

MARCHER APPLE NETWORK

NEWSLETTER No 1

Summer 1995

Since the formation of the *Marcher Apple Network*, in December 1993, considerable steps forward have been made in the aims of the group, and this first Newsletter is being sent to supporting members, a number of whom live some distance away, so that they may be kept in touch with progress.

TREDOMEN COURT

We are pleased to report that plans are now going ahead for planting up an orchard with old local varieties of apples and pears. The original site chosen was part of the old walled garden of Gwernyfed High School at Three Cocks, which had been agreed with the school governors. However, with the arrival of the new Head Teacher last autumn, other uses for the garden came under consideration, and it became apparent that a site with a more certain long-term future needed to be found. We are fortunate in that Mr. Roger Williams, who is one of the Governors, a local farmer, and Chairman of the Brecon Beacons National Park, stepped into the breach, and offered the use of a section of an old former orchard at his farm, Tredomen Court, near Llanfilo. The site was visited, and thought to be suitable, and the offer was gratefully accepted.

Tredomen Court lies to the west of the Black Mountains [NGR. SO 123316] between the valleys of the Wye and the Usk, at about 525'. The soil is a fertile clay loam, overlying Old Red Sandstone. The nursery area, about three quarters of an acre in extent, has been surveyed by *M.A.N.* members, and recently fenced off by Mr. Williams. A few MM106 stocks have been planted and cut back. These will be stooled to provide a source of new stocks. Other young MM106 stocks have also been planted, and should be ready to be grafted on site, next spring. M25 stocks on which budding was carried out last August, will, it is hoped, be ready to plant out this autumn, in a nursery area. Later, they will be transplanted and will be grown on, to become full standard trees. The young trees will need protection from rabbits in their early stages, and spiral rabbit guards are being used. Pig netting at present keeps the sheep out, but eventually, when mature, the orchard of standard trees will be grazed by sheep in the traditional way.

As well as the budwood collection made last summer, graftwood from a number of interesting old varieties of apple, together with some pears, has been

collected over the winter season. (In this context, a variety will be considered as old if it was introduced before 1900). Propagation material has also been collected from some trees, which, as yet, have not been identified, but which bear fruit recommended by the owner, or are believed by the surveying team to have qualities worth perpetuating. The unknown varieties will be assessed when they fruit. A few varieties, which have been noted as doing very well in the area, though normally associated with other parts of the country, will also be included in the planting scheme, so that a representative collection of varieties once widely grown in the Marches, can be displayed, and a gene bank safeguarded.

Sheila Leitch

WESTHOPE

A small site has been most kindly put at our disposal in mid-Herefordshire. Owned by Mrs. Mollie Beaumont, who is a farmer's daughter, and whose late husband was a well-known local solicitor, County Councillor, and former Mayor of Hereford, the site stands well up above the village of Westhope, in an area with magnificent views all around, and the trees we have planted will add to the rich panorama of apple blossom in the Spring. It is well below the crest of the hill, and the ground dips away sharply, through a long-vacated and overgrown gravel pit, towards the Wellington brook below.

After removal of one dead apple tree, several saplings and a good many brambles, there ought to have been room for close planting of some 30 half-standards. A complication then arose: the whole area is frequented by fallow deer! It was therefore decided to plant a few standard trees in cages to a design recommended by the nearby County Rangers Department at Queenswood (Dinmore) Arboretum. In this way it is hoped that several uncommon traditional varieties may be grafted on to each rootstock.

The first phase, the planting of 7 M25 rootstocks complete with their cages, has been implemented with the aid of a 40% grant from Hereford and Worcester County Council. The remainder of the cost has been funded by *M.A.N.* It is intended to graft scions or bud a number of compatible varieties in the course of the next year, and it is hoped that the site may be able to accommodate a further 5 or 6 trees. Regular watering is being greatly assisted by Mrs. Beaumont and local residents.

Ray Boddington

APPLE DAY

A very successful event was held in October 1994, to publicise the work of the Marcher Apple Network, and to bring Apple Day to the attention of the public. Since 1990, October 21st, or the nearest weekend to that date, has been celebrated on a national scale by Common Ground as part of its campaign to preserve old orchards and the distinctiveness of the local landscape.

Llanigon Village Hall was the venue of our Welsh Marches event, and over 120 people enjoyed an audio-visual presentation of a scenic journey down the River Wye, compiled by the late Mr. Kenneth Seed, and shown by Mr. Tony Hollingworth. After an interval in which numerous lovely apple cake recipes were sampled, there was time to examine the display of 63 old apple varieties from local orchards and gardens, collected and named by the Marcher Apple Network team. A demonstration of apple juicing, using a Viga press and mixed culinary and dessert windfalls, provided a delicious drink, and was of interest to many. At another table, apple tasting also pulled the crowds. The most popular variety turned out to be one of the oldest, the Herefordshire Pomeroy, located only a month earlier in a Glasbury orchard. Many of the audience were delighted to find apples remembered from their childhood, such as the Monmouth Green and the locally bred Carnation.

A similar event is planned for this autumn. It will be held at the Clarence Hall, in Crickhowell, on Friday 20th October, at 7.30. Another of Mr. Seed's delightful presentations will be shown, featuring Hereford, called "The Beauty and the Bounty", and again a display of local old fruit varieties will be mounted. It is hoped thus to publicise the aims of M.A.N. in the Usk valley, and enrol additional members. For further details, see FORTHCOMING EVENTS, on page 8.

These events are also useful in helping to raise funds for the work in progress. In this connection, we were delighted to receive, last August, a grant from the Prince of Wales' Committee, to assist in the cost of orchard survey work and the planting scheme. Further grant aid is being sought.

Sheila Leitch

ORCHARD GLEANINGS

One of the aims of our group is to identify and perpetuate old apple varieties, especially those of local origin. During the past two autumns, we have visited over 50 orchards and gardens in the Welsh Marches, and recorded over a hundred and fifty sorts of apples. Sometimes they are easy to identify, others need considerable research, and a fair number have defeated us, perhaps because in some instances they are just local seedlings. The rarer cultivars, and the more promising unknown seedlings, we hope to propagate for further study. A few of the recognisable highlights are listed below.

Crimson Queening (also known as Herefordshire Queening / Quining / Quoining and Summer Queening). In past times, this must have been popular locally because we have seen trees at Bronllys, Tregoyd, Erwood, Glasbury and Clifford. Queenings or Quoinings are tallish conical angular apples with a crimson flush and dark red streaks and a wonderful fragrance. The name Quoining may be due to the pronounced ridges or quoins on the fruit, or it may

just be Herefordshire dialect for Queening. Kilvert recalls being given "Quinins" when he called on one of his parishioners in Bronydd in September 1870. As with other old sorts, such as Catshead, there is considerable variation in characters. Most of the queenings we have encountered ripen in October, but "The Orchardist" (1873) gives their season as December to April, as does an early King's Acre list.

Similar variation was being noted over a hundred years ago in King of the Pippins, another popular old eating apple. Perhaps, as George Buryard suggested in 1904, this was due to the practice of raising them from pips. King of the Pippins is a medium sized oblong apple with an orange flush and stripes. We have found it in many old orchards on both sides of the border, and individuals vary in appearance, flavour, and keeping qualities. It has a host of other names, including Golden Winter Pearmain, Shropshire Pippin, and Seek-no-Farther. Locally, it is most often known as Prince's Pippin. At its best, as encountered at Boughrood and Ewyas Harold, it is a handsome juicy fruit with distinctive bitter-sweet flavour.

Herefordshire Pomeroy, another ancient dessert variety which ripens in October, is a rather lumpy fruit with a rough skin coloured by scarlet, yellow and russet blotches. Its rich aromatic flavour was much appreciated by visitors to our Llanigon evening. The samples on that occasion came from Glasbury; later we came across a second tree at Checkley, where the villagers knew it as the Sugar Apple. In the same orchard was a tree of Pitmaston Pine Apple, a variety raised about 1780 by Mr. White of Witley in Worcestershire, who was a steward of Lord Foley. These small yellow conical apples were described by Edward Buryard as having "...a most deliciously scented and honeyed flavour".

Catshead is a large roundish cooker dating back to the time of King Charles I, which we saw at Llangenny, Llyswen and Hay-on-Wye. It will keep until Christmas, and in the past was a favourite for apple dumplings, but has now been superseded by such as Grenadier and Lord Derby. Another cooker, Mère de Ménage, a large handsome apple shaped like Bramley's Seedling, but with bold dark crimson splashes, was found at Glasbury and several orchards in Herefordshire. The fruits keep in fine condition until early March, and according to Joan Morgan, this variety is recommended for "Apple Charlotte".

Late last autumn, single trees of Reinette Rouge Étoilée were found at Llangatwg and Llangynidr. This old Belgian or Dutch variety has beautiful round or conical apples which are deep red in colour and sprinkled with star-shaped lenticels. The red colour spreads into the outer flesh and around the core. At first, the flavour is pleasantly sharp, but it sweetens as Christmas approaches.

Michael Porter

CIDER AT CHECKLEY

Cider has always been one of my favourite tipples, particularly the flavourful brew which one of the smaller Herefordshire makers still produces. The interesting relics of cider making are occasionally to be spotted in farmyards and pubs - left over from a time when cider making was a common autumn event, and orchards part of the landscape.

However, I hadn't seen a cider mill in working order until we visited a couple of Herefordshire orchards last September, and were shown two fine examples only half a mile from each other. Our guide, John Sewell, suggested we might return in November, when he would organise a cider making session. It all sounded very jolly, and we looked forward to trying our hand at it. A friend, who is keen on country pursuits, was persuaded to accompany us. This extra manpower turned out to be extremely useful, for we discovered that we were to be the horses!

It was a moist November day, but inside the ancient half-timbered barn we were dry and raring to go! The apples were already picked and stored in bulging sacks against the wall. They were rather green because they had been rescued before the cattle were turned into the orchard. The cider mill was ready and clean to receive them - a huge stone trough with an enormous grindstone which it took three of us to move.

The first sackfuls of apples were fed into the trough and spread evenly with a bat, so that the millstone would crush them as we trundled it (pretending that three humans equalled one sturdy steed). With the leader (usually John Sewell) pulling the bar from the front, and the other two in tandem behind, we trotted with synchronised footwork round and round the trough, while the millstone slowly mashed the very hard green apples. The person on the outer position had to hold on especially tightly, or be flung outwards against the waiting barrels. We got up a fair head of steam on the downhill slope, but it was hardly enough to carry us up the slight incline on the other side, where the cobbles had been renewed. From time to time we were allowed a breather as the condition of the pulped apples was checked. Then we were off once more.

The rest periods between the bouts of crushing and spreading began to lengthen, and it was a mighty relief when, at last, the pulp was deemed soft enough to be scooped out. It had reached the cheese stage, and the hardest work was over.

The aged wooden cider press now came into action. Several layers of hessian sacking were spread with the cheese to make a giant-decker sandwich. This was topped by the head board. The screw was applied, creaking and groaning as it was wound down from the granary floor above. The force was applied by using a long iron bar, manipulated by a muscular operator. Cider

makers have to be macho men and women! Indeed, as a fitness exercise, I should think it would rate pretty high! Firmer and tighter the screw was applied, ominously squeaking, and the juice oozed and trickled on to the dripstone. The precious liquid was collected into a well-positioned bucket. The smell was unforgettable - the fruits of autumn and the year's bounty mingling in the damp air. Gurgling, the pale golden liquid ran, as the pressure increased. A large jug was substituted for the bucket. We were allowed to sip - rather thin and watery, but at least cider-like. The small cask we had brought was filled, and we were instructed how to care for it so that the cider would be ready for Christmas.

Many thanks are due to John Sewell for showing us some of the skills of traditional cider making.

Christine Porter

WILL THE COX AND THE BRAMLEY GO THE WAY OF THE OTHER NATIVE FRUITS?

Added urgency is given to the efforts of groups and organisations such as ours by the latest European policy that rewards British farmers handsomely for grubbing up their long-established orchards to make way for the overproduced avalanche of continental apples. This will result in traditional native varieties disappearing from our shops, while the Golden Delicious - with or without blush - and its like continue to pour into the U.K. from Mediterranean countries, setting a trend that seems like the mirror image of the rape of our traditional fishing grounds.

M. A. N. should therefore aim to provide a service, within our capability, to encourage individual householders in the culture of native varieties, whose number is practically inexhaustable, if not allowed to die out by sheer neglect. We intend to pursue this aim by propagating young trees in whatever sites are made available to us, in order to build a "tree bank" for the supply of propagating material to the public, and by assisting to identify fruit specimens whose names have been lost.

In this activity, we cannot hope to replace the service to the public at large by commercial suppliers. But we should do what we can to ensure the perpetuation of our fantastic heritage of wonderful apples by encouraging marketing through small local outlets. These are likely to experience a renaissance in popularity as pollution and transportation issues work their way to the top of society's agenda as time goes on.

Ray Boddington

GRAFTING

Two years ago, at the Victorian Week festival in Llandrindod Wells, we came across Paul Hand, of "Bees and Trees", demonstrating grafting with great dexterity. Old apple varieties were speedily grafted on to stocks, and the

purchaser was able to take home his chosen tree, such as Scotch Bridget, within a couple of minutes of joining the crowd of interested onlookers. During a lull, we got talking, and found common ground in our belief in the urgent need to save these old local varieties and their valuable characteristics. When M. A. N. was formed, Paul became a Founder Member, and has made his skills available, budding for us in summer, and grafting in winter. It was fascinating, therefore, to watch him recently, on "Countryfile", niftily grafting a scion on to a stock, and then to recognise a couple of labelled varieties from the large number left with him in April, which had resided in our spare fridge over the winter months. Crimson Quoining was one, and the other, labelled Tyr Uched No. 7, was from a fine old tree, thought to be an Improved Tom Putt/Devon Red, which the owners report has borne a heavy crop each year since 1949, when they first moved there, and the orchard was already mature.

WANTED!

We are on the lookout, in the old counties of Brecon and Radnor, for several varieties including the following two which are mentioned in "The Apple and Pear as Vintage Fruits", published by the Woolhope Naturalists Field Club:-

Sam's Crab. Not a crab apple, but an early dessert apple, also used for cooking and cider making. Described as conical or roundish ovate, with skin beautifully streaked with crimson and yellow on sunny side. Flesh tender, juicy, sweet and of good flavour. Rich aroma, and loved by Herefordshire schoolchildren. Two varieties, one better than other. Mentioned in Kilvert's Diary, when it grew near Clyro. Does it survive in the area? If so, is it the better variety? It is still known over the border, in Herefordshire.

Goose Apple. A grass green apple, above middle size. Sour, but makes excellent sauce. Cooks 'transparent' and tree crops 'wonderfully'.

Another variety we are keen to locate on either side of the Welsh Border is Wormsley Pippin, an apple bred by Thomas Andrew Knight, and his favourite. It is a dual purpose fruit, season September-October. Large, oval, with prominent ribs terminating in bosses. Skin smooth, deep yellow, with orange flush. Flesh yellow, tender, crisp and sweet. Aromatic.

Sheila Leitch

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Wednesday, 23rd August. Farm Open Day - Tir Cymer/Brecon Beacons National Park. At Capel Tydist, Bethlehem, near Llandeilo, Dyfed. See farming and the environment working together. Demonstrations and displays, including traditional orchards & apple varieties. Tel. Jeff Davies 01874 - 624437 or Richard Morgan 01558 - 822239.

September, date to be arranged. The Taliesin Project. Monthly meetings in Talgarth to attempt regeneration of the town by giving a worthwhile future to the Mid-Wales Hospital and its extensive grounds. The plan is to provide training in the development of sustainable community projects, including orchards of old fruit varieties. Further details from Eluned Hurn, Tel. 01874 - 711382.

Sunday, 24th September. "*The Big Apple*" held at Putley, between Hereford and Ledbury. Workshop on apple identification, by John Edgeley, of Pershore College of Horticulture. Tel. Mrs. Jackie Denman, 01531 - 670544 for programme and details of this "not to be missed" celebration of Apple Day. (See also below).

Saturday, 30th September/Sunday, 1st October. The Malvern Autumn Show at the Three Counties Showground, Malvern. Display of apple varieties by R.H.S., Wisley. Also fruit display from Berrington Hall. Apple identification.

Saturday/Sunday, 14th & 15th October, at Putley, Display of old apple and pear varieties, and, the following weekend, Cider fruit display at Much Marcle.

Friday, 20th October *Marcher Apple Network*. "The Beauty and the Bounty" and display of old fruit varieties at Clarence Hall, Crickhowell. Tickets 2.50, (children under 16, £1) from Brecknock Wildlife Trust Office, 2, The Struet, Brecon, Powys, LD3 7LH. Tel. 01874 - 625708, or Webb's of Crickhowell. Tel. 01873 - 810331 or John Aldridge, address below, Tel. 01432 - 820304.

Saturdays, 4th & 11th November. Fruit tree pruning at Berrington Hall, near Leominster. Secateurs and wellingtons. £4/day. Tel. to book 01568 - 615721.

Do, please, write in with items of interest for the next Newsletter. This is just to get the ball, or should we say, the apple, rolling. How was Apple Day celebrated in your area? What would you like to see in future Newsletters? Ideas will be most welcome.

The financial year for *M.A.N.* begins 1st August, to coincide with the beginning of the Apple Season. We do hope all members will rejoin, by sending their £2 subscription, made out to Marcher Apple Network, to our Membership Secretary, Mr. J. Aldridge, Orchard Barn, Ocle Pychard, HEREFORD, HR1 3RB. Application forms can also be obtained from him, at the same time, by enclosing S.A.E. The subscription has been kept to the absolute minimum to cover postage and photocopying, and to encourage as many supporters as possible to join the Network. Donations in addition to the subscription, or from non-members, will be very welcome.

M.A.N. is grateful to Mr. Richard Booth, of Hay-on-Wye, for kindly printing this Newsletter.