

RHS Fruit Group flying the flag at Europom 2010



Europom exhibits from the RHS Fruit Group, the RHS Wisley Fruit Department and fruit growing enthusiasts from France, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, Austria and Switzerland. Report page 7

Visits planned for 2011

Wednesday 10th August 2011 – a day in Kent

A full day at Edward Vinson Ltd – commercial growers of premium soft fruit, breeders and propagators of strawberry and raspberry plants, based in Kent. This will be a fabulous visit for anyone growing soft fruit, to see how it is done on a grand scale.

Edward Vinson Limited is a family owned company with its roots in the late 19th century. Our hosts - Peter Vinson, is fourth generation, and his nephew, Sean Figgis, the current managing director, is a fifth generation fruit grower. In the past the business has been involved in a wide range of fruit and vegetable crops but in the last two decades it has reduced its range of activity in order to be better placed to serve the current sophisticated market environment. At the core of the business for nearly 150 years is the strawberry crop and this remains even more important today.

Edward Vinson Ltd has three divisions:

1. Fruit production. Annual production of strawberries is in the region of 2,500 tons, with smaller volumes of blueberries and blackcurrants also grown.
2. Strawberry breeding. What commenced as a hobby in 1985 has today become one of the leading programmes in Europe. A total of 36,000 seedlings are planted annually in Kent and Spain. The main success of the programme has been the development of improved everbearer varieties to extend the season into July, August and September. In addition to strawberries the team is also breeding raspberries, blackberries and blueberries.
3. Propagation. The development of varieties owned by Edward Vinson Ltd has allowed the company to benefit from growing plants of those varieties for sale to other fruit growers.



EV has launched a new everbearer strawberry variety named VELVET, which has excellent flavour.
Photograph Edward Vinson Ltd.

Tuesday 13th September 2011 – a day in Norfolk

Morning visit to the **Ecotech Centre**, Swaffham, Norfolk, PE37 7HT www.ecotech.org.uk

Visit includes an organic garden, a heritage orchard in the shadow of the UK's first multi-megawatt wind turbine. Fit members will have the opportunity to climb the 305 steps to the top of the only wind turbine in the UK with its own public viewing platform.

Afternoon visit to **Narborough Hall Gardens**, Narborough, Norfolk, PE32 1TE
www.narboroughhallgardens.com

Narborough Hall is one of Norfolk's most beautiful and romantic private homes. Set in the valley of the River Nar it is surrounded by ancient parkland, lakes and woods. The restored **walled kitchen garden** provides top fruit and soft fruit, vegetables and cut flowers for the house and the cafe, and is managed organically. There are rare varieties of soft fruit, local varieties of apple, and the avenue of quince is particularly interesting and impressive.

We will be given a guided tour by the head gardener, Bob Lever, who is a great source of gardening wisdom and experience. He works in sympathy with the natural world making places for birds, butterflies, bees and beetles in the vegetable beds and the fruit cage.

In addition to being Head Gardener at Narborough Hall, Bob Lever is an experienced fruit grower. He is very active in the East of England Apples and Orchards Project (EEAOP) and many restoration projects in and around the East of England.

Other garden areas include: the **blue garden** - a floating sea of nepeta, lavender and blue basil; the **plum and chocolate border**, designed to show that herbaceous planting can be edible as well as beautiful, with black hollyhocks, roses, blackcurrants and crab apples; the **pastel border**, planted with pinks, roses, geraniums, double hollyhocks, lupins and frothy alchemillia mollis; the **Bridal garden** is newly planted in shades of white, cream and green; the **West facing border** in the **walled garden** planted with foxgloves, fritillaries, hellebores and the ancient rosa mundi.

The grounds of Narborough Hall are a haven for wildlife with rich and varied habitats; meadow, wetland, woodland and ancient parkland. The traditional hedge laying won an award from the Campaign to Protect Rural England in 2007. Otters and kingfishers can be seen from the banks of the beautiful Mill Leat of the River Nar which flows through the grounds. Wild flowers have been encouraged to thrive both in the meadows and in the 'wild at heart' garden. Visitors are free to explore the many walks, one of which leads to an ancient henge which pre-dates the Iceni.

Fruit Group Meetings at Wisley in 2011

Wednesday 23rd March

In response to requests from a number of FG members we have arranged a talk on **Insects in the Orchard** and their role in pollination. This will be followed by FG Chairman Gerry Edwards giving the talk on the **History of the Fruit Group - and its future** that he gave to delegates at Europom.

Thursday 14th July

We are the **guests of Jim Arbury and the Wisley Fruit Department**, and the meeting will focus on whatever is topical in the fruit gardens or orchards at the time of our visit. Given that the meeting is in July, it will, hopefully, be a bright sunny day.

Thursday 10th November

We are planning talks on the Wisley experience of **Vine growing, pruning & tasting** and hoping to get a wine making expert to take the story on from growing the fruit to producing the wine.

There will also be a **Fruit Grower's Question Time** with a Panel of Experts to answer your fruit growing queries, so get your questions ready.

Fruit Grower's Question Time (Part 1)

Questions raised by FG members and answered by our expert panel, Jim Arbury, Harry Baker, Gerry Edwards and Adrian Baggaley, at the Wisley meeting 24/3/2010. Please note that the answers given are advice only, based on experience. Members of the panel that provided advice cannot be held responsible for any failure!

Q. Does the source of pollen have any bearing on the size and flavour of the fruit it pollinates? This question was prompted by FG member Barry King, reading that dates will vary in size according to the varietal source of the pollen which fertilises the flower

A. Harry Baker was not aware of any UK research in this area – but has noticed that too much pollen will produce a very high fruit set, a very heavy crop, and whilst there will be numerically more fruit on a tree, the individual fruits tend to be smaller and with less flavour – the thought being that the flavour characteristics are being spread more thinly between the fruits. This supports the advice to thin the fruit in order to improve the size and quality of the individual fruits and reduce the chance of the tree going into biennial cropping, where a good crop is only produced every other year.

Jim Arbury noted that blueberries are affected by cross pollination, with larger and better quality fruit being produced if more than one variety is grown. Jim also mentioned that sweetcorn, where the actual seed on the cob is eaten, rather than the flesh of a fruit around the seeds, is a vegetable where you can see and taste the difference between cobs that have been pollinated by different varieties.

Q. “Has there been any recent investigations into pear rust”, asked Jim Dalmon, “as I have taken out my pear trees because they became covered in rust and produced no fruit.”

A. Jim Arbury was pleased to report that the main collection of pear trees at Wisley has not shown any signs of rust, but some had been spotted in the model fruit gardens. His advice was to remove individual leaves as soon as the orange blisters appear, before they sporulate (develop ‘fang’ shaped growths on the back of the leaf which release the spores). These leaves should not be put on domestic compost heaps,



but burned. Harry Baker said that in his experience the weather and growing conditions were a factor in pear rust, being more likely to occur on trees in damp, crowded conditions. Gerry Edwards, growing pears in West London gets some pear rust, but it does not seem to have affected his pear crop. In general, he advised pear growers to maintain good garden hygiene – removing infected leaves and clearing fallen leaves.

Q. Is it possible to feed a standard apple tree through its trunk bark? FG member Maïke Windhorst is aware that some fruit growers in Europe paint their trunks with a mixture for late winter containing cow's dung.

A. The panel had not heard of this practice, but felt that it would be more effective to apply any fertiliser around the roots, or to foliar feed if quick results are required. Jim Arbury noted that there may not be any need to feed the fruit tree at all, explaining that at Wisley they only feed fruiting trees as and when necessary, as indicated by the results of soil analysis. Neither Adrian Baggaley nor Gerry Edwards feed their trees once they are established and fruiting, unless they are showing signs of deficiencies. Newly planted trees should be fed until they become established.

Q. Can it ever be necessary to make incisions to the trunk bark of cherries, apricots etc. to relieve pressure inside?

A. The conclusion of the panel was – no – as wounds can lead to bacterial canker in the stone fruit mentioned in the question, which could lead to the demise of the tree. The bark on fruit trees will sometimes split naturally, as a result of frost damage or a massive uptake of water in wet conditions – but these ‘natural’ splits will tend to heal naturally, callusing over.

Q. Can darkened areas on the bark on trunks or boughs be a sign of a fungal disease?

A. Yes, as this could be a sign of apple canker or bacterial canker on stone fruit trees. The best advice is to prune out stem cankers, cutting back to healthy wood, burn the infected wood that is removed – make sure that secateurs and saws used when cutting out cankers are sterilised with an antibacterial cleaner or rubbing alcohol such as surgical spirit, so that the infection is not transferred to other plants on the tools.



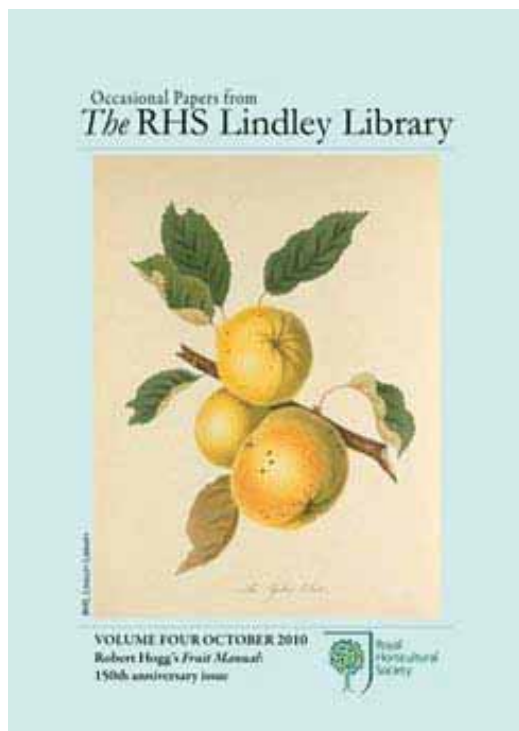
Photograph shows bacterial canker on prunus, courtesy Dr. Steve Roberts, Plant Health Solutions, www.planthealth.co.uk

Q. FG member George Freeman reminded the panel that a few years ago the RHS cut their black currants down to the ground because of big bud, and he asked - did this work and are the plants back to full production?

A. Jim Arbury confirmed that this had happened, and that that whilst it may have helped, it was not the total solution, as the Fruit Department continue to use an insecticide to control big bud mite. Harry Baker noted that the real problem with blackcurrants was reversion, and cutting down the plants will not help with this.

Fruit Grower's Question Time (Part 2) should appear in the next FG Newsletter.

Robert Hogg's *Fruit Manual*: 150th anniversary



One of the treasures of the RHS is The Lindley Library described as *'the world's finest horticultural library, with books, journals, pictures and art on practical gardening, garden history, garden plants and design from 1514 to the present day.'* The Lindley Library collections are a unique testament to gardening in all its aspects: botanical, horticultural, technological, and social. The two main libraries are at Vincent Square in London and at Wisley. In addition, they support smaller libraries at Harlow Carr, Hyde Hall and Rosemoor. They are a great source of information about all aspects of gardens, gardening, plants and fruit growing.

The FG members may be interested in this recent Lindley Library Occasional Paper, which has appeared on the RHS website.

The Occasional Papers seek to portray the importance of the collections and to record significant findings that derive from them.

Volume 4 of the Occasional Papers is devoted to studies in the history of British fruit, in honour of the 150th anniversary of Robert Hogg's *Fruit Manual*. This study examines the *Fruit Manual*'s rivals and successors, and examines novelist RD Blackmore's comments on pears, matched with those of Wisley's pear expert Jim Arbury.

Fruit is further celebrated in part one of a survey of English fruit illustration in the 19th century, looking at the work of Knight and Ronalds. Illustrations from the RHS Lindley Library compare Hogg's own apple tracings with hand-coloured drawings from *Pyrus Malus Brentfordiensis*. The Library's fine collection of pomonas also let us compare hand coloured and uncoloured plates from editions of *Pomona Herefordiensis* and *Pyrus Malus Brentfordiensis*.

Volume 4 of the Occasional Papers can be accessed by computer at this web address:

<http://www.rhs.org.uk/Plants/RHS-Publications/Journals/Lindley-Library-Occasional-Papers/Occasional-Papers/October-2010>

Many thanks to Fruit Group member Jeff Bull who brought this to our attention.

At last, a Europom in Great Britain – and at Wisley.



Europom and Taste of Autumn were very well attended this year, and at times it was a struggle to look at all of the displays because of the crowds of gardening enthusiasts who attended this four day event. John Beswick organised a splendid display on behalf of the Fruit Group which centred on Britain's favourite dessert apple the Cox and Cox derivatives. Also on show, was a selection of fruit and preserves from FG member Adrian Baggaley.

The RHS Wisley Fruit Department flew the flag for Great Britain and stunned the visitors with the quality of the fruit that they showed. Walking round the Europom marquee was like taking a fruit tour of (Northern) Europe with displays by fruit growing enthusiasts from France, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, Austria and Switzerland. Given the time of the year, most of the fruit on show were either apples or pears, but by looking carefully you could find a few walnuts, medlars, quince, and other exotic fruit. European visitors were particularly taken by the Wisley orchards – they could look at the display fruit, then walk up the hill and see the fruit growing on trees – something of a novelty for Europom.

Europom Talks

In addition to the splendid displays of fruit, on Friday 22nd October there were a series of Europom Talks.

RHS Fruit Specialist, Jim Arbury, made the introductions and started the talks with an **Introduction** and a descriptive presentation on **Fruit at the RHS**. This was followed by FG Chairman Gerry Edwards who presented the **History of the Fruit Group - and its future**. Next up were Carina Dunkerley and Rowena Ganguli founders of **The London Orchard Project**, whose slogan is 'Urban Fruit for Urban Communities'. Their spirited talk explained how they set about promoting orchards and fruit trees in London, how they work with Londoners to plant and harvest apple, pear and plum trees all over the city, and help people to rediscover the pleasure of eating home-grown fruit. The morning session concluded with RHS Historian Dr Brent Elliott gave a talk on **The History of Fruit at the RHS**.

After a lunch break which just gave time to visit the main Europom displays, Dr Joan Morgan Vice Chairman of the RHS Fruit, Vegetable and Herb Committee and Author of 'The Book of Apples', spoke on **The Origins of the National Fruit Collection**, now at Brogdale. Cider apple specialist, Liz Copas, introduced the **Dorset Apple Project**, and the talks concluded with **DNA Fingerprinting of the Brogdale and National Trust Apple Collections**, by Dr Felicidad Fernandez, Plant Breeder at East Malling Research.

Next year Europom is scheduled for 22nd and 23rd of October in Zug, Switzerland.

SHARED WISDOM

Report on the FG visit to Sussex, by FG member Sal Mansfield

When Fruit Group visits present the opportunity to view one of the member's own gardens, I know this is going to be something special and well worth the effort of making a trip.

Wednesday 15th September offered two such visits. The morning was devoted to Paul Barnett's garden in Chidum, West Sussex where I would see a Bramley apple tree with 250 other varieties of apple that have been budded onto it. OK, that sounds really interesting, and the promise of an afternoon visit to the garden of FG member Peter Collett - well - makes a worthy excuse for a day off and a trip to the coast.

We parked up, walked towards Paul's house, and were greeted immediately by a sight to defy the eyes! Beside the house and standing centre stage, within a spectacular backdrop of a curved herbaceous border, stood a huge apple tree fabulously adorned with hundreds of fruits of differing shapes, colours and varieties. Starting some 20 years ago with the original Bramley tree, fruit enthusiast Paul has gradually budded each variety onto the original tree framework. Each additional variety has been labelled carefully and the tree now literally dripped with fruit and labels – and with the fruit colouring nicely, it looked like a huge Christmas tree covered in multicolour baubles.

But there was much more to see. We moved on through the Paul's garden – past beautifully tended rows of vegetables and flowers, through a large windbreak hedge and into his orchard.

Here we discovered that not only has Paul grafted scores of varieties onto apple root stocks, he has also successfully achieved the same idea with pears and to my amazement, plums and cherries. Fruit Group members were dotted around the orchard staring in wonderment at this fine display of trees, many now in full fruit. In addition to giving us a running commentary on the history of his fruit trees, Paul also demonstrated the art of budding. He showed us the technique that he uses, and explained that he has no problem striking either grafts or buds, both work for him! He reckoned that he could potentially produce 10 trees from the buds on just one length of this year's new growth, the proof being in the middle of the orchard where there were planted hundreds of new trees that he has budded onto different rootstocks.



Paul Barnett, centre, demonstrates budding to FG members.

Could the afternoon bring more delights? Well yes actually it certainly did! A short drive to Tangmere brought us to Peter Collett's house and garden.

I had last visited his garden in 1997. At that time Peter had recently moved and replanted the whole of his fruit collection (As described in Peter's talk to the Fruit Group at our meeting in March. Ed).

I was impressed then - but 13 years later it was truly remarkable to see how this garden has matured.

Peter's garden is an absolute feast for the eyes - the whole plot is beautifully tended; clean and tidy simply packed with over 30 kinds of fruit, including closely planted apple and pear cordons of many varieties, and other



delights such as a medlar, fig, tropical kiwi fruit, and a fabulous *Tom Putt* apple tree, from which Peter encouraged us to sample fruit. I took a couple home and baked them, proving that although many consider *Tom Putt* as a cider apple, it is far more versatile.

Peter gave a talk about the history of the house, built for RAF officers in 1926, and the history of his extensive collection of fruit.

So what better way to bring the afternoon to a close – eating homemade cakes and drinking tea in the good company of some of our most knowledgeable fruit growers. A very social occasion, and a great opportunity to hear some valuable hints and tips on fruit growing from some of our most knowledgeable members.

Sal Mansfield, cook for the fruit grown by your editor Alan Mansfield in Hertfordshire!



Editor's note. Peter's garden was featured in RHS 'The Garden' magazine Oct 2004; more information on Paul Barnett's tree can be found in 'The Garden', October 2009, and by the time you read this review, you may also have seen film coverage of Paul in BBC Gardener's World that was broadcast in October 2010.

Harvesting the crop, the whole crop and nothing but the crop

Health and safety is an important issue, even when harvesting fruit.

Tony Gentil recommends an effective device for safe ladder and tree work.

Harvest time in the orchard is an eagerly anticipated event. It follows months of waiting with bated breath to see if the blossom survives the fickle frosts, only hinted at in weather forecasts. Then we watch the 'June Drop' – is it the entire crop or simply the trees shaking off excess fruit? And then, finally, that glorious sunny day in early autumn when it is time to gather the apples, pears or plums.

Fruit picking is easy on small trees, but what if the trees are grown as standards – how can you reach the highest, most desirable fruit, safely?

A ladder leaning into the base of the crown may get you standing in the centre of the tree – but can you reach every last luscious fruit out on the tips of the branches? Leaning the ladder against the outer framework of branches is unstable, and could lead to your downfall and severe damage to the branches.



Photograph: Ankalad

I have found the ideal solution. This is a device called the 'Ankalad Ladder Stabiliser'.

It consists of a series of telescopic poles which attach to almost any ladder, enabling it to freestand safely without needing the support of the tree or an assistant. For storage it all folds away so that no more room is needed than that to stow away the ladder. The telescopic poles are made of aluminium, adding little additional weight to the ladder. One person can assemble and carry the entire item easily.

I have used the 'Ankalad', which, incidentally, is British made, to great effect for all sorts of tree operations over a number of years, and would recommend it highly to anyone who needs to use a ladder to pick fruit, carry out pruning and renovation or do any tree work above the ground.

Tony Gentil, who grows and picks fruit in Cheshire.

Editor's note: the 'Ankalad' is readily available from a number of on-line retailers – just put 'Ankalad' into an internet search engine and follow the links.

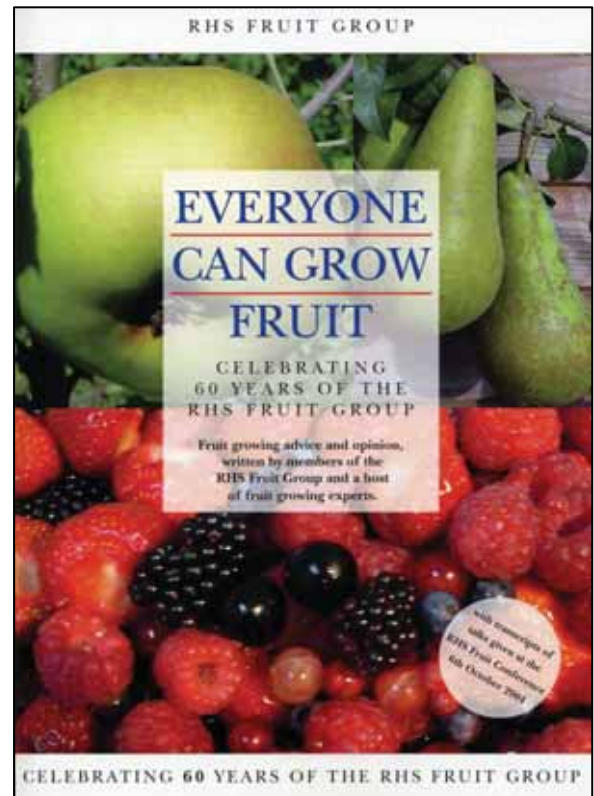
Wishing you a Fruitful Christmas and a Happy New Year

If you need a present for the person that has everything.....the Fruit Group book 'Everyone Can Grow Fruit' would make a great gift – and we still have copies left.

The book contains fruit growing advice and opinion – written by members of the RHS Fruit Group and a host of fruit growing experts. The book has over 160 pages and a cover price of £15.00.

Members of the RHS Fruit Group can buy copies direct from the Fruit Group for the reduced price of £10.00, paid on collection at Fruit Group meetings.

Copies can be posted to Members for a total cost of £13.00, including postage and packing.



Please make out cheques to The RHS Fruit Group, and send them to:

Fruit Group Book Offer, PO Box 74, Hertford, Hertfordshire, SG13 7UG

Silly Season Competition

Congratulations to FG member Jackie Pearson, who correctly identified the lines:

'Show me round your fruitcage, 'cos I will be your honey bee

Open up your fruitcage, where the fruit is as sweet as can be'

from the Peter Gabriel song 'Sledgehammer'. She receives a copy of the Peter Gabriel CD 'Shaking The Tree: Sixteen Golden Greats' as her prize.

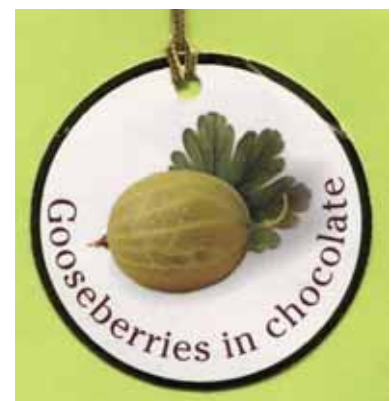
And finally....for those of you who are still looking for the ultimate

Christmas gift for the fruit grower who has everything:

WISHING YOU ALL A GOOD CHRISTMAS

AND A FRUITFUL 2011

Alan Mansfield, Editor, and your Committee.



Dates for 2011

Wednesday 23rd March, Wisley 1.00 meeting
'Insects in the Orchard' and 'History of the Fruit Group – and its future'.

Thursday 14th July, Wisley. Guests of Jim Arbury and the Wisley Fruit Department, topical visit to see the latest developments in fruit at Wisley.

Wednesday 10th August 2011. A day in Kent.
Visit to Edward Vinson Ltd commercial growers of premium soft fruit, breeders and propagators of strawberry and raspberry plants, based in Kent.

Tuesday 13th September 2011. A day in Norfolk.
Organic orchard at the Ecotech Centre, Swaffham and the walled fruit gardens at Narborough Hall.

Thursday 10th November, Wisley. 'Vine Growing, pruning and tasting'; 'Wine Making'; 'Fruit Grower's Question Time' with panel of experts.

In addition, there will be a host of regional events that we are all welcome to attend.

Other Events 2011

24th – 28th May, RHS Chelsea Flower Show
5th – 10th July, Hampton Court Palace Flower Show
20th – 24th July Summer Fruit & Vegetable Competition, at RHS Garden Show Tatton Park 2011
5th & 6th October, Autumn Fruit & Vegetable Competition, RHS London Autumn Harvest Show, Westminster,
Taste of Autumn, Wisley October.
Late Fruit & Vegetable Competition, Wisley, November

The RHS Fruit Group Newsletter relies heavily on contributions from members. Many thanks to all of you who have submitted articles, apologies if they have not appeared in this issue. We always need short articles of 100-150 words to fit around longer articles. If you have anything that may be considered for publication, please hand it to me at a Fruit Group meeting or send it to: Alan Mansfield, PO Box 74, Hertford, Hertfordshire, SG13 7UG. Telephone: 01992 550175 Ideally, copy should be in electronic format emailed to:
fruitgroupeditor@rhs.org.uk
Deadline for next issue: 31st January 2011

In addition, the South West Branch, Midlands Branch and the Northern Fruit Group will be organising regional events and visits; please contact them direct for more information.

RHS Fruit Group (RHS)

For more information contact:
Stephen Colfer, 01483 212342

South West Branch (SW)

For more information contact:
Brian Fox, Chair, 01264 357229

Midlands Branch (M)

For more information contact:
John Beswick, Chair & Secretary, 01604 403115

Northern Fruit Group (N)

For more information contact:
Hilary Dodson, Chair, 01943 464325

The Regional Branches extend a warm welcome to all members of the Fruit Group. No matter what your geographical location, members may attend any event organised by Regional Branches.

YOUR COMMITTEE

Chairman: Gerald Edwards
Vice-Chairman: Bob Sherman
RHS Fruit Department Representative:
Jim Arbury
Treasurer: Tony Benham
Committee members: John Beswick (Midlands), Peter Collett, Hilary Dodson (Northern Fruit Group), Brian Fox (South West), Alan Mansfield (Editor), John Poole (Webmaster), John Sale, Marianne Slater (Administrator), Howard Stringer, Eric Spanier
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