NEWSLETTER

No 85 January 2019

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Please note that in this list, and the rest of this archived version of the Newsletter, contact details have been removed for data protection.

OFFICERS

Chairman
Hilary Dodson

Treasurer
Peter Robinson

MEMBERS

Membership: Sharan Packer

Minutes: Peter Nichol,

Newsletter: Jean Richards

Apple Events: Margaret Drury

Rachel Benson

Jo Murphy

Philip Rainford

Chris Simmonds

LOCAL CONTACTS

Local contacts are an informal network of volunteer members who may offer a range of services from organising occasional events in their area, to swapping seedlings, or simply providing information to visitors and newcomers. Please don't hesitate to get in touch if you think they can help you.

James Ellson: Hayfield (and area) (SK22 2LJ),
Bridget Evans: South Yorks,
Melanie Fryer: Skipton/Gisburn
Ken Haigh: Darlington,
Ann Hindley: Crowle, Scunthorpe
Jo Murphy: York area
Peter Nichol: Manchester area
Philip Rainford: Cumbria & North West
Chris Simmonds: Ryedale & North York Moors,

As you can see, the list isn't complete, so if your area isn't included, would you like to volunteer? Simply get your name and contact details in the Newsletter, and you take it from there, doing as much or as little as you wish.

****

DIARY

Dates for your diary for the next few months: please see the Programme and Events sections below for further information, and visit our Facebook page for updates and last minute changes to the programme.

FEBRUARY
Saturday 9: Meeting for exchange of scions, followed by short talks.

MARCH
Tuesday 12: Grafting course, open to all members
Saturday 23: Grafting course, open to all members

APRIL
Tuesday 23 - Wednesday 24: Setting up for ….
Thursday 25 - Sunday 28: Harrogate Spring Flower Show

FURTHER AHEAD
Saturday May 11: meeting open to all members
Tuesday 9 - Thursday 11 July: Great Yorkshire Show
Saturday November 9: Annual General Meeting and talk

****

EDITORIAL

Welcome to another new year, the beginning of a fresh growing season, and four more exciting issues of our Newsletter.

Housekeeping first: have you renewed your membership? Membership for 2018 expired with the old year, so unless you have paid up, you are no longer a member, and won't receive any more of our lovely Newsletters. If you haven't renewed yet, now is the time to do so.

Last year, we celebrated twenty years of production with a look back at our first four issues, in 1998. I found this entertaining, and I hope members did too, because a few more retrospectives have crept into this issue. The Fruit Novice is storing quinces in a very old-old-fashioned way, member Stuart Denton has found a cache of old magazines and promises to entertain us with snippets from the 1930s and 40s, and yes, there really was a Granny Smith. In addition to her (it?), George Baker looks at the origin of some his local apples, as does James Ellson (to avoid losing at scrabble yet again). Plus we have reports on some past events and information on events to come, appeals for help, some research results on mulch, Chris Simmonds on eating fuchsia berries (truly), Celia Cropper on quinces, and lots more. Unsolicited items are always welcome, and if you are not an internet user, don't hesitate to send me a hard copy by post: my contact details are on page 2.

The Editor, and all the Executive Committee, wish all members a happy and - perhaps more importantly - a fruitful New Year.

PROGRAMME
Fruit Group Events

Executive Committee members please note that the next meetings are scheduled for 10.00am on Saturday February 9, Saturday May 11, and Saturday November 9 immediately preceding the AGM.

Meetings

The first members' meeting of the year, on Saturday February 9, will be held at at 1.00pm at Hampsthwaite Memorial Hall and will include the annual scion exchange and some short talks by members. The post code for sat nav users is HG3 2EJ, but keep a map handy as we have reports that the post code takes you to the proverbial middle of nowhere. There is plenty of parking.

Please bring scions for exchange, rather than trees, and make sure that they are correctly labelled. (See the item below on Grafting Courses for information on how to collect scions.)

If you are a new member, or haven't come to the scion exchange before, please note that you don't have to bring anything in order to take away scions for your own use. Members donate scions they think will be of interest to other members, and no money changes hands.

The other two meetings scheduled for 2019 will be held on May 11 and November 9, at 1.00pm, in the Jubilee Room in the Learning Centre at Harlow Carr (dates are as yet unconfirmed by Harlow Carr; we trust they won't change but check in the next issue of the Newsletter just in case). Speakers to be announced.

Teaching gardens

Weather permitting, we will continue to meet fortnightly at our two teaching gardens, from 10.30am to 3.00pm, on Wednesdays at Dewhurst Road, and on Thursdays at Otley; if you would like to join us, please contact the Chairman for dates.

New volunteers - beginners included - are always welcome to join us. If you haven't been before and need further information or directions, again please contact our Chairman.

<> <> <>

Grafting Courses

Grafting courses will be held at Hampsthwaite Memorial Hall (see above for directions) on Tuesday 12th and Saturday 23rd March. Grafting courses are limited to 10 persons per session so please book by email using nfg.workshops@gmail.com. For these courses you only need to bring yourself and your lunch. Scions, rootstock, knives, tape, labels, string and wax will all be provided. However, if you have a Stanley knife with a new blade, please bring it. A carrier bag to take your muddy but grafted rootstock home could be a good idea.

Scions are lengths of the wood that grew last summer. They should not be matchstick thin or as thick as a pencil, but somewhere in between. Wood for scions needs to be fully dormant, so they should be collected in January or February. The central portion of the growth is used and it needs to be at least 4 buds long, so it is a good plan to have at least 6 buds to allow for errors. The scion is then stored, complete with a label, in a dry plastic bag in the salad drawer of the refrigerator.

Please let Hilary know if you wish to graft anything other than apples so the correct rootstock can be brought.

<> <> <>

Reports on last year's events

Visit to Ripon Walled Garden

The development of Ripon Walled Garden was the subject of the talk at our AGM in 2017, so we were delighted when speaker Rob Gooderidge invited us to visit the Garden for our annual outing last year. Roni Senior kindly sent us this report.

On a lovely afternoon in August, some thirty members of the Northern Fruit Group plus family and friends met at the Ripon Walled Garden, attached at the beginning of the Victorian era to the Bishop of Ripon's Palace. Lunch took a little longer than expected given the larger crowd than expected, so Rob Gooderidge, Garden Supervisor, gathered the waiting crowd near those still eating and explained the history to all of us.

The walled garden itself is now divided into sections, with a modern training area, the old fruit avenue, delightful gardens and lawns. Originally trees were trained round the inside and outside of the walls with the apple avenue dividing the Walled Garden itself and the main orchard beyond the gate; containing now huge standard trees.

The trees in the avenue are now reaching the end of their lives, often with hollow trunks and masses of lichen but they are still fruitful. However each year some shed branches and Rob is slowly replacing trees; trying to maintain the visual effect whilst slowly renewing the avenue.

The large orchard is rough cut grass; with paths wandering through the enormous standard apples, pears and plums, the latter being particularly impressive. There are also quince and gages. In spring, they must be a sight to behold. Here the plan is to replant with large standard trees over time; again to maintain the visual effect whilst gradually renewing the orchard. Even at 170 years old, some of the pears have a lot of life left in them. The Pitmaston Duchess right in front of the gateway is superb. Whilst most of the pears and apples have been identified, a few of the plums remain un-named including one huge tree almost in the centre of the orchard with dark purple fruit of a size to match the tree.

Many of the espalier and fan trained trees were not kept trained and are in a sorry state as far as formal aesthetics go, but the fruit on the Denniston's Superb plum tasted as wonderful as the name.

We scrumped round the orchard, with Rob helping with identification where possible and members' heads bent together where he was unsure. This is one of the gardens from which we collect fruit for the Harrogate Autumn Show and the Harlow Carr display, so we have a vested interest in its good health. If you've not visited before, or only visited during harvest, there's no doubt it will be stunning in spring time, with a succession of massive trees flowering over a long period. The Walled Garden are hoping to extend the woodland walks and the parking facilities and the café is welcoming.

And if you go in late summer, do check out the fig that lingers in the corner near the sales area.

Roni Senior

At this time of the year, the Ripon Walled Garden is open from 10.00am to 4.00pm daily, from Tuesday to Friday.

NFG Apple Event

Our annual apple event was held at Harlow Carr from October 31st to November 4th 2018, and was a success in many ways and for many reasons: the RHS gave free admission to all children under 16; it was half term and the weather was beautiful; and we also had more publicity in RHS Garden Magazine, Radio Leeds and local press. This meant the footfall through the display was huge which allowed us to talk to visitors and answer more questions than ever. We also signed up new members. We were also able to sell apple juice and quinces which were plentiful this year. Apples for tasting were available too, Elsanter was very popular with children. This helped to make the event financially worthwhile too.

The identifiers were kept busy with 125 people bringing 262 apples to be identified. They managed to keep up and named most before closing day, leaving very few people to be contacted after the event. Numbers of people requesting identification were up on last year (114 requests 205 apples). Some of our members who wanted to gain experience in identifying were able to sit in and learn. We need to encourage and help potential new identifiers.

To do all this we must mention the members who were there to help in many ways: we could not do it without them. They helped with setting up the display (it takes 2 full days), answering questions, directing people with apples to the identifiers, filling out requests for identification, pointing out the donations pot! And suggesting that the apples meant for sale would be tastier than the ones on the display, etc. etc. Thank you one and all.

Margaret Drury

<> <> <>

Shows

Harrogate Spring show

Last year we did very well, gaining silver-gilt medals for our stands at each of the shows. Can we keep it up this year?

The first show of the year is Harrogate Spring Show from 25th to 28th April. Our application has been made and we now have to consider the display we will put on. Last year we made a display for a backyard

garden. This year the thought is that we do a display for a modern patio. Ideas, props and helpers needed. Please get in touch with me to air your ideas, etc.

Thanks, Hilary Dodson

Great Yorkshire and the rest: Going for Gold

As Hilary said, this year we won Silver Gilt at all the shows where we had a stand. This was achieved by only a small number of volunteers who deserve a big thank you, not only for their time and knowledge that went into this, but also for swelling the coffers of the Fruit Group which helps to keep the membership fee at an incredible low £10 per year.

I'm sure like me you watch the flower shows such as Chelsea and the interviews with those who have won gold, but have you ever wondered what it feels like when you win? As the newest Committee member, I was heavily involved in the RHS Autumn Flower show and winning Silver gilt was a huge buzz. Unfortunately, the team that pulls this together is getting thinner (and a bit long in the tooth!) so we need your support. Help at the shows has many fun aspects, such as planning, setting up, meeting the public and answering questions plus the opportunity to look around the show with free entry for helping. You may feel you don't know much (I certainly do) but it's a great way to learn as you can pick up so much from other members on the stand.

So please join us on as many of the events you can and help make 2019 another good year for awards. I'm leading on the Autumn show so please give me call if you would like to join me and the other volunteers who came forward at the last meeting (01904 799839). Let Rachel Benson (or any of the committee members) know if you would like to help at any of the other events and don't forget your local contacts might have some other things in your area you could get involved in.

Jo Murphy

<> <> <>

Non Fruit Group Events

Don't forget that we are happy to advertise any non profit making fruit related events open to the public: just contact me with the details. Ed.

****

CONFESSIONS OF A FRUIT NOVICE

In the autumn, a kind friend gave the Constant Gardener (aka The Husband) several tens of kilos of quinces, something he doesn't grow. Overcoming his reluctance to accept anything not produced under his personal supervision, he brought them home and handed them over, 'indoors' being primarily my responsibility. Two batches of jelly and some quince vodka (highly recommended!) later, there were still some left. Being too Yorkshire to waste anything, I sought a second opinion from the CG.

"We must store them properly while we think about it" was his first response. "How?" I ask. "Your department", he says. So I look it up in my trusty bible, *Jane Grigson's Fruit Book.* "Got it" I tell him, "listen to this", and I read:

"*Pick ripe quinces without a blemish, in fine weather and at the waning of the moon. (*OK, have to trust that our friend did that*.) Put them gently into a large new bottle with a wide neck… Put a mat or ring of willow on top and press them down slightly, and cover with the best liquid honey. This way of storing not only keeps the quinces well but also gives you a liquor with the taste of honey and of quince which can safely be given to those with la sieure. Some people put quinces in little boxes on top of cupboards, where it's dry and cool, no smoke and no bad smells, with their heads up, stems down, not touching, in poplar or pine sawdust".*

He looks at me disbelievingly for a while, then puts on his coat and boots. "Where are you going?" I ask. "To find some willow. We have enough dust already." Ouch! And he's gone, before I can tell him that this recommendation comes from a book, quoted by Jane, called "*La Jardinage*" and dated 1578. I wonder if it will work.

I am, incidentally, still uncertain about the exact meaning of l*a sieure*, but I think it's an epileptic seizure. If so, I don't think the quince treatment is to be recommended.

****

FRUIT TREES NEEDED IN THE YORK AREA

As the local contact for York, I've been getting some calls for support and advice. All Saints school have applied to be an ECO School (www.eco-schools.org.uk) which is a pupil led award scheme to engage children in improving the environment. The aim is to put ten things in place which leads to the International ECO-Schools Green Flag award. Two of the ten areas to improve are biodiversity and healthy living and as the head master has just retired they would like to create a garden for him which is particularly attractive to bees.

Of course, as always, the budget is the size of an apple pip, hence my appeal in this Newsletter. There is space for 12 fruit trees, apples, pears, plums and we have a request for a quince from the catering support teacher. So, if you have been carried away by the grafting bug and have a few too many trees that have no home, please can we have them?

They would also appreciate other plants, seeds, tools and planters that you might be wanting to get rid of. I'll be at the February meeting so if you could bring them along then I'd be grateful. Could you also ring and let me know what you have, in case I need to get some other drivers from the school (01904 799839).

Many thanks for your help.

Jo Murphy

****

BEES

Our item on bees in the October issue brought this response from "John, newish member in east Yorks":

Just spotted your article on varroa, the little blighter. Formic acid is used and can be bought freely in UK. One product though has a nasty habit of killing queens, so I steer clear.

Another natural product is effective, oxalic acid. Know where that is found? Rhubarb leaves! It's vapourised by heating below the hives, but don't breath it in!*

It's virtually impossible to get rid of the bugs but timely dosing controls them. They carry several viruses, one being deformed wing virus. They can wipe hives out if you're complacent.

Sorry for the confusion; because formic acid was banned by the EU when the original piece was written in 1998, I assumed, wrongly, that it remained so. Thanks to John for putting me right.

** My resident chemist tells me that oxalic acid is a competitive inhibitor of the enzyme lactate dehydrogenase (LDH) which is involved in the pathways for producing energy in the cell, so it can be dangerous by ingestion or prolonged skin contact. So now you know! Ed*

****

UNUSUAL FRUITS - QUINCE

Quince trees (I am talking about Cydonia oblonga here, not the bushy Japanese Quince, Cydonia Japonica) are hardy and long lived, which need less pruning and maintenance than apples and pears. They have attractive pink blossom and handsome yellow fruit, rich in vitamins and minerals, with a pleasant taste and scent. They were very popular in seventeenth century England for making a range of preserves, but seem to have gone out of fashion.

One reason may be that they can take up a lot of space in a small garden, They are mainly grown as free standing trees, with size depending on the choice of rootstock. Quince A is semi-dwarfing and produces a tree of up to 15ft (5m) height and spread and Quince C which is dwarfing, producing trees of up to 10ft (3m) in height and spread. However, there is now a patio, very dwarfing quince, which only grows to about 100 cm. They may also be wall trained as a fan (but are unsuitable for cordons or espaliers as they produce their fruit buds on the tips of shoots). A bonus is that, being self-fertile, only one tree is needed.

Cultivation

As the Quince comes from Iran, it will tolerate very cold winters, but likes hot summers, so if grown in the North, it needs a sunny position. Training against a south-facing wall is a good idea, as this will promote good quality fruit. Quinces are prone to leaf rust infections, particularly if grown in the shade. The apple shaped Leskovac/Serbian Gold is said to be the hardiest and probably the best choice for colder positions. It is also said to be resistant to leaf rust infections.

Other varieties for sale in Britain are the pear shaped Meech's Prolific and Vranja. Vranja is said to be more suitable for the south. Quince trees will tolerate most soils.

Quince trees are usually developed as vase or open-centred trees. Once the framework has been developed the tree must be pruned regularly, particularly the inner parts, which can become choked and shaded unless excessive growth is removed. Those limbs or the parts which are weak or crowded should be thinned, and the dead ones removed. Prune out unwanted shoots by removing them completely, not just shortening them, so as to encourage new growth for the future. Apart from this, little other pruning is required; however, if trees become too high, the tops can be shortened.

My Meech's Prolific tree, growing in the shade of a building in Manchester, suffers from Quince Rust, which causes the leaves to be spotted and fall, weakening the tree, and, in a bad year, also affecting the crop. If planting again, I would choose a sunnier position and the variety Leskovac. Spraying with fungicide seems to make little difference. However, I manage to get a crop most years by carefully removing fallen leaves, so spores cannot reinfect new leaves in the Spring and removing shaded branches, which are much the worse affected. Also by the basic TLC of feeding and mulching. Unsurprisingly, I have had very little leaf rust and a record crop this unusually hot summer.

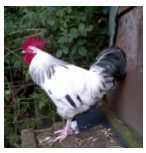
Cooking

The golden yellow fruits do need to be cooked. Although hard and astringent when raw, when cooked they have a very pleasant taste. They can take as little as fifteen minutes to cook, but have the property of turning a beautiful red colour after a couple of hours in a covered casserole. This is due to the release of health giving anthocyanins, the red pigments also found in berries.

Quinces can be used in savoury dishes, to accompany meats, but also in a wide range of sweet dishes. They are particularly good baked or in a compote with lemon and ginger and also enliven apple dishes. They also make excellent preserves, due to their high pectin content. Quince jelly is a classic, but there is also Quince Paste, known in Spain as Membrillo, and eaten with cheese and cold meats. Sometimes the quince flesh may turn brown on cutting, but I have found that this does not seem to affect the cooking quality, provided you cut out anything actually rotten. As raw quinces can be very hard, it may be easier to leave in the core and to pull it out with your fingers after cooking.

Celia Cropper

****

A Smallholder Writes . . . No 11 NFG member James Ellson writes a blog about his smallholding http://jamesellson.blogspot.co.uk/	

Apple Stories

It's the winter. Time to sharpen your secateurs, check your apple stocks, make apple brandy, and decide on your grafting targets for March. And play scrabble with the wife.

If you've done all that, then you may consider a spot of research for the website fruitid http://www.fruitid.com/#main which describes itself as a fruit identification project for pomologists, orchardists, and fruit enthusiasts.

419 apples have so far been researched and published, but plenty have not.

Having been thrashed on consecutive weekends by the wife at scrabble, I decided to try my brain at apple research.

It's been an interesting journey. I have spoken to academics at RHS Lindley Library, owners of garden centres, and a Welsh octogenarian. I have looked up death records and ancient nursery catalogues, and bought a copy of Muriel Smith's National Apple Register on ebay. I have received Baker's Delicious in the post, and I have sent Christmas Pippin.

I discovered that, like artefacts and works of art, like extinct animals and old people, indeed like almost everything, apples have a geography and a history. Apple cultivars have stories.

Following is a flavour of 'my' apples, but for the full stories, have a look at the fruitid website. And if you're feeling really rash, then you could challenge my wife to scrabble.

Herefordshire Russet

A popular modern cultivar bred by Hugh Ermen in 2002. Parentage unknown.

Matthews describe it as ‘the russet with a Cox flavour. Exceptional eating quality with a rich aromatic flavour. A winner in “taste testings” around the country.’

Hugh Ermen (1928-2009) was one of the UK’s leading amateur apple breeders. He specialised in breeding new varieties, especially own root trees (rather than the standard practice of using dwarfing rootstocks). In 1988 he was awarded the RHS Associate of Honour for his contributions to pomology. He worked at Brogdale and bred popular cultivars which also include Core Blimey, Red Devil, Winter Gem, Limelight, Scrumptious, and Sweet Society.

Bakers Delicious / *Dantaith Pobydd*

An early dessert apple introduced in 1932 by Norman Baker of Bakers Nursery in Codsall, Wolverhampton. He found the apple growing in a client’s garden in Wales. Parentage unknown.

An advert on the back of the 1948 Bakers catalogue describes the apple as ‘Handsome, mid-season Dessert Apple with typical Cox’s Orange flavour.’

It is not well known in England, but in South Wales it has a good reputation and is grown on a small-scale for farm shops.

James Macduff of Ystwyth Valley Apple Breeders in West Wales told me ‘it is a promising parent for breeding as (a) it has a good flavour, (b) seems pretty free from scab, bird and insect damage, (c) yields reliably, (d) and is of reasonable size and look.’

Christmas Pippin

A new Cox-type apple introduced in 2010 by Marshalls who state ‘it reaches perfection in November / December . . . a perfect accompaniment to a glass of port and a slice of Stilton on Christmas Day!’ Parentage unknown.

It was discovered in 2003 by Geoffrey Rowson who noticed it growing beside the M5 motorway in Somerset. He collected samples and found them of good flavour. He sent samples to Matthews and to the National Fruit Collection at Brogdale. There was a positive response. The NFC curator Dr Lamont wrote they were ‘impressed by its flavour’, while Joan Morgan, who’d been shown the apple on a visit to Brogdale, described it as ‘a possible winner’.

Encouraged, Rowson collected graftwood and sent them to Matthews who grafted it on M9 rootstock. In 2005 Rowson planted one of these trees in his garden.

Rowson met the owner of an adjacent field to the original tree. A long-term resident, he told Rowson that orchards had once stood there. This led Rowson to discounting the theory that the tree was a seedling from a core thrown from a car. He thought it more likely the tree had sprung from a windfall apple in the original orchard.

In 2008 Rowson's new tree produced its first reasonable crop of apples (17 lbs). He transferred its ownership to Matthews who applied for Plant Breeders Rights. Then in 2010, Matthews gave sole marketing rights to Marshalls who began advertising. Matthews also arranged for it to be included in a trial of fruit varieties organised by BIFGA (British Independent Fruit Growers Association) planted on three sites: Brogdale, Hadlow College in Kent, and Wisley.

As a result, Christmas Pippin was put on sale at garden centres.

Thanks James. For another fascinating history, see the piece on Granny Smith on page 21. Ed.

****

MULCHING MADNESS

The aim of this article by Dr Glynn Percival of the Bartlett Tree Research Laboratory is to outline developments in mulch technology that can be used to enhance fruit tree yield and root growth

It is now well recognized that for newly planted fruit trees, the first year is critical for good root establishment. A tree is 'established' once it has grown sufficient roots to stay alive without the need for supplemental irrigation. Consequently enhanced root growth equates to quicker establishment. Mulching under fruit trees provides the simplest means to stimulate root growth as mulches suppress weed growth, maintain a constant soil temperature and moisture retention, encourage mycorrhizal associations and improve soil fertility. Such benefits will become more important as during the summer of 2018 the UK experienced a prolonged drought period identified as one of the hottest summers on record, with climatic models indicating the UK will become a warmer drier country over the next twenty years.

Wood chip provides an ideal mulch for fruit trees. It is long lasting, breaks down into a humus, and is available in large quantities as a waste by-product of the arboricultural/forestry industry so is inexpensive to

purchase. When making mulches from wood chip the general consensus is to allow the wood chip to "rot down" for several months. Contrary to this however, research at the Bartlett Tree Research Laboratory based at the University of Reading has shown that far greater benefits can be obtained when a fresh rather than composted mulch is used. The premise behind this, is that trees contain a diverse array of chemicals such as terpenes phenols, alkaloids, sterols, waxes, fats, tannins, sugars, gums, suberins, resin acids and carotenoids. These classes of compounds are known as secondary or special metabolites; many of which are commonly used for medicinal, botanical and pharmaceutical purposes. Consequently, when a fresh mulch is used all these chemicals are released into the soil which in turn can have a profound effect on soil biology which is manifest above ground in terms of fruit yield and root vigour.

For example, a field trial was set up at the Bartlett laboratory using 1-1.5m high trees of conference pear and apple cv Gala. Trees were planted in late January and mulched to a depth of 12-15cm using one of six mulches made solely from either beech (Fagus sylvatica), hawthorn (Crataegus monogyna), silver birch (Betula pendula), cherry (Prunus avium), evergreen oak (Quercus ilex) and English oak (Q. robur). Ten trees per mulch were used and all mulches were applied at the same time as the pear and apple trees were planted. During the growing season no irrigation was required and no supplementary fertilisers were applied. Effects of pure mulches on crown volume growth and fruit yield were recorded at the end of the growing season. Interestingly mulches derived from hawthorn and cherry were shown to be the best type of mulch, increasing crown volume growth by 100-150% and fruit yields by 400-600%. Even the "worse" type of pure mulch (beech) increased crown volume growth by 20% and fruit yields by 50%. The importance of this result is that any mulch is better than no mulch.

Why the differences between mulches?

The most likely reason is, as stated before, as the mulch breaks down, chemicals within each mulch influence soil biology which in turn influences root growth and fruit yield. In support of this, previous research has shown a mulch derived solely from cypress trees slowed down the growth of hydrangeas, spirea and viburnums compared to several garden centre bought mulches. As cypress trees are noted for their resistance to decay fungi which is associated with the presence of phenolic compounds in the wood, it was suggested these phenolics would be leached into the soil in turn inhibiting root growth. Other chemicals found within trees,

however, have been shown to be effective at stimulating root growth. Both hawthorn and cherry are inherently high in sugars such as sucrose and sorbital. Applications of sugars to transplanted English oak, silver birch and European beech trees has been shown to be effective at stimulating root vigour, encouraging mycorrhizal associations, alleviating transplant stress and increasing survival rates while latest studies have shown a fresh mulch derived solely from Eucalyptus cladocalyx had a positive effect in transplant performance of Platanus racemosa.

For the Future

Results of our research and that of others, show that a mulch derived from a single tree species has the potential to provide many benefits, i.e. in our experiment fruit yield of young apple and pear trees was increased by 400-600%. Such benefits may have a positive impact not only for those involved in the care and maintenance of fruit trees but other industries such as arboriculture, forestry, and horticultural crop production. Importantly, use of mulches require no capital investment and only small adjustments to standard management aftercare procedures.

Applying mulches for fruit trees

Ideally each tree should have a mulch ring measuring at least 1m in diameter; this can be expanded by 30 cm each year in the first few years after planting to pave the way for new feeder root growth. Mulch should be a minimum depth of 5 cm, and a maximum of 10 cm.

References

Percival, G C; Gklavakis, E; Noviss, K. (2009). The influence of pure mulches on survival, growth and vitality of containerised and field planted trees. Journal of Environmental Horticulture. 27(4): pp. 200-206.

Percival, G.C. (2013) Influence of Pure Mulches on Suppressing Phytophthora Root Rot Pathogens. Journal of Environmental Horticulture. 31 (4): 71-77.

Percival G.C (2013). Mulching for Disease Control. The Arb Magazine. Issue 162 Autumn
Edition. pp: 37-40.

Thanks to member Jo Ryan for bringing this to our attention.

GROWING STRAWBERRIES IN POTS

Strawberries are traditionally planted out in rows in dedicated beds, but gardeners with limited space often try keeping them in containers, especially purpose made strawberry planters. This is not unlike the methods used by commercial growers where plants are cropped on growing bags on benches. This aids crop management; growing media and feeding can be better controlled to optimise the plants requirements, and benches make picking easier. Pots have additional advantages: they can be moved or turned maximise light, warmth and air circulation.

With this in mind, the RHS undertook a Plant Trial of strawberries in hanging baskets and growing bags in 2016-17 at RHS Garden Wisley in Surrey.

Strawberries fall into two main types: June or summer-bearing cultivars, which produce one crop of fruit each growing season, usually about 10 days in June, and perpetual strawberries or ever-bearing cultivars, which produce two or three crops a year.

Most strawberries will grow well in pots and there are many to choose from. Grow in containers in John Innes No 2 compost or good quality peat free multipurpose but add 30% perlite by volume, especially to larger pots, to improve drainage. Ensure the crown of the plant is set at or above soil level to prevent rot setting in over winter. Spring is the best time to plant bare root strawberry runners which have been cold stored to hold them back. Available from a range of suppliers, young cold stored plants establish quickly and produce a crop in just two months. Alternatively buy pot grown plants from a garden centre in spring, or late summer/autumn.

Feed plants with liquid tomato fertiliser from spring onwards; when watering avoid splashing leaves to prevent fungal diseases (mildew and grey mould) spoiling the fruit yield. Container grown plants can be troubled by vine weevil, the grubs of which eat roots in winter: treat pots with nematodes available as a sachet formulation to be watered on in late summer. Fruit fly (spotted wing drosophila), strawberry virus and strawberry black eye can also be a problem. Net fruiting plants to avoid bird attack.

Pick and eat the fruits when they are bright red all over, ideally during the warmest part of the day, because this is when they are most tasty.

For the trial, plants were grown in growing bags and hanging baskets, three to each. This worked well for bags, but in the second year

baskets became congested, affecting fruit performance. Lifting plants off the ground avoided the major pests, slugs and snails, but created a tabletop feast for a family of squirrels, despite a good fruit cage.

The following strawberries were given the RHS Award of Garden Merit (AGM) for use in growing bags:

- 'Finesse': good flavour, quality, size, and yield; excellent disease resistance.
- 'Florence': late summer fruiting cultivar, good flavour, trouble free, good yield.
- 'Malling Centenary': large fruit, good flavour, good in trial, a huge success commercially.
- 'Vibrant': best of the June bearers in the trial, good sweet flavour, dark red berries, produced a second crop.

No strawberries in hanging baskets achieved an AGM.

Abridged from "Scarlet Drops Make Tasty Pots", The Garden (magazine of the RHS), July 2018

****

APPLES

ONE A DAY… BUT YOU NEED TO EAT THE RIGHT BIT

New findings have revealed that eating an apple regularly is not enough to promote good health. Eating the skin of the apple is the important thing.

With just 60-80 calories per serving, 3g of fibre, and plenty of nutrients including potassium and vitamin C, apples are a low GI, high fibre food that makes a perfect snack. While the positive nutritional profile of apples has been known for thousands of years, more recently researchers have become increasingly aware of the nutrient powerhouse that is apple skin. It is becoming more apparent that it is much better to actually eat the whole fruit, skin and all.

Apple skin contains high amounts of polyphenols, in fact 2½ times the amount that is in the flesh. Polyphenols are a group of natural, plant based molecules known for a myriad of health benefits including powerful weight control and anti-cancer properties.

Specifically, new research published in the *Journal of the American College of Nutrition* has reviewed 13 scientific studies investigating the regular intake of apples and found that the high polyphenol content of apples appears to be linked to preventing weight gain via a range of mechanisms including reducing the absorption of fat and carbohydrate in the body, helping fat to be metabolised and helping to create a healthy gut that is required for weight control. In addition to these benefits, it appears that a diet high in polyphenols through the regular consumption of apples is linked to a reduced risk of developing some types of cancer and specifically the slowing of breast cancer cell growth in laboratory studies.

When it comes to bumping up our fruit consumption, one of the most common questions nutritionists are asked is what about the sugar content? Apples, like all varieties of fruit, contain the naturally occurring fruit sugar fructose: an apple, for example contains 12-14g of naturally occurring sugars. While the regular consumption of fruit is not linked to weight gain, one way to help regulate the amount of fruit sugars consumed at any one time is to always eat the whole fruit rather than juiced or other processed varieties (and in the case of apples skin and all), but also enjoy your apples with some protein rich foods.

A few apple slices with cheese, or spread with 100 per cent nut spread, or blitzed into a morning smoothie with Greek yoghurt and milk are easy ways to enjoy the health benefits of apples and their skin in a healthy, balance diet.

Susie Burrell is a nutritionist. Follow her on Twitter: @SusieBDiet

<> <> <>

THE ORIGINS OF GRANNY SMITH

About 90,000 people gathered in Australia in October 2018 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Granny Smith apple. But who was the English emigrant who gave her name to the famous fruit? New evidence has recently come to light.

In the 1860s, in the farming community of Eastwood, 10 miles or so north of Sydney, an unusual apple tree could be seen growing along the banks of a creek. Its fruit was notable for its large size, light-green skin and suitability for both cooking and eating raw. The tree grew so abundant that its branches were later claimed to have been propped up to stop them breaking.

How it originated is not known for certain. But according to legend, the tree grew from the discarded core of a crab apple thrown out of the kitchen window by a farmer's wife - one Maria Ann Smith.

The lady herself. Image copyright: family

This legend is borne out, to some degree, by science. An entirely new variety of apple, such as Granny Smith, could only grow from cross-pollinated seeds within an apple. The parentage of the Granny Smith is thought to be possibly a cross between a cultivated apple and malus sylvestris, a crab apple.

Amanda Karlstrom, of UK horticultural research firm NIAB EMR explains: "Granny Smith is most likely a chance hybrid of two existing varieties and/or species. The clever bit that Ms Smith did was to identify the potential of her young plant, nurture the seedling and propagate it for wider apple production. This was certainly no mean feat as most people never get their young plants to the fruiting stage."

Could the real Granny Smith have brought this knowledge with her to Australia from the other side of the world?

In 1838, the Lady Nugent had sailed into Sydney with nearly 50 emigrant families on board including the Smith family - Maria with her husband,Thomas, and their five surviving children.

Back in England, the Smiths had lived in the village of Beckley, in Sussex, surrounded by the orchards of the Weald. It seems likely Maria had spent her life in England on fruit farms: records suggest that Cherry

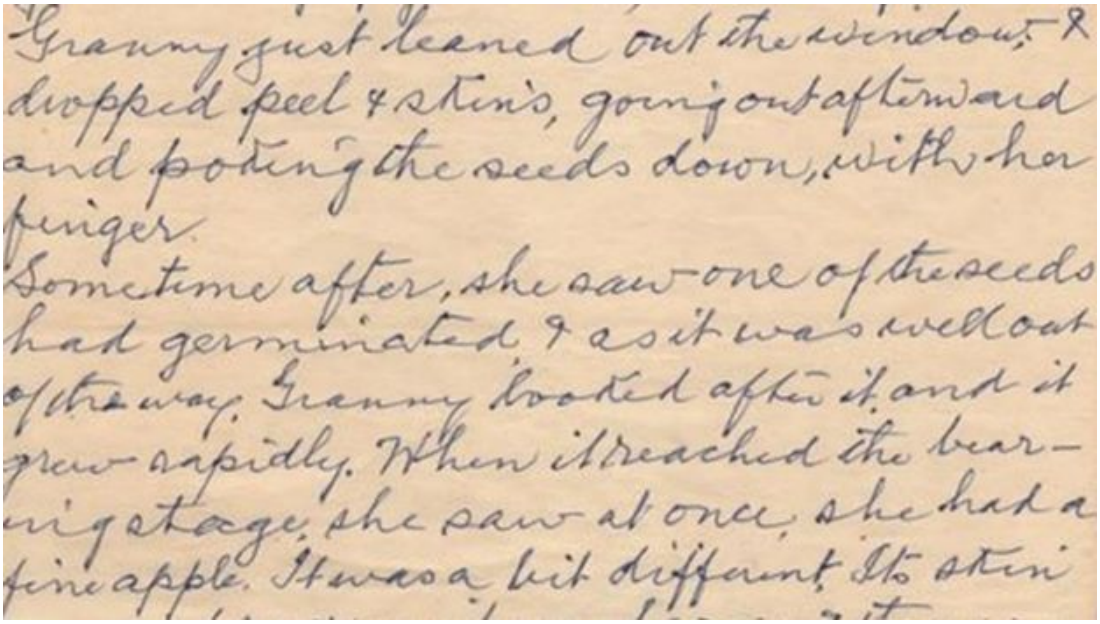
Gardens, a farm in the area specialising (despite its name) in hops and pears, may have been tenanted by her father-in-law.

However, conditions were tough in England in the 1820 and 30s and it appears the Smiths fell on hard times.The end of the Napoleonic Wars had led to a labour surplus and depressed wages for farm labourers. At the same time, increased mechanisation had reduced demand for agricultural labour. Poor, hungry and increasingly angry, rural families took action in the summer of 1830 as the Swing Riots broke out in neighbouring Kent and soon spread to Sussex.

Beckley would have been right "in the eye of the storm". It was "one of the most pauperised parishes" in the county, according to the guardians of the Rye Poor Law Union. "We are in the greatest possible distress for want of labour at the Rye union board," wrote parish official Samuel Selmes. "Yesterday we had upwards of 80 labourers out of employ and our houses [workhouses] are quite full."

The solution, officials decided, was to send people abroad. By November the parish had paid for about 200 people to be taken to Australia to begin new lives. Maria, Thomas and their five children were among them.

A letter written decades later by Granny Smith's grandson, Benjamin Spurway, describes how the family found employment in Australia before taking on land for themselves and establishing an orchard.


Granny just leaned out the window & dropped peel & stin's, goin' on afterward and poking the seeds down, with her finger.
Sometime after, she saw one of the seeds had germinated & as it was well out of the way Granny looked after it and it grew rapidly. When it reached the bearing stage, she saw at once, she had a pine apple. It was a bit diffarnt. Its stin

Family copyright

The letter has only recently come to light after lying undiscovered for decades. The land was heavily-timbered, he wrote. "Much hard work,

determination and courage were needed before the land was cleared, ploughed and cultivated and ready to make a fruit orchard, which they decided upon. The day came when their ambitions were realised and a beautiful orchard took the place of wilderness. Oranges and all kinds of fruit of that period were grown on the rich soil."

Spurway goes on to tell how Thomas Smith took on a market stall to sell the fruit but came back penniless after he stopped at the pub. At that point, Maria took over the stall. It was at the market that another fruit producer gave her a batch of crab apples to test their cooking qualities. According to her grandson, she made two pies, dropped the peelings and cores out of the window, and the first Granny Smith seedling grew.

The family records that the first Granny Smith apple was produced in 1868, two years before she died. Later, the apple grew in popularity and went on to become one of Australia's major food exports. Today it is grown around the world.

In Eastwood, which long ago became a suburb of Sydney, the bountiful fruit that made the area prosperous is still remembered. A Granny Smith festival has been held each year since 1985 and is attended by tens of thousands of people.

However, the Smith family did not become rich. "Fruit can't be patented, and I often think how rich we could have been if it had have been different," said Sue Butler, who is Maria's great-great-great-great-great granddaughter. "But we are proud of its history."

Abridged from a BBC news item

<> <> <>

Local Apples

Every area has its own local apple. A chance seedling at the road side or in an orchard, which tastes so good it gets cloned in a very tight area and never gets to market. But what I have in mind is/was a spontaneously arising apple that is good enough to get to market as a named cultivar.

Here are 3 that I have grafts of, all local to me in North Manchester, all cookers but maybe that is what you would expect in generally, wet, heavy soils:

Pott's Seedling

Raised by Samuel Potts in Ashton-under-Lyme (6 miles) around 1850 then sold commercially by John Nelson of Rotherham. Early cooker that does not store. Green (with a light pink flush) cooks to a frothy purée.

I have a couple of these grafted, not sure of the rootstock but it came from Hilary, so possibly 106. If a couple of people local to Ashton/ Manchester/South Lancs want to try this tree then get in touch. Contribution to the group funds AND a couple of apples each year please.

Lord Suffield, aka Lady Sutherland

Raised by Thomas Thorpe, a Weaver, from Middleton (3 miles), first distributed about 1836. Named after Lord (or Lady) Suffield because his Lordship had a local estate cooker, crisp, juicy flesh with an acid flavour. Cooks well, breaking up completely.

Lord Derby

Raised by B.W. Witham in Stockport (8 miles) first recorded 1862. Catshead is possibly a parent mid/late-season cooker. Green/yellow large 5 ribbed angular sharp fruit, long stalk, prolific and regular cropper. Stays intact when cooked. Cook early when green for a sharp taste. Good for pies. Does well on cold wet soils. Resistant to scab, very prolific.

There is a **Manchester Pippin** listed in national fruit collection at http://www.nationalfruitcollection.org.uk/names.phpbut I can find no more information about it.

I would love it if you told me about YOUR local apple, please share, especially if you know any local to North Manchester.

George Baker

****

GENETIC MODIFICATIONS HELP IN THE FIGHT AGAINST BANANA BLIGHT

Some time ago we reported on that banana blight was threatening commercial crops. Here's good news of the latest development.

The first strain of genetically modified banana to show almost complete immunity to a virulent fungal disease devastating banana crops around the world has been developed.

Banana fusarium wilt or Panama disease emerged in the 1990s and has swept through plantations of *Musa acuminata* Cavendish Group, which accounts for almost all supermarket bananas and about half of all commercial plantations. Cavendish bananas themselves replaced *M. acuminata* 'Gros Michel', wiped out in the 1950s by an earlier strain of the disease.

Because most bananas are sterile clones, they are particularly susceptible to epidemics. Attempts to produce resistance through breeding have been only partially successful.

At the Queensland University of Technology in Australia, researchers have modified Cavendish bananas with a gene from a wild banana which is unaffected by Panama disease. Field trials have so far revealed four strains with good resistance, including one showing no signs of the disease after three years in infested soil. The modified bananas could reach growers within five years, but how popular will they prove with consumers?

From the RHS magazine The Garden, February 2018

****

OLD ORCHARDS: SOME DETECTIVE STORIES

Anne Lee is back on the trail of Ernest Oddy's Old Orchard Notebooks: Wilstrop Hall Farm

The mediaeval village of Wilstrop near York has disappeared and all that remains are the humps in the pastures, indicating where people once lived. The 'period' hall, which stands on the site of the former manor house, is not an ostentatious mansion in the grandiose tradition and it functioned as a working farm. (You do not walk through the door of a stately home and immediately step into a farmyard surrounded by barns.) In the early 1990s what remained of the old orchard, situated on the north-facing slope between the house and the River Nidd, was being used as a pasture for beef cattle.

In the 1980s the European Common Agricultural Policy encouraged farmers to grub out their old farm orchards and convert the land to more productive use. As no viable market existed, or would ever again exist for their fruit, these orchards were considered a waste of land. Commercial production, particularly of French apples, grown on dwarfing rootstocks,

had begun to exceed demand. (Remember the 'Apple Mountain' and the tipping of the excess harvest into landfill?) The change from traditional small mixed farms, each with an orchard, to develop intensive arable agriculture resulted in the disappearance of the large-sized standard trees that were a feature associated with the Victorian/Edwardian English countryside - the consequence of their removal has had a destructive impact on the landscape. You can now drive through what were once notable fruit-growing areas in the North, such as the Vale of York, and see scarcely any apple, plum or pear trees on farms. Only a scattering of pockets remain and where they do, their survival appears to be for sentimental reasons, such as Fred Hirst's at Swillington: '...it was my grandfather's orchard'; or because, as the late Frank Knowles at Pickhill acknowledged, the orchard is a recognised part of the farm history, and in the case of the late Jimmy Beale's at Sutton -on- Derwent, because he was a tenant on church land.

'Prof Apple' Ernest was advocating organic growing years before 'green' ideas achieved mainstream recognition, but in the late 1980s concerned environmentalists started campaigning for the preservation of traditional farm orchards on grounds of heritage value, biodiversity, landscape enhancement and social importance to local communities. Common Ground was founded in 1989 and 'Apple Day', initiated in 1990, has since become a national institution. Among Ernest's files I discovered an undated statement he wrote, arguing a case for the preservation of old farm orchards. I guess he may have written it in connection with a TV programme, broadcast in about 1995, in which Ernest appeared along with Jimmy Beale, then in his 80s, who was still actively running his farm. The theme of the programme was deploring the demise of the English apple, particularly the loss of heritage favourites. Ernest displayed and described some of the apples growing in Jimmy's orchard. Here follow Ernest's own words:

Old farm orchards have almost disappeared, so are becoming extremely rare.

Large village orchards and farm orchards must be looked upon as distinct and separate from the orchards of the large private estates [e.g. Newby Hall]. At one time they provided all the fruit that was needed on the farm, to be used either freshly harvested, after storage, or for preserving.

The orchard was the domain of the women and I have heard It said that a bride would take grafts from her parents' orchard to her new orchard, so that she would have trees of the varieties she liked best.

Some of the larger orchards supplied the local markets with fruit, thus the variety, quality and flavour had to be good.

Cultivars that had a resistance to disease, such as scab and canker, were chosen, and a 'balance of power' controlled the pests. In unsprayed orchards the large armies of natural predators that build up, such as ladybirds, hoverflies, lacewings and [unreadable] mites need pests such as caterpillars, greenfly and spider mites to live on. This natural food chain is an ecology unique to orchards, but as a result some fruits may be damaged. The Prince of Wales would no doubt agree, though, that using natural organic control in this way is better than spraying trees with chemical insecticides. There is less demand these days for fruit from unsprayed orchards, because the public demand unblemished fruit. This is one reason why farm orchards have been neglected in recent years and allowed to fall into disuse. Many have been grubbed out Properly managed they are capable of producing lots of good, clean organically grown fruit.

Apart from the fruit they are capable of producing, farm orchards provide a fine feature in the landscape, not only in the Spring when the trees are in blossom, but also in the late Summer and Autumn when they are heavy with fruit. Some trees, especially pears, provide very attractive autumnal tints.

Farm orchards are also worth preserving from an historic point of view.

[Note: Ernest omitted to mention in paragraph 2, that cider production was an important use for the apple crop and that the 'historic point of view' also included the tradition that a farm labourer's wages would be paid partly in cider. A Ripon historian told us that records describe drunken riots, especially associated with the Feast of Mary Magdalene, 22 July, which coincided with the first cider of the year made from the earliest apples, Red Juneating. The Saints' days, the holy days, were the workers' holidays. Lammas, the first loaf from the harvest in August, was celebrated with perry from the Lammas pear. Other historical uses were bee-keeping and as pasture for grazing livestock - often geese. They ate the windfalls, which helped to keep the trees disease free. Washing, particularly large sheets, could be pegged out to dry on lines tied between the trees.]

The Investigation

At Wilstrop farmer Sam Blacker, was involved with the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group. He installed mixed hedgerows, woodland trees,

wild flowers and ponds, inhabited by coots and moorhens. Sam shunned the use of chemical fertilisers, insecticides and herbicides. He created a permissive footpath through the orchard alongside the river, so that people might enjoy the walk among the fruit trees and observe the birdlife. I have seen a tree sparrow and a bullfinch in the tree canopy and a tree creeper making a mouse-like foray up the trunk. These small birds are preyed on by sparrowhawks. Sandmartins nest in the river bank and swoop low over the water, where kingfishers have also been observed. Because of the distinctive biodiversity that exists in old orchards, Sam was keen, for environmental reasons, to re-establish the orchard at Wilstrop - he wanted to conserve the old fruit varieties and provide habitats for wildlife. His first consideration was not that this project should be a commercial 'fruit farm' venture.

Sam, who was on the Tockwith Show committee, knew Ernest, as each year the latter would judge the fruit and vegetables. In 1992 Sam told Ernest about his proposed project. Ernest agreed to conduct a survey of the existing trees; assess their condition, decide whether a restoration programme was feasible and if so, advise on renewal pruning and planting - but at the same time give consideration to conserving the flora and fauna, such as what lichens and mosses colonised the bark. If all the dead wood is removed, so are the invertebrates that live in it and the birds dependent on them, such as woodpeckers and nuthatches will leave.

The first thing that struck Ernest on entering the orchard was the considerable height of the standard pear trees. Pears have a longer life expectancy than apples and can grow up to 30ft tall. [Note: all the measurements in this orchard were made in the old imperial system, so I have retained it.] There's an old saying: 'Walnuts and pears, you grow for your heirs'. Witstrop's pear trees were laden with crops of largely unblemished fruit, but so high up it appeared impossible to harvest them. Jimmy Beale told us, that traditionally, boys of about ten years old were made to climb up pear trees to pick the fruit (I suppose it made a change from cleaning chimneys). Jimmy recollected his grandfather would order him: 'Sithee, git up yon tree an' woe betide thee if tha drops ony', and how terrified he was - but evidently more in terror of his father's wrath.

Ernest's next task was to draw a map, measured out by pacing, on which he marked the position of the 26 surviving trees; their identity, and a record of their condition. Most of the apple trees were so old that they were hollow, but still bearing good fruit. The longest-lived survivors were the trees Ernest identified as Improved Cockpit (but see below), remarkably 'in reasonable condition', whereas a heavily cankered, decrepit

Warner's King was still producing a crop of huge, green unblemished cookers.

In old orchards it is interesting to observe which varieties have the longest life and which are resistant to all the pests and diseases. The oldest apple trees in the best condition at Wilstrop are undoubtedly these Improved Cockpit. Varieties that 'stand the test of time' appear to be those that make vigorous large standard trees, such as Bramley and Blenheim Orange, as presumably theirs is harder, stronger wood. (The Cockpit trees in the Ripon Walled Garden are still there and I have never known them to have a crop failure.)

Damsons and plums had self-seeded at the west end, thus providing a shelterbelt from the prevailing wind. The river in spate over the years had washed away the soil from underneath a huge Vicar of Winkfield pear standing by the riverbank, so that about half its roots dangled in the air over the water: it looked as if it would crash into the river at the next flood. Ernest noted mistletoe growing on a hollow Norfolk Beefing tree (and it is said that six invertebrate species live entirely on mistletoe). While he was looking around to see if any more grew on any of its neighbours, an owl popped up out of this same tree and perched on the edge of a hole watching him. (Many of the birds we encounter in old orchards show no fear of a human presence.) The next day, when he went back to continue the survey, he intended to photograph the owl, so took his camera and mounted it on a tripod. Just at the moment the owl appeared, the setting sun was in a position where it shone directly into the lens of his camera, so he didn't get his photograph. Next Spring, the owl nested again and its four fledglings were spotted sitting on the boundary fence alongside the orchard. On the one occasion I glimpsed an owl in this orchard, I thought it was a Tawny Owl. (I know of one old orchard where a Barn Owl is nesting in the old apple store, but I have been sworn to secrecy.)

No documentary record existed of what fruit had been planted, but Sam's mother, then 92, reminisced about her childhood days in the orchard she had loved. In 1995 she wrote a brief description in verses to commemorate the orchard's restoration. She recollected the mistletoe and that owls nested annually in that same Norfolk Beefing.

When I was a child, in far away days, under orchard branches I loved to laze
With a favourite book on the sun-warm grass, watching the river placidly pass.

When apples fell with a gentle plop, for a moment my reading just had to stop,
As I sampled with pleasure the ripe juicy fruit, bruised, just a bit, by the old tree's root.
There were Cockpits and Kes wicks and apples so red, that they must grow especially for Christmas we said.
Small Hazel pears, all russetty brown and a colourful apple called Flowery Town. Victoria plums hung heavily too, and damsons, rich with a purple hue.
There were walnuts and small nuts and others to treasure, in that wonderful place for an afternoon's leisure.
In a quiet corner a tree that I know still bears each winter, some mistletoe: Bees nest above and deep in the bole a little owl peeps from a half-hidden hole.
But the long years passed and the wild winds blew, big branches were broken and dead leaves flew.
Then whole trees fell with a frightening sound, leaving a clutter of debris around...

Mrs Blacker thus established that Wilstrop's orchard had been mature in her childhood, some 80 or more years previously, and as the Norfolk Beefing was hollow by that date, it would appear to have been planted during the mid-to-late Victorian era. We now have access online to old Ordnance Survey maps, on which orchards are depicted as deciduous trees growing in straight lines. On the 1892 map Wilstrop's orchard is shown as mature trees. This is not necessarily evidence that they were fully mature at this date, as it is a map-symbol representation. Mrs Blacker evidently knew the fruit varieties and would know what each was wanted for - too late now to regret that we didn't tap more of her memories. I checked Robert Hogg's 'The Fruit Manual', 1884, and confirmed that the fruit would have been known at the presumed Victorian date. Wilstrop's is thus one of the oldest orchards we know, but it is not on the 1852 map (whereas Ripon Walled Garden's is): nevertheless the maps give us an approximate period for the existing trees.

Mrs Blacker's reference to 'a colourful. ..Flowery Town' indicates that some at least of the trees could have been sourced from the famous Backhouse's Nursery in York (about five miles down the road from Wilstrop). Flowery Town, more correctly, Flower of the Town, was also listed as Backhouse's Red Streak and appears to have been a variety

exclusive to their nursery list. Unfortunately, by the time Ernest did his survey in 1992, Wilstrop's Flower of the Town trees had disappeared.

[Note: The apple we know as Flower of the Town does not appear to be the same as the specimen in the National Fruit Collection. Our provenence of Flower of the Town came from Jimmy Beale, who's grandfather planted it at Sutton-on-Derwent, where it still survives. But that's not conclusive evidence to authenticate it. However all the more recent Flower of the Town trees grown in Yorkshire derive from grafts that Ernest originally took from Jimmy's.]

Further evidence of a Backhouse origin for the Wilstrop orchard was the presence of Winter Windsor pear trees. Hogg mentions it as a stewing pear known in the C17th. He comments that it is showy (bright yellow, smooth-skinned and pyriform), but that 'it rots at the core in November'. Winter Windsor was listed by Backhouse's, who also noted, 'it does not keep well', but Edward Bunyard describes it as 'worthless' ['A Handbook of Hardy Fruits', 1920]. The difference may be accounted for by Bunyard's being a Kent nursery and Winter Windsor's preference for a northern climate? Ernest possessed a Backhouse's catalogue (1910) given to him by Miss Lasceltes of Slingsby Heights, near York, whose mother had added some Backhouse trees to her orchard. He was thus able to consult their list to verify that the Wilstrop trees could have been sourced from Backhouse's. In the Victorian period the Backhouse Nursery was in its heyday.

Ernest noticed that some of the pears carried two varieties, where Beurre Diel and Beurre Bosc had been grafted onto Winter Windsor trees and Marie Louise onto Colmar d'Ete, so that meant it was necessary to examine every branch. Somebody in the past had evidently wanted some nice dessert pears and apart from Colmar d'Ete, with an early summer season, Wilstrop's were all stewing pears. Hogg rates Vicar of Winkfield as 'not worth growing'. He mentions that Uvedale's St Germain can be huge and weigh as much as three pounds, but considers it a 'fine stewing pear'. Bunyard states that it 'is too gritty for stewing' and only good 'pour epater tes bourgeoise' with its astounding size. Ernest used to call them 'turnips', although wurzels might be a better description. These pears would produce a crop weighing several hundredweights. Could they have been grown for perry-making?

Ernest found a whole row of apple trees with large red-striped fruit and spent some time investigating all the properties. (In a cold, wet season the apples are dull green with russeted stripes and no red.) He concluded that they were Improved Cockpit, but it does not agree with the specimen

in the National Fruit Collection. The NFC's Improved Cockpit has been DNA-tested and proved not to be related to Cockpit. However these Wilstrop apples have the distinctive strong fragrant aroma and textured skin associated with Cockpit and in other respects they agree, which Ernest thought verified that Cockpit could be one of its parents. Ernest sent samples to the NFC, but I can find no evidence among his files of any results. The Improved Cockpit pictured in R V Roger's catalogue agrees with Ernest's identification, but as he used to supply Roger's with grafting scions, theirs is possibly sourced from Ernest's discovery at Wilstrop. The first documentary reference to Improved Cockpit is said to be 1902, but if Ernest was correct about its identity, Mrs Blacker's evidence would suggest that it was known at an earlier date. Curiously 'unimproved' (Yorkshire) Cockpit was also planted in this same orchard. Traditionally this was said to be 'the farmer's wife's apple, as it was versatile for any purpose, culinary or dessert, but that statement has also been ascribed to Green Balsam. Perhaps Wilstrop's 'Improved Cockpit' needs further investigation - I must try tasting them this year. He also came across Belle de Pontoise grafted onto (Yorkshire) Cockpit.

Ernest found no 'walnuts and small nuts', as described by Mrs Blacker, which she may have gathered from the nearby woods, nor were there any longer bees nesting in the hollow Norfolk Beefing. The walnuts may well be survivors from an earlier orchard, located south of the house, as revealed on the 1852 OS map.

Some of the varieties Ernest discovered were not 'the usual stuff' he expected to find in a Victorian orchard. Cockpit, known since the 1840s, was an apple localised to Yorkshire. He thought that one of the plums was the historic Rotherham variety, Winesour. This was what we call 'a book identification'. He consulted the classification table in Bunyard and Taylor's 'Plums of England' and worked it out by a process of elimination. I asked Ernest why the Victorians would grow sour plums and he replied that they were reputed to keep for a long time and were for culinary purposes, preserved by drying and used in recipes such as fruit cake and chutney. This plum answers Hogg's description exactly, apart from just one characteristic - that the flesh has red veins and on cooking the stone has a red tip. Next time I called at Ernest's house, he was experimenting by stewing some of these plums - his researches sometimes required him to confirm the culinary properties. Evidently Hogg habitually did so. Ernest once saw two women harvesting the plums and damsons by spreading sheets under the trees and shaking the branches with garden rakes. He was somewhat surprised, as he thought they were gathering them for

preserving and wondered who, these days, dries or bottles plums? But no, he just happened to be in York the next day and spotted these same women selling them on a market stall.

To be continued in the next issue of the Newsletter.

[Footnote:
The reason I have selected to write about the Wilstrop Hall farm orchard is because its restoration is well documented. In 1995 I became involved personally in the project (and didn't know when I volunteered, what I'd let myself in for!). I have the original plans Ernest produced in 1992, on which he identified the varieties. He pencilled in notes describing their condition his suggestions for conserving the old trees, and what varieties were added. His notebooks list those he raised in his nursery area.

Wilstrop Hall orchard can be viewed on the satellite images of Google Maps. In March 2018 the hall was advertised for sale and an Internet search will bring up a set of images. The one with a sliver of the river in the bottom left-hand corner, shows part of the orchard above it.

From the 1980s Ernest was involved with other restoration projects at other farm orchards, but unfortunately, as his notebooks were only an aide memoir, some of these are recorded only by the name of the farm: I haven't a clue where, for instance, 'Wood Farm' is located.

Other NFG members, such as Ann and David, have been involved with the recent restoration project at Swainby Grove Farm near Thirsk. Fred Hirst planted a heritage orchard at Swillington containing over 100 varieties.]

Anne Lee, 2018

****

A FRUIT GROWER'S DIARY 1935

Member Stuart Denton has copies of the Countryman magazine going back to the 1930s, and has kindly offered to extract entries from the diary of the aptly named Raymond Bush which might entertain us today.

Raymond Bush was a large-scale fruit grower in the 1930s and 40s, based in Herefordshire (I think). He was the author of about a dozen

books, which covered all aspects of top and soft fruit growing, from choosing a site, planting and care, to storage and marketing. He emigrated to Jamaica in the mid-1950s to grow tropical fruit. He also wrote a regular feature for *The Countryman* magazine, "*A Fruit Growers Diary*", beginning in 1935, which covered such wide-ranging topics as hints for fruit growing, hints for housewives, the weather, fruit prices and the incredible range of noxious poisons that was used, all told with a wonderfully dry sense of humour. The title he liked best to describe himself was, 'That insatiable scavenger of horticultural information, useless or otherwise'.

Anyway, to the diary. If we think our weather today is extreme, just read about the 1935 season!

May 10. Fruit trees crowded with Phyllobius beetles. Pretty little devils, especially under the microscope, which resolves their green colour into a mass of little green cushions on a dark ground. Clever, too, for when we paint our grafts with arsenate of lead *(!!!)* they sit cheerfully on the arsenate waiting for the bud to open.

May 15. Good to hear the blossom on the apple trees alive with bees. They won't work under about 57 degrees *(13.8^{0}C)*.

May 16. A neighbour has found two bronze pots, one inside the other. His fruit farm is the site of innumerable British hearths and he is continually finding the round stones which when heated were dropped into pots to boil the water.

May 17. A fatal frost last night of over 6 degrees below *(-3.3^{0}C)* at 700ft. has eliminated a big percentage of our plums, pears and apples.

May 21. Fearful reports of the disastrous frost by every post. The power to overwinter, which is possessed by many (insects), is due to ability to throw off surplus water from the system and hibernate as a semi-dry husk, living off internal fat. I think the little things in Nature are often more interesting than the big.

May 25. In the Rother Valley, near Fittleworth (near the South Downs), where up to 17 degrees below freezing *(-9.4^{0}C)* had been registered, no fruit can have escaped destruction.

June 1. Came down to breakfast to find a roaring and welcome log fire. What a summer!

June 3. Apple sawfly is hatching out and the second spray is going on, our gang working a two-shift 16-hour day. Arsenic, lime sulphur and nicotine, a hellish and expensive brew. *(!!!)*

June 4. Gave up my daily smoking of 25 cigarettes and an ounce of tobacco. Laid a Dunhill pipe, a full pouch, a new packet of cigarettes and matches on a milestone for the benefit of the first tramp who came along.

June 7. Howling gale and rain all night. The wretched spray gang tried to make a start but it was too much for them at 5 a.m. and had to be abandoned, but only for brief interval, for the pests are hatching out regardless of wind and rain. The gale increased in fury all day.

June 9. Sunday but unable to bear it any longer, so after supper I went and dusted our few remaining wall pears with copper dust. The night was ideal and the dust was floating in the air 200 yards or more behind me. *(!!!)*

June 16. As I stroll in the hayfield chewing a grass stem, my companion, who is a doctor, explains that an unpleasant and fatal disease called Actinomycosis, or Wooden Tongue,, may be transmitted to humans who persist in chewing grass or straw.

June 17. Visited a brother grower near Colchester. He lives in a fifteenth-century house and the previous owner found a complete suit of armour stowed away in the attic--probably left there by some escaping soldier who disguised himself as a farm hand.

June 22. Telephone message from a peer. Have I still got any of that plant, greater celandine, growing in the garden which cured his warts some years ago. The answer is in the affirmative. It appears that his pet spaniel has a wart on her nose.

June 25. After four days of fierce humid heat, a thunderstorm.

June 28. A record year for wild roses and foxgloves. I do not remember ever having seem the roses bloom so profusely or the foxgloves grow so

high. I have marked several of the latter over nine feet high to save for seed.

June 29. Spent the weekend with a large Kent grower who owns the finest cherry orchards in the country. Frost has wiped out 20 acres of his fruit. The trees are enormous, some few being more than 100 years old, and yielding over 600 lb. of fruit to a tree (normally). This is a better proposition than a cottage to rent.

July 4. Trimming up grafted trees all day. Never have our grafts gone so badly. Many are dead owing to the incessant attacks by leaf-eating weevils. I feel inclined another year to enclose each graft in a cellophane bag.

July 7. Tomorrow we spray again with a strong arsenate of lead wash with just a dash of nicotine to kill any youngsters (codlin moth) that are newly out and about.

July 24. Sold all our Purple Pershore plums today in advance at 3*d*. a lb. on the ground in the buyer's empties. This works out at 18*s*. a pot hamper. Last year they could be bought freely at 1*s*. a pot. It is expected that Victoria plums will either be auctioned singly or sold by private treaty.

July 29. Called on a brother grower. He had spoilt his patch of cordon Cox. His spraying water supply had been contaminated with sheep-dipping, and the free arsenic in the water caused the fall of all the apples. Never before have I seen hay, oats, beans, barley and wheat being cut on the same day. England is becoming dry.

Aug. 3. At a North Wales seaside resort today I was amused to find my wife buying at 8*d*. a lb. plums I had sold a few days before at 4*d*. Last year, though we got less than 2*d*., the retail price was still 8*d*. Realise now this figure is the limit for the North Wales seaside visitor. In South Devon she is good for an extra 2*d*. The seaside price is unaffected by market conditions, gluts or shortages.

Aug. 12. One customer in a nearby town who buys Lloyd George raspberries from us at 8*d*. a lb. resells them freely at 1*s*. 6*d*.

Aug. 14. Have raised the price of raspberries to 10*d*. a lb. The drought is now more severe than in any period of the last two years.

Aug. 19. Drought continues.

Aug. 23. Rain at last.

Aug. 27. Noted today how a hedgerow fire is started. Motorist No. 1 throws out his cigarette on the road. The back draught of the following car whirls the cigarette into the hedge, and No. 3 fans the blaze with the wind of his passage, while I am just in time to put it out.

Sep. 11. Much talk at East Malling Research Station this day on the great frost of May and how we may prevent a recurrence.

Sep. 16. Gales over the weekend unusually severe. Have many apples blown off.

Sep. 17. Disaster. Yesterday evening the wind began to increase from the south, the temperature shot up several degrees and a hurricane became inevitable. At daybreak today trees down in all directions and the ground carpeted with fruit. 1935 will go down as the fruit-grower's worst year.

More from Stuart, and Raymond Bush, in the next issue.

****

FRUITS WE DON'T NORMALLY EAT…
Fuchsia berries

Yes, I know this feature is normally called 'fruits we don't normally *grow*' but in this case it is something that most of us probably grow but very few realise that the fruits are edible. I am talking about the Fuchsia berry, yes, those pretty, brightly coloured flowers that are a mainstay of bedding schemes and window boxes across the country but who knew the berries were edible?

I am indebted to Mat Coward for telling me about this little used fruit. For those of you who have never heard of him, he has written organic gardening columns for a national newspaper, humorous gardening columns

for a monthly gardening magazine and he is also one of the QI ‘elves’! I came across him because he is currently crowdfunding his new book ‘Eat your front garden’ and I loved the idea of growing beautiful things that are also edible, ‘an invisible allotment’, so I quickly signed up as one of the first supporters. In return I get regular updates and little snippets from Mat and the information about Fuchsia berries appeared in the September update.

I will let Mat tell you about them in his own words. “As far as anyone knows, all fuchsia berries are edible, but not all are palatable. The one I grow is called Fuchsiaberry and was specially bred by Thompson & Morgan to produce heavy crops of fruit with a very good flavour. I use them as an ingredient in jam, but they can be eaten raw. Mine grow contentedly in 16 inch pots.”

I was intrigued so will be ordering my Fuchsiaberry plants in the spring. Apparently the fruits taste “sort of like figs, with a hint of citrus” I will let you know.

If you want to find out more about Eat Your Front Garden go to https://unbound.com/books/eat-your-front-garden/

Chris Simmonds

Note: Part 2 of Pineapples, a fruit we don’t ***grow****, is held over to the next issue. Ed*

****

AND FINALLY…

The last word on quinces, with a cook’s tip

The newly-wed owl and pussy cat “dined on mince and slices of quince, which they ate with a runcible spoon”. That has never sound like a treat to me, though perhaps it’s not as bizarre as it sounds: Celia Cropper in her article on page 12 mentions the use of quinces in savoury dishes, and Jane Grigson does offer a recipe for Russian beef braised with quince.

In case you are wondering, a runcible spoon doesn’t exist; Edward Lear simply made it up, along with other words he liked the sound of.

And the cook’s tip? If your quince jelly (or other fruit jelly for that matter) hasn’t set well enough to spread on toast without dripping over the edges, put it in a nice jug and call it fruit syrup. Lovely on pancakes.

My thanks to all contributors for their help in preparing this edition of the Newsletter. Ed

The next Newsletter will be circulated in early April 2019. All contributions welcome, to the Editor please by March10, or send by post.
Illustrations need to be suitable for printing in black and white.

If you would like to receive your Newsletter in electronic rather than paper form, please tell the Membership Secretary.

The Group's website is:
www.thenorthernfruitgroup.com

You can also find us on Facebook