a pony and trap which he drove around Petersfield delivering in person. I was there for about 18 months mainly pruning and tending the orchard although we also grew strawberries. At the time Cambridge University was experimenting with hybridising new strawberry varieties but hadn't the ground needed for trials so contracted this out. An old school friend of my employer was engaged on this and so we were able to get hold of some of these hybrids which yielded very well. One variety was Cambridge Favourite which you still hear of occasionally.

But I felt that there was no long term future for me there. My wife and I had to make major decisions. I decided to stay in agriculture but not to try farming on my own account. I could easily manage the growing but the other half of the job is marketing and that is not easy and it's not well organised in this country, never has been. And of course it would have taken a great deal of money which I lacked.

So I applied for a job near Chard for a retired brigadier. He had two sons in the army and wanted to build up a fruit farm for the remaining son who was then still at school. He already had a three-quarter acre orchard of dwarf pyramids behind his house and he then purchased a 20 acre farm which was planted with apples. The poorer grades of apples and windfalls went to the cider works in Chard. On one occasion two men cleaning the vats there were overcome by fumes and died.

A further 30 acres was purchased later. New buildings were erected for grading and packing and for 100 tons of cold storage. I was there from 1950 to 1970 but then having got the place up and running and without due warning I was made redundant. It was a nasty shock to us but I quickly

obtained the position at Sunnyhay which is where I started my story for you last episode.

So where does one start with planning a fruit farm? Having found a suitable site a soil analysis of each field is essential. This used to be carried out as a free service by the Ministry of Agriculture. The results would show if additional lime, nitrogen, phosphates or potassium are needed. A check should be made to see if further drainage is required. Then the land would be ploughed and cultivated. When soil conditions were good enough planting could take place. "Maiden" trees should be used - say about 4-foot high and with at least 4 good "feathers" (side shoots near the top) grafted onto a suitable root stock. In the first 3 years it is better to prune with a sharp knife rather than using secateurs. In the West Country it is important to keep a watchful eye for any signs of canker as this could kill a young tree quickly. Also, for at least the first 3 years the ground around the young tree should be kept clear of competing ground cover.

As the orchards grow there is a vital need for controls to protect the fruit from pests and diseases: various caterpillars, sawfly, weevils, etc plus fungal problems such as scab and mildew. In the following years the crop increases resulting in the need for extra staff for picking. People come with no previous experience and have to be trained and supervised to make sure that every apple is carefully handled at each stage.

Grading indoors is by passing the fruit along a widening belt which then allows the fruit to flow into trays of equal size apples, normally with a range of 5mm - for example all in one tray would be between 60 and 65 mm diameter. The apples are then packed into individual cells in layers or possibly directly into shallow trays for marketing.

The weather can cause damage. In 1963 we had deep snow and rabbits were able to climb over wire fences and chew the tree trunks, killing some trees. I can recall pruning when the temperature was only 10degF. Once after a very hard frost the sun was strong resulting in the bark of many trees splitting from top to bottom - a problem we solved by nailing the bark back together with tin tacks. In 1976 there was a severe drought and there were cracks in the ground that one could put one's hand down. The resulting crop was very poor and the next year's was also badly affected. Much has changed over the past 70 years and I have now been retired for many years myself. Spraying used to be done on "modern" farms in the 1930s by using underground mains to various points in an orchard. Here a heavy 25 yard long pressure hose was attached and each tree was sprayed from 3 directions to ensure complete coverage. Tar oil was used in winter and this regularly burnt the worker's face. Later tractor drawn machines came along and these were then superseded by air-assisted sprayers and then mist sprayers. Each innovation reduced the volume of water used,

from perhaps 300 gallons/acre to as low as 5 gallons! The early chemicals killed every insect egg, but later selective materials were used. European legislation means that ever fewer chemicals are permitted. This is fine for the environment but will the public accept apples with maggots?

Picking used to involve the use of heavy ladders. Nowadays no one can afford the cost of people going up and down. And in any case nobody is willing to climb (I once went 33 rungs up a ladder!). So we now grow trees that can be picked from ground level. From the picking bag we used to put apples into boxes each holding 40lbs which were then loaded individually onto a trailer. But for many years now bulk bins have been in use (the idea started in New Zealand). These bins hold about 640lb of fruit and can be picked up by a tractor and loaded on to a trailer. Holes for planting used to be dug by hand but now this can be done in a moment with a tractor-mounted auger. Pruning was detailed and by hand but now power-pruners and chain saws are used.

Prior to planting we not only have to consider the trees and pollinators but also plan shelter belts to create mini-climates which encourage bees and other pollinating insects and reduce wind. New varieties have been introduced and knowledge of rootstocks has improved. The supermarkets have increasingly wanted well-known varieties which travel well and have a long shelf-life. But now the public are asking for Russets or are enjoying Braeburn (a more recent introduction). People are prepared to go to farm shops and farmers' markets. Competition from abroad where production costs are less has contributed to the grubbing of some 60% of orchards. But with changing climate we may find it economic to plant new orchards perhaps further north to supply ourselves and possibly for export. So the challenge is there - who will accept it?

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Membership Year Extended! If members are wondering why they have not received the usual membership renewal letter it is because the membership year has been extended to the end of March 2010. Previously the renewal date was the 1st September but being close to the pressing season this caused difficulties since for insurance purposes equipment can only be hired by paid up members. Membership renewal letters will be sent out at the beginning of March and we hope that you will all wish to renew for another interesting year.

One of our members read the Orchard Link newsletter article on the EuCAN orchard management and habitat conservation visits and signed up to go to France. Makes it all worthwhile! We look forward to reading about his experiences in the next newsletter.

I promised you an article on curl buntings and orchards by the RSPB but it has not been forthcoming. I will nag them but for those of you interested check out the curl bunting bulletin on the RSPB website.

There is a book length publication from the Devon Archaeological Society (DAS): **Ancient Country: The Historic Character of Rural Devon** by Sam Turner who introduces it as "an introduction to Devon's wonderfully rich and endlessly fascinating historic landscape". It is very heavy reading but the reason I mention it is that it briefly zeros in on orchards: in the 1890's the Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) showed at least 120 km² of orchards, this value being based on land use for blocks greater than 1ha and so excluding many small orchards hence the total was surely higher. Now there is only 19 km² - a minimum of 84% decline. So it gives us a firm basis to cite such numbers. The good news is that with the advent of "... organisations like Common Ground ..." (Orchard Link being one such organisation) there has recently been a small rise in the area of Devon orchards.

Check your local library, come to an Orchard Link committee meeting and look at my copy or for your own copy order from the DAS Publications Officer at www.groups.ex.ac.uk/das/ for £12 including p&tp.

We still have some copies of a pamphlet entitled **Traditional Orchards: A guide to wildlife and management** by the People's Trust for Endangered Species. It describes steps that orchard owners can take to help to protect wildlife associated with traditional orchards. Email your address to me at Orchard Link and I will post a copy to you.

And finally I wish you all Seasons Greeting and we hope to see you all at one or more of our events in 2010.

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Bicton College has recently completed a beekeeping course. One of the students has contacted Orchard Link to ask if we could put orchard owners who would consider having hives located in their orchards in touch with her. If you are interested please contact Patricia at patricia.foong@gmail.com.

I am looking for fruit trees to photograph for a book I am writing about orchards. They don't need to be particularly exciting trees; more important is trees that will make a good photo. Small trees are usually better, especially where they can have a clear background. Pears, plums, cherries, apricots and peaches are all desirable. If you think that you can help, please contact me on 01803-868144, or 07792-664710. Thanks, Ben Pike

Footnotes

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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