



SUFFOLK TRADITIONAL ORCHARDS GROUP

Newsletter January 2016

“Orchards East”



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All being well, a new project – “Orchards East” - will soon be launched, with the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund. It is very much the fruit (no pun intended) of STOG itself, and a sign of its success, for in effect it will roll out the work which you have already undertaken so successfully in Suffolk, across all six counties in eastern England – Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk. Orchards East – ‘OE’ – is a joint venture by members of STOG – especially Paul Read and Gen Broad – and the Landscape Group at the University of East Anglia. Plans for the project have already passed the first stage of scrutiny from the HLF and have, during the last year, been in the ‘Development Stage’. We will finally submit our refined proposal some time over the next few months.

The Landscape Group, part of the School of History at UEA, is a collection of academics and researchers dedicated to the study of all aspects of landscape history, in East Anglia and beyond. The key players in the OE initiative are Tom Williamson (Professor of Landscape History), Dr Rowena Burgess (Lecturer in Local History) and researchers Dr Gerry Barnes and Dr Patsy Dallas. Our joint interest in orchards developed out of studies of veteran trees and ancient woodland, and has so far involved a programme of documentary research into the history of orchards in Norfolk (the results of which were published as an article in the journal *Landscapes* in 2015) and an ongoing project to catalogue the extensive archive of the Aspoll cyder company and to research aspects of its history, directed by Patsy Dallas. When we were approached by Paul and Gen about a joint project on orchards, we thus needed little persuading!



Both the aims of OE, and the methods it will adopt should our bid be successful, will be familiar to readers, for they are firmly based on those of STOG itself. Our focus is very much on traditional orchards as *habitats*, and as a part of the historical environment which has been largely neglected by landscape historians and others; on historic fruit varieties, including not only apples and pears but cherries, nuts, medlars and anything else; and on the role that orchards played in the lives of our ancestors. Our aim is to record surviving examples of traditional orchards throughout the six counties and to encourage their conservation and their restoration – as well as the creation of new examples - using tall standard rather than dwarfing rootstocks. We are also keen to continue and expand STOG’s work in oral history and its educational initiatives, especially concerning the culinary use of traditional fruit varieties.

As readers will be aware, although traditional fruit and nut orchards have been recognized as important cultural landscapes in many European countries for several decades, they were only accorded the status of UK Priority Habitat by the Joint National Conservation Committee (JNCC) in July 2007, after years of pressure from naturalists and others.

In spite of this, orchards still have no statutory protection (although they are supposed to constitute a material consideration in the planning process) and their survival into the future thus depends on enthusing owners and communities about their importance. Orchards contribute significantly to local and regional distinctiveness; make an important visual contribution to the landscape; and provide a tangible link with the past. The experience of the Suffolk project demonstrates that there is a clear opportunity to harness the widespread enthusiasm of the general public to record and conserve existing orchards, and to create a new generation of ‘traditional’ orchards, many as public open spaces in both towns and villages.

Orchards East has the support of a wide range of organisations and individuals across the six counties, as well as that of Natural England; and we have, as it were, received an ‘amber light’ from the HLF. The project is certainly not ‘in the bag’, but we are cautiously optimistic. *Watch this space!*

Dr Gerry Barnes and Professor Tom Williamson, Landscape Group, University of East Anglia



This Bramley's Seedling apple tree is believed to have been grafted about 105 years ago.

Its size is dependent on many factors, age of course, but its management, soil and climate, its genes and chromosomes (it's a triploid and triploid apples are almost always large), the rootstocks it was grafted onto, and the life of the animals, plants, bacteria and fungi associated with it in many different ways.

How much longer can it live with its obvious rot? Well... the original Bramley's Seedling tree seed, which this tree was derived, germinated about 1800, 215 years ago.



EVENTS / COURSES CALENDAR Spring 2016

The following courses are scheduled for New Year 2016.

Please contact Paul to book and/or receive further details. All STOG courses are free.

Course	When	Where	Notes
Fruit Tree Pruning (Marina O'Connell) and Fruit Tree Grafting (Betsy Reid)	Sat 23 rd Jan 2016	Newbourne Village Hall	Contact: Mariah Skellorn (mariahskellorn@hotmail.com, tel: 01473 736455) Cost: £10.00 per person See flyer overleaf
Restorative Pruning of Traditional Orchard Trees, (Anna Baldwin)	Sat 30 th Jan 2016	A Chiltern Rural Skills course at National Trust Bradenham Manor Herts.	Bradenham Manor Link > See flyer overleaf
Formative Fruit Tree Pruning course (for recent plantings) (Bob Lever and Kevin West)	Sun 7 th Feb	West Raynham, Norfolk (East of England Apples and Orchards Project)	For details email info@applesandorchards.org.uk Download booking form >
STOG Fruit Tree Grafting Course (Paul Read)	Sat 13 th Feb 2016 10am – 4.00 pm	Suffolk Wildlife Trust's Foxburrow Farm, Saddlemaker's Lane, Melton, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 1NA	Cost: FREE - EVERYONE WELCOME! Booking essential. Further info available on booking. Tea and coffee provided, please bring your own lunch. Please note there is a risk of minor cuts. We suggest that no one concerned about handling sharp knives should attend. The course is not suitable for children. Contact: Paul Read (paul@home-farm.myzen.co.uk)
7th National Scion Wood exchange (Mid Shires Orchard Group)	Sun 1 st March	Recreation Hall, Little Horwood, near Aylesbury, Bucks.	Contact Clare (msogchairman@yahoo.com, tel: 07973 667221) See flyer overleaf

STOG Fruit Tree Grafting Course Sat 13th Feb 2016



Would you like to learn to graft fruit trees? Is there a favourite tree that you would like to propagate? Perhaps there's a tasty apple in a friend's garden you would like to grow or a special plum you remember from childhood? And you can also help us by grafting trees that we will give to amenity orchards in Suffolk.

If the event is oversubscribed we will run further courses.

Workshop format:

- Discussion of traditional fruit tree propagation techniques.
- Demonstration of grafting and budding
- Practical experience in grafting, mainly using the whip-and-tongue graft method.

New Year Courses - Further details



Waldringfield, Newbourne & Hemley
Scattered Orchard

Fruit Tree Pruning Course with Organic Fruit Farmer

Marina O'Connell

Saturday 23rd January 2016 Newbourne Village Hall 10am – 1pm

(learn how to prune fruit trees, both young or old and neglected)

£15 per person - refreshments included



Followed by Fruit Tree Grafting Course with Betsy Reid 2pm – 4pm

Learn how to graft your own fruit trees

(you may bring prunings from your own trees or use the varieties that we have collected)

£10 per person

If you would like to book for either session please contact Maria Skellern

mariahskellern@hotmail.com

01473 736485

07709485979



Chilterns Rural Skills Courses

2016

Restorative Pruning of Traditional Orchard Trees
Saturday, 30th January 2016

Do you have an interest in traditional orchards or fruit trees? Then this course is for you.

Learn:

- How to identify the parts of the tree;
- why you prune;
- The science of what to do and where;
- Practical techniques for restorative pruning
(the course will not cover formative pruning or restricted forms like espaliers);
- Sharpening secateurs;
- Use of secateurs, hand held and long handled pruning saws.

Bring your own secateurs, sharpening tools, gloves and pruning saws if you have them. Hard hats, goggles and long handled saws will be provided for tall tree work.

This course will be held at the National Trust's historic Bradenham Manor orchard.

The Course will be led by **Anna Baldwin** (Dip MB BS, MRCP, MD, MFPA). Anna is a passionate earth-friendly gardener who uses permaculture and biodynamic principles. She grows as much of her own food as possible and enjoys foraging in hedgerows. Anna renovates traditional apple (and other fruit) orchards and works to preserve old apple varieties as a way of interesting people in local food. She aims to prune trees gently in harmony with the needs of the tree.



Traditional Orchard Tree Pruning

– 1 day course, Saturday January 30th

£55

The Chilterns Conservation Board continue to develop a programme of rural skills training suitable for members of the public and professionals alike. We aim to expand the skill base of those able to look after the important elements of the landscape that make the Chilterns such a special place to live, work and visit.

Courses for 2016 will also include:

Hedge Laying, South of England style £89

– 2 day course, Saturday 13th/Sunday 14th February

Particularly suitable for 'improvers', Britwell Hill, south of Watlington.

Scything £55

– 2 one day courses (choose between meadow mowing and rough vegetation cutting). July
Natural England's Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve.

Pre-Booking is essential

Full details of each course, including booking arrangements are available here:

<http://www.chilternsaonb.org/calendar/27/1571-Orchard-tree-pruning-course.html>

or contact:

Neil Jackson njackson@chilternsaonb.org 01844 355523

Donna Webb dwebb@chilternsaonb.org 01844 355500



An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



Mid Shires Orchard Group
Scionwood Exchange 2015
New fruit trees for old!



The Mid Shires Orchard Group (MSOG) is pleased to present the
7th National Scionwood Exchange

To be held on Sunday March 1st 2015 at the Recreation Hall, Little Horwood

This is a fascinating Spring event where MSOG members and visitors can see, buy and swap old and rare varieties of apple tree scionwood (one to two year old wood used for grafting) and have these grafted onto young rootstocks, to make new apple trees!

❖ Originating in the USA...

- This festival of fruit tree swapping originated in the USA, where apple trees as we know them have been planted and nurtured since the first European settlers landed and set up home
- Scionwood Exchanges are a great way of getting into home fruit growing, as well as conserving rare fruit trees and spreading vital skills and knowledge
- It's a social event with an educational slant - enjoy good company & learn something new!

❖ Nurtured in the UK...

- The Mid Shires Orchard Group has run the Scionwood Exchange for seven years
- MSOG members and visitors have been able to obtain many rare and local heritage apple varieties, to plant in their gardens and home orchards
- We can graft the scionwood onto rootstocks of all sizes, for you to take home

❖ Presented on Sunday March 1st 2015 at the Recreation Hall, Little Horwood

- Bring along scionwood from your favourite apple trees
- Swap these for others and have new trees grafted 'while you wait'
- None to swap? Purchase from a wide selection on offer on the day, for a nominal sum
- Take your scionwood home to graft your own new trees, or have trees made on the day
- Advance orders will also be taken, for collection at the event

❖ Contact Claire at MSOGChairman@yahoo.com or on 07973 667221, for more information about the event and pre-ordering

- Or see our Events calendar at: www.midshiresorchardgroup.freeforums.org



The Mid Shires Orchard Group is for all enthusiasts of orchards, apples and heritage top fruit in Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire and Warwickshire. For more information on who we are, what we do and how to join in, contact us at: MSOGChairman@yahoo.com
or call Claire on 01280 814928 / 07973 667221



Paul will be there as a visitor with graftwood of some Suffolk varieties of apples, pears and plum.

Actually France has similar, often very local events, like this.....and we plan to do the same during the Orchards East project..... and of course invite Mid Shires to come along too.

[MSOG Facebook page >](#)



Plums – almost always too many to use at once, but don't just boil them in water. They are too soft, lose some of their flavour and lose character. Try placing them in a pyrex dish alone and bake them in an oven for just 15 mins.

These are Kirkes, already a great dessert plum, but baked they become extraordinary and different, in a strong plum liquor. Eat as a cold sweet with crème fraiche, or splash with gin or brandy, allspice and a little sugar and cover with puff pastry, or freeze until.....

Orchard sites to visit—any ideas?

In June 2014 STOG hosted the Ancient Tree Forum's (ATF) annual 2 day conference and on Day 2 we visited David Wheatley's Rummer's Lane orchard at Wisbech St Mary. [See STOG Summer 2015 newsletter for details and pictures >](#)

This visit was very successful and was attended by a roughly 50:50 mix of orchard enthusiasts from all over England (and Belgium and Holland) and ATF members some of whom had little previous experience of old orchard trees. The new ATF East Anglia branch had its first meeting in Suffolk last autumn (at Suffolk Wildlife Trust's Captain's Wood, Sudbourne, in the sandlings). Since then we have had requests for more traditional orchard visits from STOG and ATF members and orchard enthusiasts from elsewhere in East Anglia. With the Orchards East project starting sometime this year, it seems a good time to start planning these visits more widely.

Several sites have been proposed, but we think it would be a good idea to ask you, our STOG members, where you think might be good locations, perhaps with several sites in close proximity. There are always major issues with visiting traditional orchards in East Anglia. Despite the large number of old and interesting sites, most are relatively small, very diverse, and often privately owned, so groups may have to be restricted in size, and car parking is usually a problem. This was the principal reason why Rummer's Lane was chosen for the ATF conference as it has a field for parking and the site is large enough for 100 visitors. We plan a return visit there sometime this year.

We already have four sites in mind in Suffolk. One is centred on Thrandeston, near Eye, where parking is available at Home Farm, and where two old sites and two new traditional orchards planted within the last 20 years are all within a half-mile walk along footpaths. We hope to arrange this for April 2015 when the huge old pear trees are in flower; more of this in the next newsletter.

Another possibility would be a peripatetic tour one afternoon., starting at one site and driving to another, or two. Then we know of at least four more larger sites outside Suffolk, where parking and numbers is less of a problem.

Can we ask you where you would suggest? We might aim for 20+ visitors at a time, parking for 8/10 cars and perhaps 2 to 4 sites close by to visit in an afternoon, or one single large site. All ideas gratefully received!



Learning to Graft

(....no not that sort of graft, *grafting plants*!)

Suffolk isn't the only county where grafting (and its associated technique budding) courses are available, but hands on courses are not at all common anywhere.

Mid Shires Orchard Group does it too; on **Saturday 6 Feb 2016** Andy Howard, co-founder of the Mid Shires Orchard Group and owner of the Heritage Fruit Tree Company, is running one at his Twyford, Oxfordshire, nursery. Although a few nurseries occasionally *demonstrate* grafting there is a very long history of tree propagation nurseries' unwillingness to demonstrate or teach grafting, presumably to restrict the spread of the technique too widely to their customers. There are references to this reticence in the literature and the *Gardener's Chronicle*, a now defunct weekly magazine mainly directed at professional gardeners, their employers and nurserymen from the early 19th C, did occasionally carry letters decrying this, but keeping it in the "family" has always been an inbuilt protection of a skill (not of course limited to grafting). Gardening was once taught in rural primary schools, and some boys were taught in the 1920's and 30's, but since the 1940's horticultural colleges alone have taught grafting and budding. To this day it is still not fully recognized the extent to which the technique is an essential part of nursery propagation of the most select and desirable ornamental trees, shrubs and climbers. Garden centre's select Japanese maples (*Acer palmatum*), white barked birches, dogwoods, Rhododendrons and Magnolias and all the best Wisterias are all grafts of clones selected for their flowers, bark or foliage, just as are almost all garden centre fruit trees, and today most garden centre plants grafting is carried out in Holland, some of it fully mechanized. Just a few fruit trees are routinely propagated from rooted cuttings, the best example being figs!

A walk through Kew Gardens looking at old specimen trees will reveal that many new species were brought to England as scion wood and grafted onto native relatives.

I learned to graft initially by watching someone do it (about 1955!), and for a while I grafted everything to everything. In those early days my successes included a tomato seedling onto a potato, and the spectacular annual scarlet and black Sturt desert pea onto a bladder senna seedling (the only way, the *Gardener's Chronicle* said, to grow this Australian desert plant in England!). Then I started to get out more!



You can graft new varieties onto existing trees, and it can become an obsession! Paul Barnett's apple tree near Chichester has over 250 different apple varieties grafted onto it. It was originally a Bramley's Seedling tree. [Link >](#)

And yes, there are trees like this in East Anglia!



Most grafted trees have grafts where they won't be noticed, such as just above the ground. Some do not make long lasting graft scars, some do. This is *Ulmus americana* (American Elm) grafted onto *Ulmus procera* (English Elm) in Kew's elm collection. It was imported into England as a length of one year old twig, probably about 1850. The label doesn't mention the graft!



Here we go A-Wassailing!

Monica Askay

Derived from an Old Norse and Old English toast wishing the drinkers good health, wassail has come to have two distinct but connected meanings. Robert Herrick, the C17th poet, writes of both.

Throughout the twelve days of Christmas it was the custom to have a Wassail Bowl (referring both to the vessel and to the drink contained within it) ready for visitors, particularly on Christmas Day, New Year's Day and Twelfth Night. The drink was most usually Lambswool, a hot spiced and sweetened ale, topped with roasted apples or crabapples and/or sippets (small pieces of toast). It was also the custom for people to go from house to house, singing wassail songs, sometimes with their own Wassail Bowl, sometimes drinking from the Wassail Bowl offered to them. Welcoming wassailers would ensure abundance throughout the year. Today's carol singers going from house to house are an echo of this custom.

The Orchard Wassail was particularly connected with cider orchards. It took place most usually on Old Twelfth Night. (The change in 1752 from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar means that Old Twelfth Night is now 17th January.) The aim of wassailing Apple Trees was to wake the spirits of the trees (and perhaps scare off evil spirits), and ensure a good crop. It is a custom which has been subject to revival and embellishment in different periods, and the tradition is currently growing as the number of Community Orchards increases. Each Wassail is different, being a mixture of old and new traditions. As with many Christmas customs, Wassail has pagan roots.

To wake up the trees and scare off evil spirits Wassails are noisy events with much banging of pots and pans. The tradition in some places is also to fire shotguns into the upper branches. Toast (or cake) dipped in cider is hung from the tree as an offering to either the oldest tree (the Apple Tree Man) or to all the trees, to sustain them and ensure a good crop. The toast or cake can also be an offering to the robin or blue tit, both birds having once been sacred. Sometimes a small boy, representing one of these birds as guardian of the trees, is lifted into the branches and the cider-soaked toast and cheese passed up to him. In a few places there is a Wassail Queen or King who hangs the toast from the branches. The roots of the tree are sprinkled with cider. Cider can be thrown up into the branches, and the lower branches and buds dipped in cider. The toasting of the trees can be accompanied by singing, chanting, music and dancing. Robert Herrick's orchard wassail verse is as follows:



Spiced apple juice to wassail at Cambridge's Trumpington Community Orchard Wassail in 2014. The "wassail bowl" (in this case a large saucepan) is decorated in traditional manner with evergreens and ribbons. This is used both as an offering to the oldest apple tree in the orchard (in this case a large old Bramley), and for the refreshment of the wassailers.



Toast to wassail apple trees (and jasmine flowers) at the Cambridge Trumpington Community Orchard Wassail 2014.



*“Wassail the trees, that they may bear
You many a plum and many a pear:
For more or less fruits they will bring,
As you do give them wassailing.”*

Orchard Wassails are held either late afternoon or in the evening and are lit by lanterns and sometimes bonfires. A very good description can be found in the book “William Winstanley: The Man who saved Christmas” by Alison Barnes. William Winstanley lived in Quendon near Saffron Walden in the C17th. He is thought to have been the author of the Poor Robin pamphlets which promote the revival of traditional Christmas customs after the Restoration of the monarchy. (The Poor Robin descriptions of Christmas traditions are said to have influenced both Washington Irving and Charles Dickens in their writings.)

Wassailing apple trees is a living tradition which continues to evolve. It is a great opportunity for those who have worked so hard in the orchard all year to take a step back and enjoy their achievements.



There are also old records of blessing new fruit trees or new orchards. Here is a modern interpretation at a new orchard, with a new tree, the sponsoring family, a morris man, and the local press photographer.



Wassailing at SWT Foxburrow Farm around the apple Beauty of Kent



Towersley Morrismen, blessing the new apple trees being planted in a new orchard in Bucks. It was raining!



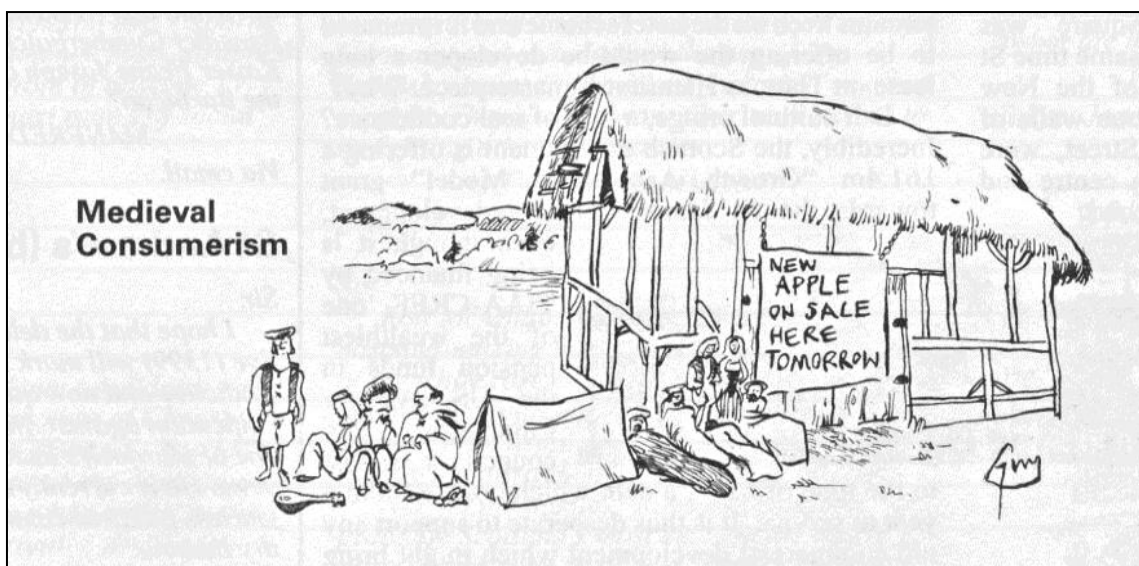
Young pears (on pear rootstock) in a north Suffolk cemetery



St Germain pears, possibly Uvedale St Germain, Suffolk, late October



Morris Men at a new orchard planting in Buckinghamshire



There are some people that simply don't understand this cartoon!

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