



Marcher Apple Network

APPLES & PEARS

AFALAU A PÊR

Volume 2 No 6

Non-members £2

Autumn 2012



Reviving the old varieties of apples and pears
in the marcher counties

www.marcherapple.net

The Holme Lacy Perry Pear Tree

This ancient tree, growing on the banks of the river Wye, has a considerable history. Some accounts date it to pre-Christian times, others to medieval. It is thought possibly to be connected with monastic activities in the area some 600 – 700 years ago. Whatever the origins of this remarkable tree it is said that the rooted branches of the tree created a canopy, in 1790, covering three-quarters of an acre. It yielded crops of five to seven tons of perry pears.

The extract below gives more details of this famous tree and MAN is investigating the possibilities of propagating it in one of our orchards. I am grateful to James Bissett of the Countryside Service, Herefordshire, for drawing my attention to this article.

Peter Austerfield.

The first mention of the tree is by J.C. Loudon in "Arboretum et Fruticetum Britannicum" [1838]:

'In Herefordshire, "A very extraordinary tree, growing on the glebe land of the parish of Hom-Lacey, has more than once filled 15 hogsheads of perry in the same year. When the branches of this tree in its original state became long and heavy, their extreme ends fell successively to the ground, and, taking fresh roots at the several parts where they touched it, each branch became as a new tree, and in its turn produced others in the same way. Nearly half an acre of land remains thus covered at the present time [1805]. Some of the branches have fallen over the hedge into an adjoining meadow, and little difficulty would be found in extending its progress.'

Being anxious to know the present state of this celebrated tree, we wrote to a highly valued friend, residing at Hereford, respecting it, and we have been favoured with the following reply:

'I have been this morning to see the far-famed pear tree. It once covered an acre of land, and would have extended much further had nature been left to her own operations. It is now not a quarter of the size it once boasted; but it looks healthy and vigorous, and when I saw it, it was covered with luxuriant blossoms. The original trunk is still remaining; and there are young shoots which are only yet approaching the ground, but which seem nearly ready to take root in it. The tree would completely have covered the vicarage garden if it had been allowed to remain. It is said to have been in its greatest perfection about 1776 or 1777.'

Right: The Holme Lacey pear tree and (Front cover) in winter 2010, covered in hoar frost.
Photos: courtesy Archie Miles

There is another tree of the same kind in the neighbourhood.

Hereford May 18th 1836.

One has to say that if this tree was in its prime in the late 18th century then there is every chance that it was already well over 100 years old. We may have a pear tree that is getting on for 400 years old – perhaps the oldest pear tree in Britain! At present there are a few concerns about its future. Cattle are regularly grazed in the field which has led to some barking and a degree of ground compaction. The continual browsing by livestock will inhibit the tree's propensity to lay down layering boughs, thus perpetuating its historically natural habit. Several boughs have been broken in storms and lie enmeshed in the canopy, their weight putting further risk of damage on

the tree's structure. There are moves afoot to try and remedy some of these problems and put the tree back in the pink of health, by fencing it from stock and carrying out a little careful tree surgery. There are also thoughts of a propagation programme to safeguard the variety. The other tree mentioned at the end of the 1836 report is unknown and, one must assume, it has probably been lost.

Extract from a piece written by Archie Miles (2010) for 'The Ancient Tree Hunt'. Reproduced by kind permission.

Preliminary notice

AGM.
Saturday, 1st December
2012
Cider Museum, Hereford
from 10.30 a.m.

The guest speaker this year will be **Jim Chapman**, holder of the National Collection of Perry Pears at Hartpury, Gloucestershire. Jim will be talking about perry pears, the National Collection and plans for the future.



Notes from the Chairman

As always, an eventful year with more than a few highlights.

A good part of 2011 was devoted to celebrating the 200th anniversary of the publication of Thomas Andrew Knight's '*Pomona Herefordiensis*'. The Herefordshire Council and others, including MAN, certainly put a lot of effort into providing a wide variety of events. These ranged from 'Orchard Art', a scheme involving charities working with mentally or physically challenged people, enabling them to visit an orchard and use this as a creative process, to lectures on Knight's life and work and orchard conferences. The major exhibition of apples during these celebrations took place at Hergest Croft Gardens in October with MAN joining teams from the RHS and Frank P Matthews. The displays were awesome and the MAN exhibit of dessert, culinary and cider fruit more than held its own in terms of rarer, local varieties.

Another highlight was our AGM when we were delighted to welcome our President, Sir Andrew Large, to give an illustrated talk on his recent visit to Kazakhstan and the Tien Shan mountains, places of great significance in the story of the apple. Understandably the meeting was well attended and some interesting discussion followed. We are grateful to Sir Andrew for this rare opportunity to see and hear about places where it all started.

The Members' Event in May also drew a 'full house' with a visit to Tidnor Wood Orchards near Hereford. Owner and MAN member Henry May has done wonders here in the decade or so since he took over. More background to this event follows later in the Newsletter (see [page XX](#)).

The committee organised two other significant events: a winter pruning course, tutored by Paul Davies, and restorative pruning led by Nick Dunn. We are grateful to both for what were generally agreed to be informative and well attended sessions.

The Marcher Apple Network maintains a considerable archive dating back to its foundation in 1993 and our archivist, Chris Porter, assiduously collects material relevant to our work. We will be adding to the archive soon in that we have been offered, for safe keeping, a file of orchard records collected as part of the Blue Remembered Hills Project in

South Shropshire. The file details some of the 4000 or so orchards in Shropshire and has some 400 pages of data on individual sites. The definition of orchard used was 'a patch of ground, fenced off or otherwise isolated, and used solely or principally for the growing of native fruit trees'. Understandably, the project could not record every orchard but we will have a useful selection of orchard details in this county to add to our archive.

I usually try to strike an optimistic note when writing for the Newsletter but as I look out of the window and reflect on the last months, a certain degree of pessimism takes over. I refer, of course, to the state of some of our orchards. If my own orchard and the MAN Westhope orchard are anything to go by, the autumn crop will be something of a disaster. When I consider that last year I made 16 dozen bottles of apple juice and was self sufficient in apples to April, one can only curse the rain gods, *aka* the jetstream. Blossom was generally down in April/May and cold, wet weather has seemingly kept the bees in their hives.

I know of a perry pear tree which produced 150 kgs of fruit last year and some very good perry. This year not a pear in sight. *Prunus* species did set fruit but some are now splitting and rotting. However, a friend of mine has a positive slant on all this wet weather, he says his geese are very happy. I am beginning to wonder what fruit will come in for identification this year after last year's large numbers. Hopefully we will be able to collect enough fruit from our orchards for our autumn displays.

As always the committee works hard to review and improve what we do. We are now developing more detailed orchard management plans for our museum orchards with a particular member (or members) taking responsibility for each orchard. We have also been successful again in being awarded funding from Environment Wales thanks to the efforts of our Project Manager Sylvia O'Brien. These funds will help further our work in Wales and we are grateful to Environment Wales for supporting our efforts.

Peter Austerfield

Marcher Apple Network Accounts for year ended 31.07.11

EXPENDITURE

Events	70.80
Library & equipment	196.97
Orchard maintenance & equipment	711.75
Committee admin. + expenses	2501.92
Newsletters	619.94
Misc. payments	1422.22
Paramor Orchard	7368.964
	12714.82

INCOME

Subscriptions	1296.00
Life members	100.00
Apple IDs	1025.63
Bank interest	154.00
Donations & Gift Aid	185.93
Pomona project	5423.37
Purchase/sale books	1121.18
Speaker fees	70.00
Misc. receipts	199.76
Graftwood	137.50
Deficiti for the year	3001.45
	12714.82

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31.07.11

LIABILITIES

Accumulated fund	68026.66
	68026.66

ASSETS

Publications at cost	8669.00
Orchard equipment at cost	
less 20% p.a.	2960.00
Planting and exhibition materials	960.00
Library & reference books	
& equipment	4800.00
Land at cost + improvements	36000.00
Bank balances	14037.66
Environment Wales Grant rec'd	
and recorded in last year's acct	7306.00
	68026.66

The Ole Boys were right !

Having spent a lot of time in and around orchards, fruit growing and apples, I have heard a lot of stories and supposed gems of wisdom, some of which I suspect are slightly dubious with regard to provable accuracy.

However, when it comes to grafting, I discovered that one of the things the ole boys say is absolutely true. I was pruning an orchard with an interesting mix of varieties in autumn 2010 and, despite it being only late November, it seemed too good an opportunity not to collect some graft wood. This, despite my normal approach, which is to cut scion wood one day and graft it the next, as I hold that the fresher the material the better.

So heading home with a good mix of healthy scion wood I wrapped it in wet newspaper and buried it in a raised bed in my vegetable

garden. Then, of course, we had that bitter winter of 2010/11 when temperatures in the said vegetable plot went down to minus 17 degrees C at one point, and the graft wood must have been locked in virtual permafrost for weeks. When it comes to grafting, again despite claims that you can start from new year onwards, I always go as late into March as I can get away with on the basis that the less time the union has to sit around before growth commences the better.

By the time I had dug up the graft wood it had been buried for over 3 months and exposed to exceptionally low temperatures, yet it still looked fine, so I grafted it as I would had I cut the material that day: low and behold - they all took and grew away quickly making fine growth.

Thus it seems it makes little difference whether you collect your scions in early March or November, or for that matter any time in between, as long as you look after them, they are very resilient. So, on this score, the ole boys and their stories about burying it in the garden were bang on. The moral here perhaps is to be opportunistic and collect scion as and when the opportunity presents itself over the autumn/winter period.

Wade Muggleton

Successful Pruning Day

24 members and non-members attended two restorative pruning sessions held in the orchard of our Treasurer, Tom Froggatt, on 10th March. There were two sessions under the skillful tutelage of Nick Dunn, Managing Director of Frank P. Matthews Ltd. of Tenbury Wells. He had brought with him a selection of tools and some smaller trees to illustrate the various methods of pruning and also removed some lower boughs on the tall trees. With the aid of a long pole he indicated which branches of the old trees should receive prior treatment, emphasising the necessity to take great care as falling boughs do not always drop where intended.

Lunch was served to attendees of both morning and afternoon sessions in the new Bishop Hooper school at Ashford Carbonel, where toilet and car park facilities were also provided. Attendees, including an American lady doing a PhD, came from as far afield as Stratford on Avon, Shrewsbury, Barry and Sennybridge.

Feedback was good and the event could be repeated in 2014 if there is sufficient interest.

Tom Froggatt



What's on?

A list of regional apple events is included with this issue of the newsletter but note that

www.marcherapple.net/diary.htm

contains the most up to date information

The lost varieties of Worcestershire

The study and recognition of locally distinct varieties has grown enormously since the innovation of 'Apple Day' 21 years ago and the wonderful work of Common Ground. As a Countryside officer for Worcs County Council I have for the past 13 years been involved in a range of orchard initiatives and – I suspect like many – based my list of the County varieties principally on the Common Ground one. Hence it was my belief that in Worcestershire we had 25 apple varieties (see list below) that were either found, bred or introduced by nurserymen of the county. Along with a couple of pears and a few plums that was what we all considered to be our native county varieties. This was the situation until I was sent a list of what Hogg, in 1884, claimed to be "Varieties associated with Worcestershire" and, lo and behold, there were another 10 varieties that I had never come across before and had no knowledge of!

Some research has narrowed this to six possibilities. Hogg made reference to Worcs in all of the following:

Knott's Kernel – seemingly a stripy, early season cooker. Hogg said that it was much grown in the orchards of Worcestershire, so no direct implication of it being of county origin but there is one web reference to it as a lost variety; on Brogdale list but no info.

Martin Nonpareil – a smallish dessert apple received from a nursery, as a crab stock, by the Rev. George Williams, of Martin-Hussingtree, near Worcester and, after producing fruit, was communicated by him to the London Horticultural Society. No modern references.

Pigeon's heart – Seemingly a smallish green cooker with good keeping quality; only reference seems to be that Hogg obtained it from R Smith & Co of Worcester, so could possibly have come from anywhere. No modern references.

Pitmaston Golden Wreath – A tiny yellow crab apple originating from J Williams Esq. of Pitmaston, Worcester, a cross between Golden pippin & Siberian crab.

Pitmaston Golden Pippin – A small yellow desert apple, seemingly very similar to Pitmaston Pineapple if the description is to be believed. Again originating from Williams nursery in Pitmaston.

Red Splash - Described as small and yellow with crimson streaks and being grown largely at Newland near Malvern and all the surrounding parishes; sold to the pickle makers to make chutney and apple jelly (Hogg).

Robin Hood – seemingly a synonym for 'Gloucestershire Costard' so not from Worcs.

Sitchampton Russett – A dessert apple of good quality, which keeps well till February. Received by Hogg from Messrs. R. Smith & Co. of Worcester in 1876, under the name of 'Sitchampton Pearmain', but "as it is not of a Pearmain shape I have thought it better to give it its proper designation" (Hogg).

Walsgrove Wonder – seemingly a synonym for 'Greenup's Pippin' from Keswick, Cumberland, late 18th century, so not a Worcs apple at all.

Winter Peach – seemingly from the USA and introduced in 1853, so a new kid on the block in Hogg's day, but not a Worcs variety.

In addition to these there is also an obscure reference to a '*Worcester Silk*' from a MAN list I believe, but again I have found no other references and there seems to be some debate as to whether it is a pear rather than an apple.

So, in amongst this lot, it looks as though there could be half a dozen or so lost varieties since Hogg's day (were we to go further back there are probably countless others!). I have been unable to find any illustrations or photographs of the above, so we seemingly have only descriptions to go on.

Thus far we have anecdotal reports of two old trees possibly of *Martin Nonpareil* so, come September, further investigation may reveal something there. We have in Worcestershire rediscovered lost varieties before, most notably *Chatley's Kernel*, rediscovered by local farmer Peter Weekes following up on tales his Father told of the village apple.

All of this of course throws up the debatable subject of what constitutes a county variety. In a county like Worcestershire once rich in nurserymen, we have a number of so-called county varieties by virtue of their having been introduced by local nurseryman whilst they may well have been bred or found elsewhere.

It is interesting from a cultural and historical perspective to investigate the varieties in one's own area and the positive value in terms of suitability to local conditions and genetic diversity are obvious. Yet it is equally worth noting that some of these heritage varieties disappeared as in truth they weren't very

good or were superseded by better modern varieties.

Whilst others are seemingly forgotten gems, Bunyard said of *May Queen* "A neglected fruit of great excellence and as a fruit for small gardens as cordons or bushes it can hardly be surpassed" – a comment I would have to agree with as my tree crops fantastically every year and the apples keep well. My other local favourite is the highly obscure *Tupstones*, which again keeps well right through winter, seems very hardy and disease-free and possess a rich nutty flavour.

Wade Muggleton

(MAN member South Shropshire / Worcs border)

wmuggleton@worcestershire.gov.uk if anyone can shed an light on any of this.

Previously considered Worcestershire List

Betty Geeson
Captain Tom
Catshead ?
Chatley's Kernel
Colwall Quoining
Dick's Favourite
Doddin
Edward VII
Gladstone
Green Purnell
Hope Cottage Seedling
Herefordshire Russet
King Charles Pearmain
King Coffee
Lord Hindlip
May Queen
Madresfield Court
Newland Sack
Pitmaston nonpareil
Pitmaston pineapple
Sandlin Duchess
Tupstones
Whitting Pippin
William Crump
Worcester Pearmain

Visit to Tidnor Wood Orchards, May 2012

Like the AGM, we had a very good turn out for this event, the final tally being 38. I blame it all on the owner!



Member Henry May purchased Tidnor about a decade ago and has gradually developed it in terms of orchard management, planting and construction of various buildings. These last were all assembled using old, recycled materials often found on e-Bay.

Henry May shares his extensive knowledge and love of orchards with members during the tour. [Right] Henry, his wife Anna and Orchard Manager Mike Law

Tidnor now has the UK's largest collection of cider apple varieties and was awarded National Collection status in 2006. Additionally it is also a private nature reserve. Of the four orchards making up the 26 acre site, most are for the commercial production of cider fruit. The National Collection is situated on higher ground from where you have a beautiful view of the rolling South Herefordshire countryside. All the orchards are managed organically under the auspices of the Soil Association.

After a warm welcome by Henry and Anna we started the tour of part of the site supported by Henry's colleagues Mike Law and Henry Hewitt, stopping now and again to take in the scenery and the scope of the operations. I have to say that the orchards are very well managed and it is not surprising that Tidnor won a Bronze Medal at the RHS Herefordshire Orchard Competition in 2011.

Gradually we walked back to the main buildings to be confronted with a display of Tidnor Wood Orchards honey and resident cider maker Simon Abbiss's produce. Needless to

say we all took advantage of the samples on offer. The English Cyder (aka Cidre Anglais – yes, Henry has a French orchard) has a very interesting label picture. Could that be HM himself? Whatever the outside of the bottle what was inside was very good indeed and more than a few bottles ended up in Members' bags. Likewise the honey. I bought two jars of the 'runny' kind for my son-in-law and daughter-in-law and they have raved about it ever since. I hasten to add that I am not paid for this promotion, it's just that the produce is so good.

Those who could stay for a picnic lunch ended up on straw bales, kindly produce by Henry H, or camp chairs, surrounded by orchards and taking in what had been achieved. Those of us who visited in the early days realise how much has changed. And there is more to come I am told.

The day had been planned perfectly by Henry and his colleagues and we are grateful to them for making this Members' Event such an enjoyable experience.

For further details of Tidnor Wood Orchards, see www.tidnorwood.org.uk

Peter Austerfield

National online orchard marketplace

www.orchardmarketplace.org.uk
or go to www.gloucestershireorchardgroup.org.uk/market
or www.orchardnetwork.org.uk

MAN members may not have seen the announcement about a new National Orchard Marketplace which went live on 1 February 2011. The site enables the buying and selling of surplus fruit and other orchard related produce, such as trees, skills, courses and equipment. Items can also be given for free.

Each year, a vast amount of fruit is left to rot on the ground in traditional orchards, gardens and other land. While it is an important food source for wildlife, much goes to waste. This surplus fruit could be utilized by both amateur and professional juice, cider and perry makers, by community groups, schools, kitchens

and restaurants. This is a free service for individuals and businesses. This national online marketplace, initiated by the Gloucestershire Orchard Group and webmaster Pete Smith, will help unite those with orchard produce offered and wanted, reducing food miles. The more orchards are valued economically, the less likely they are to be grubbed up or neglected.

The site is funded by the National Trust/Natural England Orchard Project and Heritage Lottery fund, in association with the Gloucestershire Orchard Group and Hartpury Heritage Trust.

Do take a look and start posting!

Is this going to be a poor year for apples?

“British summer leaves cider makes pressed for fruit” was the headline of a recent Press Release from the Welsh Perry and Cider Society. It notes that orchards and crops throughout Wales have suffered from the British summer this year, with trees producing as much as 50% less fruit to last year. Following a ‘bumper’ crop last year, with blossom coming almost a month early, a cold and wet April caused this year’s blossom to retreat, providing minimal fruit set on trees where blossom did develop. Although there is talk that cider apples may recover slightly due to the later blossom, orchard owners throughout the UK are reporting that the dramatic changes to the weather has caused a crop much below the requirement to meet demand.

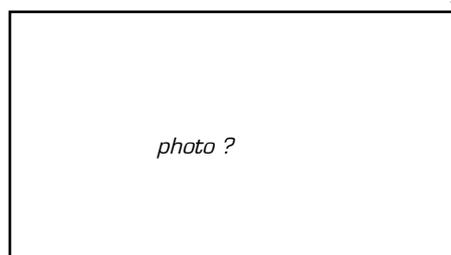
Another issue for cidemakers is that the mild winter and warm March have encouraged ciders to ferment faster and further than usual, which, for cidemakers that produce 100% pure juice products, it will be harder than usual to achieve the desired level of sweetness in finished ciders.

Meanwhile, I have read recently that “the apple is the nation’s national fruit” (not just Herefordshire?). Taking a wider perspective, is it not about time that we apple enthusiasts put

paid to the scurrilous reputation that it was the apple that Eve gave to Adam and look where that led us.....

A delightful radio programme on the myths about the garden of Eden which are embedded in all the monotheistic religions traced the origins to the dramatic — and initially dire — change in Mankind’s fortunes with the neolithic revolution and the transition from hunter-gatherer to settled agricultural communities. This is perhaps not the place the place to discuss the merits and penalties of crop manipulation and domesticating animals but the one thing that stuck out is that there is no mention anywhere in the Bible of it being an apple that Eve gave to Adam: it has been the mediaeval artists onwards who have interpreted ‘fruit’ as an apple. [Likewise, ‘naked’ in Hebrew may also be translated as ‘vulnerable’ — thus destroying another myth.]

Celia Kirby



Flora locale

New Ecological website

Flora locale has unveiled its latest initiative, a new website that provides access to information and resources on all aspects of restoring wild plants and habitats to land and landscapes across Britain and Ireland

The new website (accessed via www.floralocale.org or www.ecologicalrestoration.org.uk) is designed to help land managers and interested members of the public find information and training that will improve their capability to implement good quality conservation management and ecological restoration projects. This portal will uniquely fulfil a gap in current provision of practical advice to practitioners, by providing a single entry point to the huge quantity of rather dispersed information that is currently available online.

Current members of the MARCH APPLE NETWORK Committee

Siir Andrew Large.....	President
Ray Boddington.....	Hon. Vice President, Director & Trustee
Dr Peter Austerfield.....	Chairman & Director & Trustee
Tom Froggatt.....	Company Secretary, Treasurer & Trustee
Mike Porter.....	Director & Trustee
Diggory Kempton.....	Membership Secretary
Dr Celia Kirby.....	Editor
Sheila Leitch.....	Network Coordinator & Librarian
Tony Malpas.....	Cider interests
Sylvia O'Brien.....	Projects
Tony Pain.....	Publicity & Communications
Chris Porter.....	Archivist
Ainsleigh Rice.....	Member
Richard Wheeler.....	Vice Chairman & Webmaster
Marie Ward.....	Secretary

Growing apples in the Scottish Highlands continued

Peter Tyler's article on this subject a couple of year's ago sparked a lot of interest. Here, he kindly gives us a 'update' on his progress.

In Apples & Pears of Autumn 2009 I described setting up an orchard a few miles south of Inverness. The subsequent three years have witnessed several highs and lows in fruit growing. Apples are certainly possible and rewarding here but with reservations, mostly influenced by physical conditions such as the climate and soil depth and type. Within a few miles the topography could be too bleak and windswept with a thin stony soil. I can usually recommend apple and plum growing but not pears as my four varieties of the latter have yet to produce a single decent fruit after at least four years' blossom. I can also admit to making two beginner's mistakes. I started off with a few apparently bargain trees but when the Grenadier first fruited its tiny red apples gave the game away; I have since used this imposter as a framework to top graft for a family tree. Also I was too impatient to obtain fruit from young trees and neglected the pruning of early plantings. I am now much better disciplined at removing the lower laterals to establish a higher crown with an open shape and the early mistakes are gradually being rectified.

Climatic conditions continue to dominate the orchard's performance and remain the big challenge, with late spring frosts an annual worry. In 2011 the unusually mild April brought 20 varieties into bloom before 1st May but then four consecutive nights of frost with a final -5C on 3rd May badly affected the blossom. Some varieties were completely fruitless as a result, Blenheim Orange living up (or down?) to its reputation as frost susceptible and some with only a few fruit eg Discovery, King's Acre Pippin, and Yellow Ingestrie. It is only a subjective view but fruit set after such frosts seems better at the top of taller trees, as found on 4m tall Stoke Edith Pippin and Tower of Glamis. The cold air sinks but unfortunately not all trees can be positioned at the top of a slope with a tall leading stem and blossom well



Cold treatment of winter flower buds

above the frost level. At least earlier in the year there is no problem in giving the flower buds their required cold treatment. [Photo 1]

I had thought that wind exposure would have been a nuisance in the autumn, with increased risk of windfalls but have been gratified by the tenacity of the apples to hang on even in the most exposed parts of the orchard. Perhaps during fruit development the frequent windy conditions help form a strong stalk bond and autumn storms come as no damaging surprise. However, strong and cold easterly winds in the spring seem to adversely affect the blossom and fruit set, with very few insects seen at such times. I have found that unexpected summertime easterly winds can be damaging, for example by bark rubbing away on the stake, so some trees I have now tied to a stake on the east as well as the south west. I continue to tie



low down and have found a use for worn out wellies by cutting them into strips to be used as tree ties that hold and also protect the bark against rubbing. [Photo 2]

Establishing a windbreak along the south western fence remains a problem. Young broom plants grow quite quickly to form a barrier but eventually split and collapse under the weight of snow. I have therefore included slower growing holly, blackthorn and hawthorn but recent plantings of the latter were nibbled by lambs with heads small enough to reach through the stock netting. I have added smaller mesh netting to deter the lambs in future and planted some really thorny Worcesterberry to further discourage them.

I continue to be vigilant and adaptable against biological problems, especially grazing by herbivores. The rabbit threat has temporarily gone away but brown hares are local and a leveret was resident for several months last spring and summer. Spiral plastic guards low down the trunk and a metre square of stock netting seem to offer good protection. This metre high netting deters the frequent roe deer visitors but a freak incursion by two much larger red deer last autumn was a shock - they damaged approximately 2m tall



Burr knots on M26

tops of planted native species such as ash and cherry but fortunately did only minor damage to a few apple trees. The risk of this type of damage recedes as the trees grow taller and I am able to remove the netting and rely on trunk guards [Photo 3]. Other local vandals include two herds of cattle who came in and out without damage and recently an adult Limousin bull who broke off a few apple twigs, tip-toed past a greenhouse and ate more of a thornless blackberry than anything else. We need these reminders that tree protection cannot be ignored. I am now more in favour of M25 and M111 rootstocks as those trees can grow out of danger while my varieties on M26 will always need more protection. Another snag about M26, which I read about after planting several such trees, is the tendency to produce burr-knots if the graft union is well above ground surface. There is resultant uneven growth which does not look good [Photo 4] and with a spiral tree guard there is the added risk of soil accumulating around the stem and invertebrates including woodlice causing bark damage. I think that is why a Ribston Pippin deteriorated over two years and had to be removed. Being able to remove the stock netting does facilitate weeding around a tree and I have found no adverse effects from the permanent plastic silage wrap mulch that suppresses weed growth. It is easy enough to fold back the silage wrap to apply an organic mulch layer when necessary [Photo 3].



Silage wrap removed while adding compost in spring

Probably the worst biological problem has occurred in the last two summers, with an insect infestation where eggs are laid in young fruits in the last week of July. There is a sticky exudate where presumably each egg is laid then later a network of fine brown larval channels appears in the fruit [Photo 5]. I may be missing something obvious but despite it occurring around the Inverness and Moray Firth area nobody has yet been able to identify the culprit. The apple expert at Inverness' first ever Apple Day in October 2011 knew of the problem but could not put a name to it.



Insect laying on surface of May fruit

Allowing for 2011 being an unusual year with many varieties rushed into early flowering followed by a damaging frost, there is normally good pollination and fruit set. Honeybees from a nearby apiary play their part but not in such a big way as first anticipated; they prefer the wild cherry blossom. There are many other flying insects evident on the apple blossom and I continue to sow or plant poppies and foxgloves as well as encouraging existing flora by not strimming vegetation between the trees until late summer. The period of blossom opening normally covers three to four weeks, with so far the earliest being Oslin (24th April) and the latest Court Pendu Plat (27th May); early Marcher varieties include Worcester Pearmain and Yellow Ingestrie in the last week of April or first week of May and later varieties include Golden Harvey, Edward VII and Forester in the last week of May. The actual flowering period continues into June but the last spring frosts can be that late, with three June frosts recorded in the last four years. It has taken me a few years to appreciate that I need to be more ruthless when thinning the young fruit. The natural June drop occurs well into the next month so I delay fruit thinning until the end of July. At the other end of the year winter pruning is a movable feast as I try to do some in late November and early December before the long cold spell sets in then finish off in late March. As the orchard is on sloping ground I made a three-legged stepladder where the single leg is shorter than the two legs that are joined with rungs [Photo 6]. The extra height



Three-legged ladder used when pruning

is again useful during harvesting.

What about the apples? There is no problem with the number produced as long as the spring frosts were not too severe, but in size terms I think performance is poor. Given that some of the varieties are termed small anyway eg Downton Pippin and Jonathan and that I may have been too easy on the thinning and that my judgement is subjective, I would say the product so far is only ever small to medium sized. Even so called large varieties like Tyler's Kernel and King's Acre Pippin end up medium sized. I do not compare what I grow organically here with anything in the supermarket but when my daughter in Aberystwyth sent some Peasgood's Nonsuch apples to confirm identification I was heartily chastened that a real amateur with a single tree in the back garden could produce such large and perfectly formed fruit. I consider the soil here to be reasonably fertile, judging by the performance of other fruits and vegetables in the garden, so I am wary of adding too much organic matter in case I encourage excessive top growth. Notwithstanding, there must be some leaching of the sandy loam. At the moment there is plenty of vegetative growth to prune back so rather than being starved of nutrients I think the trees are starved of sunshine. We do have longer daylight hours in the summer but the sun is lower at this latitude and perhaps crucially the daily average temperature is lower (July average daily maxima here for the last four years were 18, 18, 16 and 17C) so the rate of photosynthesis is lower and productivity reduced.

As well as being smaller, the apples reach maturity later. The earliest dessert varieties are Gladstone, picked and eaten in the first week of September, Tam Montgomery (Early Julian) eaten in mid September and Discovery eaten from the third week of that month. Mid-season varieties are similarly about four weeks

behind their expected season, for example Ellison's Orange is best after the last week of October. The late dessert types almost catch up, eg Adams' Pearmain is still firmly attached until early November and good to eat in December. The culinary varieties are also delayed, eg Emneth Early (Early Victoria) picked and used in September, mid-season White Melrose in October and the late Tower of Glamis more or less on schedule in November.

As for flavour, I have to admit I do not often encounter the WOW! factor. I rate Discovery highly on appearance, texture and flavour, with Adams' Pearmain, Stoke Edith Pippin and Thorle Pippin also good. I enjoy nearly all the dessert varieties but have a sneaking feeling that Golden Pippin should be more fruity, Lady Sudeley less bland and the flavourless Wyken Pippin is a big disappointment. For overall performance in these conditions I would choose Discovery for dessert, Emneth Early and Stirling Castle for cookers and Blenheim Orange and Galloway Pippin for dual purpose. Emneth Early is an interesting exception to the idea that varieties are best suited to the conditions of their original locale - what bigger contrast to the Fens than the Scottish Highlands? It has also not suffered from its alleged tendency to biennial cropping.

Eight cider varieties were planted in spring 2006, all as 1 year old on M25, with a freshly grafted Bulmer's Norman added a year later. Broxwood Foxwhelp, Dymock Red and Vilberie have fruited from 2009, Yarlinton Mill from 2010 and Medaille d'Or in 2011. The crop quantity on Broxwood Foxwhelp in 2011 was encouraging [Photo 7] and suggests a potential for a large combined cider fruit yield in future years. Unfortunately the insect pest infestation was particularly bad in most of the cider varieties so Highland cider making has been delayed for another year. Never having



Broxwood Foxwhelp fruit

made cider before and being virtually teetotal I see a steep learning curve ahead.

What have I learned so far and what of the future? I see this orchard as a continuing outdoor experiment. To combat the frost blossom damage I think that the range of varietal flowering times is the best natural protection as the actual frost dates are so unpredictable and can occur anytime during the entire flowering period. Even late-flowering Edward VII and Court Pendu Plat are not safe. There may well be some frost resistance in some varieties, including Adams' Pearmain, Emneth Early and Lass o' Gowrie but I need more years of records to really confirm and add to that list. Certainly the list does not include Discovery despite its frost tolerance being mentioned in some literature - it does not cope here at -5C so those few varieties that do so are worthy of praise. Meanwhile I shall try draping horticultural fleece over some trees in full blossom during frosty nights. In pursuit of the big apple I am using careful additions



Well protected young Scottish cooker

of organic matter such as FYM or my own compost. Producing flavour-packed dessert apples here may always be borderline and I have recently added more Scottish cookers [Photo 8]. I do some of my own grafting every spring and want to follow up certain observations. Initially I bought some M26 rootstocks but the failure rate of my self-taught skill was so high that I grew many apple seedlings from pips

and used the 2-year old plants as rootstocks. Meanwhile, some of those pip plants I allowed to grow on and eventually I planted out half a dozen of these supermarket varieties in a corner of the site and left them to grow into own-rooted trees, not expecting much in the way of desirable fruit. After six years' growth only one, Granny Smith, has produced any flowers and so far no fruit. Interestingly, grafts I have made onto similar material; ie apple pip rootstocks, have flowered in much less time, eg King's Acre Pippin in three years and Katja [Katy] in four years. Does taking the scion wood from already flowering and fruiting trees have this beneficial effect? I have recently been using pips from ornamental/garden crab apples thinking that the final tree size may be reduced. Obviously all this is work in progress and neatly encapsulates the idea that growing apples in the Highlands is much about finding out how to succeed while enjoying some slow but satisfying food.

Peter Tyler

Call for volunteers for Welsh conservation survey

The People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) is urgently recruiting volunteers to take part in the first-ever survey of the remaining traditional orchards in Wales.

Since the late 1950s, 94% of orchards in Wales have disappeared due to the agricultural pressures of a global market and pressure from land development. Furthermore, the state and location of the remaining traditional orchards in Wales is unknown. Thanks to funding from the Countryside Council for Wales and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, PTES is mapping and assessing the condition of Wales' remaining orchards which will result in a comprehensive inventory that will help underpin the conservation of this unique and threatened habitat.

Researchers at PTES are studying aerial photographs covering all three and a half million hectares of Wales. Orchards managed with intensive modern practices can be easily spotted as they tend to be grown in narrowly spaced rows with bare earth beneath the typically smaller trees. So far, over 5000 potential traditional orchard sites have been spotted and a map of them can be viewed online at www.ptes.org/orchardmaps. Volunteers are now needed to check the results and locate any orchards that have been missed.

In 2011, PTES completed a four-year research project which revealed that 45% of England's remaining traditional orchards are in poor condition. The charity is hoping the picture for Wales will be better than this.

Thus far, PTES researchers have identified the following number of orchards sites that need verification from volunteers:

- 3 in Blaenau Gwent
- 808 in Carmarthenshire
- 601 in Denbighshire
- 761 in Flintshire

- 1118 in the Glamorgan Vale (Bridgend, Caerphilly, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Neath Port Talbot, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Swansea and Vale of Glamorgan)
- 876 in Monmouthshire
- 95 in Newport
- 952 in Powys
- 40 in Torfaen
- 309 in Wrexham

To volunteer, please contact Lauren Alexander, on 020 7498 4533 or e-mail lauren.alexander@ptes.org.



Book Review



How to Grow Apples and Make Cider by Bill Bleasdale.

ISBN: 9780956665713 £5.00

also available from

Welsh Mountain Books, Prospect
Orchard, Newchapel, Llanidloes,
Powys SY18 6JY

Well, what have we got here?

My first thought was that I was holding a children's book, showing them, in comic strip form, how to make themselves very drunk and ill. Clearly the subject matter is aimed at adults, though the style of writing and presentation seems not to be.

Delving further into the book there is, in fact, a lot of practical information and advice on everything from starting an orchard to bottling the cider. Planting, protecting, grafting, disease control, budding and pruning, scratting, pressing, fermenting, ageing storing and bottling are all covered and, although the descriptions are brief, the little drawings are very clear and worth a thousand words. Indeed there are also shortcuts, for example, on how to acquire fruit cheaply without having to grow it, and on improvising rather than buying expensive equipment. Pears and perry are included. There may not be much that is really new in this work, but what is there is obviously

backed up by years of hands-on experience. The approach is refreshingly "keep it simple".

Humour is a very personal thing. You might find Bill Bleasdale's style childish or amusing or both. What is certain is that apple growing and cider making are presented as fun. If the author so clearly enjoys what he is doing then so might you!

Tony Pain

News of *MAN* Orchards

Westhope Orchard

As an experiment, which seems to be working, nine of the protective deer cages have been removed from the trees. The trunks have been covered with chicken wire to a height of five feet or more as a precaution. As the trees are a fair size, being some 20 years old, the ends of the lower branches were being nibbled anyway as they projected well beyond the cages. There is still obvious nibbling but no serious damage otherwise. The remaining six cages will be removed later.

Removing the cages makes mowing much easier and I have written before about the danger to life and limb trying to strim inside a cage – a very awkward job.

Fruiting this year is poor. The only tree with anything like a crop is Stoke Edith Pippin

Peter Austerfield

Paramor

The *MAN* orchard at Cwmdru now has a comfortable seat installed - thanks to the hard work of Sylvia and Robin O'Brien and ??



Tredomen Court

During the last winter, there was a pruning course held at Tredomen under the guidance of Paul Davis of Dolau-hirion Nursery. It attracted about 15 volunteers with two sessions on 18th and 25th February. Even heavy rain on the 18th didn't diminish spirits even if they were temporarily dampened. Thank you all for your hard work during which we pruned (formative and restorative) 98 trees. Some restorative work had to be pretty drastic. And at least 36 trees were noted to have severe canker. Would pruning and canker affect the future of these trees?

This year's poor crop of apples has been widely reported by many MAN members, with similar comments as far afield as Armagh and The Netherlands. It could be serious: apple prices may rise as a result of less pollination. Peter Guthrie who lives nearby and was until very recently the Seasonal Bee Inspector for Mid Wales has endorsed this concern.

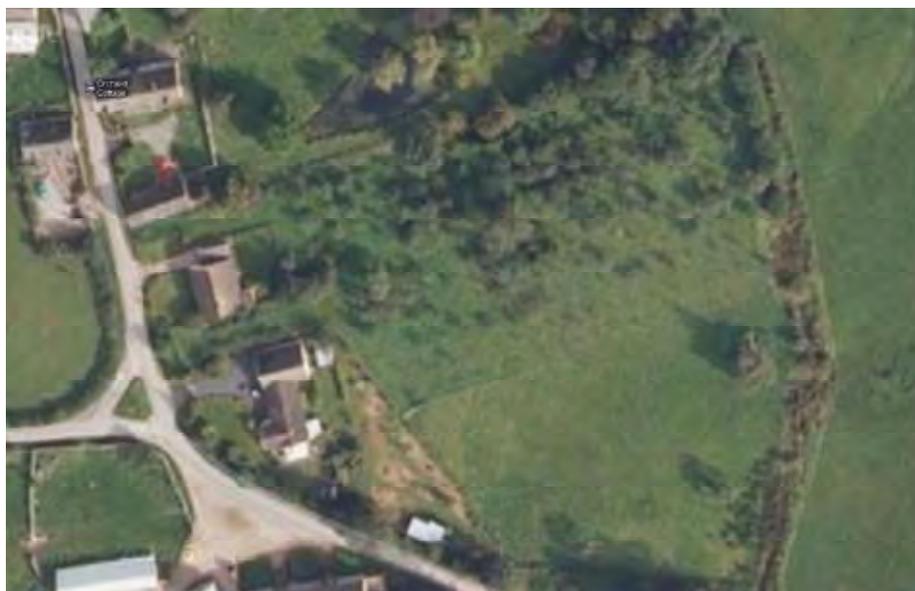
Would MAN's orchards also be affected?

Both Sheila Leitch, in Glasbury, and I, in Hay-on-Wye, have small orchards and our crops are greatly reduced, with trees bearing only 10-100 apples, despite a good quantity of blossom in May. [Nevertheless,, Sheila has good crops in her walled garden on *Worcester Permain*, Pollination Group 3, *Lady Sudeley*, Gp 4, and *Stirling Castle*, Gp 3.] When we visited Lower Ffordd Fawr in late July we were very surprised to see only about 40% of the trees had more than a couple of apples! What then would we find at Tredomen?

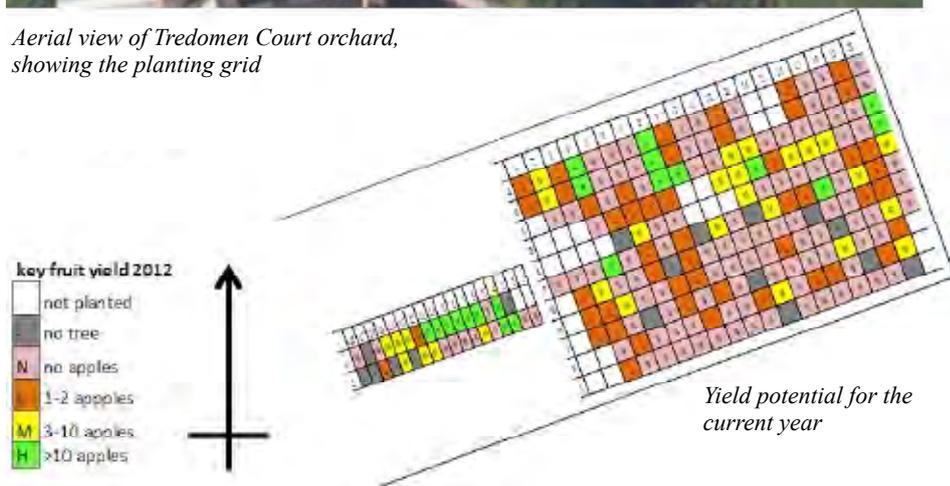
A few days later I went there with Paul Graves, a neighbour who has kindly done quite a lot of orchard management for MAN over the last few years. After having checked all the stakes, ties, labels etc., and repaired those needing attention, we carried out a detailed survey of the potential crop, i.e. did a tree have 1-2, 3-10 or more than 10 apples?

The results

Fruit yield is shown along with a satellite photograph of the orchard. Nearly half the trees had no fruit at all, and only 25% had more than 2 apples. Why was it so bad? Last year some trees bore over 100 kg each! Well we knew it would be a poorer harvest—the trees needed a rest—but why so poor at Tredomen? The weather, we shout! It was cold wet and windy. But really, was it that bad? Were all trees badly affected, regardless of flowering time?



Aerial view of Tredomen Court orchard, showing the planting grid



Yield potential for the current year

There are 101 trees at Tredomen of which we know the variety and flowering time, with most in Pollination Groups 3 and 4; there are only three trees in group 6 (3 specimens of *King's Acre Bountiful*). It is quite noticeable that trees in the pan-handle row Y have relatively good crops. Perhaps the two bungalows to north and south sheltered the trees from frequent early cold N or NE winds? There are more large apples trees in Rows A-D that may have been a bit sheltered by the northern neighbour's boundary hedge.

For each pollination group, the percentage of trees that bear no or some apples is shown in the figure below. No Gp 2 trees had more than 10 apples and only a few in 3 or 4. Groups 5 and 6 (though the sample is small) have progressively larger crops.

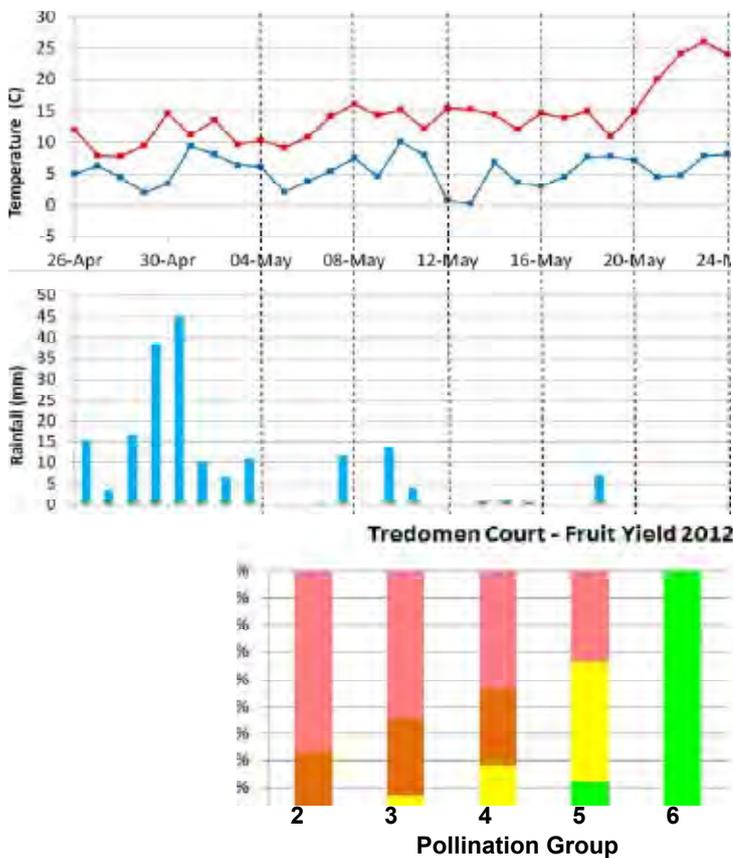
Now, is this as a result of better weather?

Bees don't generally fly unless it is at least 10-12°C and prefer drier conditions with little wind. (Imagine a bee flying through raindrops nearly half its size against a head-wind blowing at half its cruising speed. Better stop in the nest!)

Time for some analysis!

John Goodger has kindly provided some of his weather records. He has a Met Office weather station in Felindre, just 10 km distant and at a similar elevation.

Assuming flowering begins on the 30th April, and pollination groups span four days, let's compare the pollination group results with maximum and minimum air temperatures and with daily rainfall during 2012. Wet weather was prevalent during flowering of pollination group 1, but there aren't any such trees in Tredomen. It was drier for group 2 but the temperatures were low until 7th May, which was wet. There are few trees in this group with more than two apples. From 8-11th May it was warmer with less cold nights, although rain still fell on 9-10th and stronger winds were prevalent on the 11th and 14-15th. For 12-15th it was dry, but colder overnight, with frequent ground frosts. Some pollination of Groups 3 and 4 seems a reasonable outcome. After mid-May, the weather became drier, consistently warmer by day and night, and that is when fruit yields increased. There were perhaps about 6-8 days favourable for

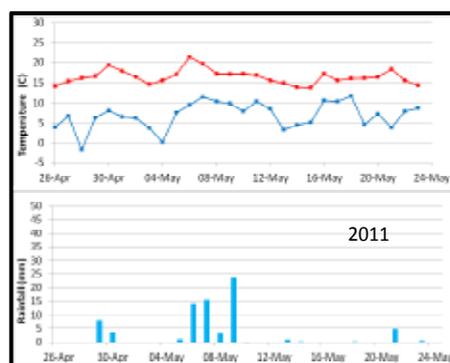
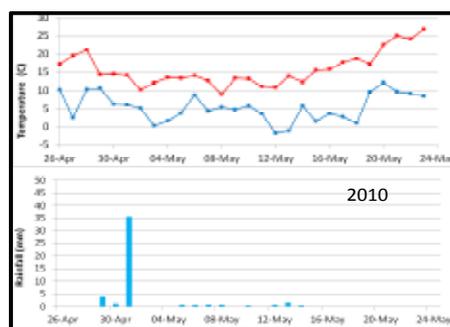
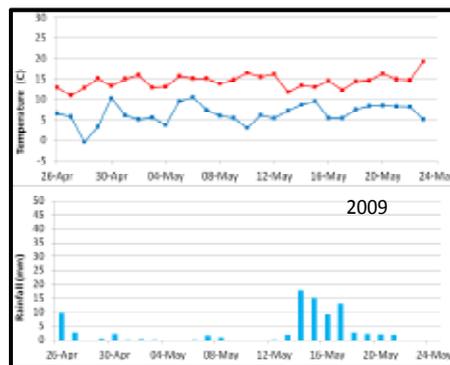


pollination, only half of which coincided with flowering of Groups 2-5.

At Tredomen we have several trees now identified to be of the same variety even if from different sources. Generally, the same variety has similar yields. But three varieties don't: *Annie Elisabeth*, *Dr Harvey* and *Lady's Finger of Lancaster*. This is odd, but these results may be explicable, based upon the tree size and how sheltered the location,

If weather is a part explanation for the current very low yields then, for 2009-2011, can we show that the consistently higher yields coincided with better weather? This is particularly striking in that Tredomen fruit yields were much higher in each of those three years than in this year.

In 2009, daily temperatures ranged between about 6 and 15°C. It was quite windy from 4-13th May, but there was little rainfall until pollination group E was flowering. Overall, there were about 18 days with conditions favourable for pollination. And we might not have noticed if the relatively few trees in 5 and 6 had low yields. Generally in 2010 days were, if anything, a degree or so cooler than 2009 and 2012. There were a number of air frosts overnight. However, most days were dry and less windy, perhaps with about 12-13 days favourable for pollination.



Daytime and overnight air temperatures were typically 2 or more degrees warmer during most flowering periods in 2011. When rain fell during the period 6-9th May, temperatures were noticeably high. It became a bit windy from 12th May, as in 2009 this might not have affected pollination of many trees. There were about 17-18 days favourable for pollination.

In conclusion, it appears that the low yield of apples trees at Tredomen Court is not simply that they needed a rest after three good, even excellent, years. Weather played a part, with rain, wind, cold and frosty days in turn deterring pollinators from visiting blossom. We, just like everyone else, have to hope that honey bees haven't been so badly affected this year that future crops will be poor too. For this year, though, we think we'll be able to collect sufficient specimen apples for making displays at shows.

**Stephen Ainsleigh Rice
Hay-on-Wye**

Comment from John Savidge

"Pam and I went to Tredomen, and Lower Fford Fawr, on May 6 and May 17, when I took some photos and recorded details of flowering time and performance. Most of the trees had flowered or had flower buds on them, but we soon noticed a considerable amount of frost damage and well as a high level of damage caused by the Winter moth and other early caterpillars.

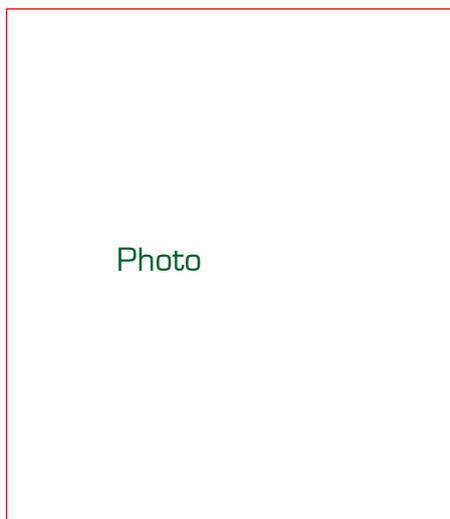
I think we must remember that Tredomen is in a frost hollow and will have lower ground and air temperatures than the nearby climatological stations. One important item is wind direction, which for most of the early flowering was from the N, NE and SE, and Ainsleigh is correct to note the beneficial effect of the houses adjacent to rows Y and Z in providing protection against cold winds. The other item to consider is that pollination by hive bees is probably not too important at Tredomen: on May 6 we noted considerable numbers of solitary bees pollinating the apple trees as well as St. Marks flies (Diptera). Over the years we have recorded many of species of Diptera pollinating at Tredomen as well as hover flies. The frost/caterpillar damage included the rotting of developing flower buds which were turning brown — see photos.

I am very surprised by the low number of apples that have developed — I have had to thin thousands of apples from my own trees this year.

My favourite apple — *Blenheim Orange*

Gosh, this was difficult! Did I want to choose a 'good' apple, i.e. always reliable, usually disease-free, carrying pretty blossom and nice shaped leaves, or just concentrate on the apple which gives me most pleasure to eat. Here again there were different criteria to consider — the lovely first crunch of an early variety after a surfeit of summer soft fruit or the more subtle spiciness of the late keepers that really only come into their after Christmas. In the end, my heart ruled my head and I went for taste not form.

Of course there were lots of tasty apples to choose from — and that's just the ones that I've sampled — there are lots out there that I have yet to bite into. My final selection of *Blenheim Orange* is greatly conditioned by the



fact that it was the first eating apple I planted in our first cottage garden in Buckinghamshire. My mother gave me a voucher to spend at Waterer's nursery outside Reading (now long gone for 'development') and I remember poring over the catalogue of some 40 varieties (gosh, were there really so many different apples?).

I wasn't disappointed when I got to eat one of the two fruits it produced in its first year. Now that I know more about the different apple cultivars, I do also like the fact that it's a variety with some history .

I expect all you apple buffs reading this will know *Blenheim Orange* well and may (or may not) agree with Rosie Sanders' description of it as "one of the loveliest apples of all with its dry distinctive flavour." I can also attest to her observation that it bears shyly when young but improves with age. Best of all, it's a dual-purpose apple, excellent for a classic French *tarte aux pommes*. I am therefore very pleased to have it in my orchard, the only downside being that I have learned the hard way that it is a bit susceptible to frost damage, as noted wryly by Peter Tyler in his interesting article on page XX.

Celia Kirby

Forthcoming Courses

Apple Identification: A Beginners's Introduction to Apple Identification.

Thursday, 20th September 2012.

Course tutor: Sheila Leitch

Restricted to MAN members. Check for details as places are limited.

Venue:

Fee:

Identification of Apple Varieties : Study session

[organised by the WEA]

Saturday 12th November. 10am – 1pm

Tutor, Mike Porter, Marcher Apple Network

Venue: Kindle Centre, Asda, Belmont Road, HR2 7JE

This course aims to help beginners to identify some of the varieties of culinary and dessert apples that are grown in local orchards and gardens. Those attending are asked to bring a sharp knife and a cutting board. A hand lens or magnifying glass would be useful.

Specimens of fruit for demonstration of identification techniques will be provided.

Fee, £12

Booking details, main contact Rosemary

Athay, Tel: 01981 540769

The Mill House, Much Dewchurch, Hereford, HR2 8DP

Alternative contact, Anne Harrison, Tel 01981 251426

Ashford House, Madley, Hereford, HR2 9NJ

Available from the Marcher Apple Network

Welsh Marches Pomona is written by Mike Porter and illustrated by Margaret Gill. It contains beautifully illustrated descriptions of 31 varieties of local apples, some of which have never featured in the apple literature. Life-size views of ripe fruit and blossom at both pink bud and fully open stages, plus line drawings of leaves and sections of fruit make this a truly unique reference work.

Hardback format, 300mm × 230mm; full colour throughout. 96 pp.

Price £25.00 + £5.00 p and p (UK)

Apples of the Welsh Marches describes 54 old varieties of apples cultivated in the traditional orchards of the region, plus 24 further varieties grown here extensively in the past and still found in local farm orchards.

Price £5.00 inc p and p in the UK.

The Herefordshire Pomona CD contains copies of all the 77 coloured plates from *The Herefordshire Pomona*, originally published by the Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club of Herefordshire in 1885. The corresponding sections and text descriptions of the 432 varieties of fruit illustrated on the plates are included, as are the lists of local cider apples and pears and the lists of varieties which the Woolhope Club recommended for planting.

The Vintage Fruit CD contains 290 separate descriptions of cider varieties and 107 descriptions of perry pears, all taken from hard to obtain reference works,

Prices £16.00 per copy, inc p and p in the UK.

Full Colour Postcard Reproductions Seven plates from *The Herefordshire Pomona*, in postcard format (6" x 4").

Price £2.00 per pack, plus 50p post and packing for up to two packs, thereafter PLUS 15p per pack.

Back Numbers of the MAN Newsletter

Many of the articles featured contain advice and ideas which have stood the test of time and still make an interesting read. Copies of last year's issue of *Apples and Pears* (Vol 2. No. 4) are also available.

Prices Nos 1 to 6 (1995 to 2000) £4.00: Nos 7 to 12 (2001 to 2006) £7.00: All 12: £10.00, all including p and p in the UK. Vol. 2, Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4, £2.00 ea. including p and p.

MAN Library List, managed by Sheila Leitch

Price £2.00 inc. p and p in the UK.

To Order: Preferably download an order form from www.marcherapple.net/books.htm — note that MAN now has a PayPal account — or write to Diggory Kempton, the Membership Secretary, Marcher Apple Network, Brook House, Hopesay, CRAVEN ARMS, Shropshire, SY7 8HD. Cheques should be made payable to Marcher Apple Network. **Wholesale price list on request.**

APPLES AND PEARS

AFALAU A PÊR Autumn 2012

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Marcher Apple Network

Apples & Pears Autumn 2012