



THE FRUIT GROUP NEWSLETTER

No. 42

March 2010



Europom comes to Wisley

Great news from Gerry Edwards, Fruit Group Chairman

I am delighted to advise you that for the first time Europom is going to be held in the UK and it will be held at Wisley. It takes place from Thursday 21st to Sunday 24th October 2010, in conjunction with the Taste of Autumn event, with Sunday 24th October for the Europom lecture day. Europom is based on the exhibition of fruit collections by societies of growers and other not-for-profit fruit-based organisations from all over Europe. Europom 2009, held at the Alden Biesen Castle in Belgium was a wonderful success (see page 8 for report). The Continental Europeans really do have something to show, and share our interest in fruit variety collections as well as an enthusiasm for growing and eating fruit. This is a great coup for the RHS and it is to be hoped that the Fruit Group will have a major role to play. Please let me, or a Committee member, know if you can spare any time to help the Fruit Group at this important event. It is hard to know quite what will be involved, but this will be defined during the year and members will be kept up to date with developments at all meetings and in our Newsletter.

Other News

It's hard to believe that we are well into 2010, as it only seems that I wrote my 2009 New Year message a couple of months ago. What I do know is that the long, hot summer that the forecasters predicted for 2009 never happened and we only got a few good summer days. Once again my barbecue was hardly used. Nevertheless we did get a decent autumn, which led to a good colour in the top fruit, which was a compensation. Continued over...

News from Gerry Edwards, ...continued

Fortunately we did get some really good weather for our two outside visits last year. The first of these was a combined visit to the Leckford Estate in Hampshire followed by a visit to Brian Fox's garden and fruit collection, which ended wonderfully with afternoon tea and cakes. That was most certainly a visit not to have missed. Our second visit was to the National Fruit Collection at Brogdale, where members were able to see the changing scene there, and taste fruit from the large collections of plums and cherries.

I was delighted to see that Fruit Group members exhibited in very good numbers at the Summer, Autumn and Late Autumn shows - where once again FG members Adrian Baggaley, Doug Palmer and Brian Fox did particularly well - well done to all of you who entered. The Summer Fruit and Vegetable Competition at the RHS Tatton Park Flower Show in July was considered to be a great success and it will be held there again in 2010, on 21st-25th July. It will be great to see some entries into the Competition from FG members living in the area, as well as the "regulars".

The Fruit Group programme for 2010 looks very good indeed and I do hope that you will all thoroughly enjoy it. We have a day of visiting two private gardens in West Sussex - Paul Barnett's in Chidham followed by Peter Collett's in Tangmere. Paul is a good, young, fruit tree grower and he has a Bramley apple tree in his garden with well over 250 cultivars budded onto it, along with other trees of multiple apple, pear and plum cultivars. You may have seen pictures of the Bramley in 'The Garden' magazine October 2009, it really is an amazing sight. I have seen it in person and it is truly unbelievable. Some of you will have been to Peter Collett's garden before but for those of you that haven't, I can assure you that you will have a wonderful afternoon there.

Our second external visit is to Garden Organic at Ryton near Coventry which is the epicentre of all that is good about organic gardening. We will get an opportunity to see all of the latest developments there and will, of course, have the 'insider' view from Bob Sherman, our own Vice-chairman.

As in previous years we have three visits to Wisley and you will find full details of these later in this Newsletter. As usual I can assure you that your Committee will endeavour to ensure that the Fruit Group continues to provide all members with a programme which is challenging as well as entertaining. May I remind members that it is your Fruit Group, and to let me, or any other Committee member know of any potential visits to consider, any questions or subjects to discuss at a meeting or, perhaps, any offer of a talk at one of our meetings.

Unfortunately I have to advise those of you who were not present at our October meeting that Alessandra Valsecchi has moved-on from the RHS and Wisley. She goes with our very best wishes for the future, and I know that we will see her again as a Fruit Group member. In my opinion Alle will be a great loss to the RHS. I also have to advise you that Julia Mitchell who has been our administrator for the last five years - and organiser of the Fruit Group stand at the Taste of Autumn event at Wisley - has decided to stand back and have a well deserved rest. Many thanks to you Julia, and like Alle, you are going to be hard to replace.

Finally may I take this opportunity of wishing you good fruit growing in 2010 and I look forward to seeing you somewhere during the year.

Gerry Edwards, RHS Fruit Group Chairman

'Fruit Growers' Question Time'

At our 24th March meeting at Wisley, we are running a 'Fruit Growers' Question Time' session. Gerry Edwards will be in the chair, posing questions to a panel of experts, which will include Jim Arbury, Wisley Fruit & Trials Superintendent.

If you have a question for the panel about any aspect of fruit or fruit growing, please let me or any committee member have your question before the meeting. Thank you, Alan Mansfield.

Please submit your question to: fruitgroupeditor@rhs.org.uk

or by post Alan Mansfield, Editor, PO Box 74, Hertford, SG13 7UG



RHS Fruit Group Committee, December 2009. From Left to right: Brian Fox (Chair South West Branch), Tony Benham (Treasurer), John Beswick (Chair Midlands Branch), Jim Arbury (RHS Fruit Department Representative), Eric Spanier, Julia Mitchell, Peter Collett, Harry Baker, Geoff Larbalastier (Membership), Howard Stringer, John Poole (Webmaster), Gerry Edwards (Chairman), Alan Mansfield (Editor). Apologies for absence from photograph received from John Sale, Bob Sherman (Vice-chairman, see below), and Hilary Dodson (Chair Northern Fruit Group)

Fruit Group Visit to Ryton Organic Gardens - July 14th 2010



- not to be missed - Bob Sherman whets your appetite

Ryton Organic Gardens is the headquarters of the charity Garden Organic. The Fruit Group visit will take in all the 10 acres of display gardens but focus mainly on the orchard and soft fruit. The tour will be hosted by Bob Sherman, Director of Horticulture at Garden Organic (and Vice-chairman of the RHS Fruit Group), and led by Head Gardener Andy Strachan and other gardens staff. At this time of year the cane and bush soft fruit will be centre of attention but we also have a new collection of local apple varieties planted as part of the Big Lottery Funded 'Fruitful Schools' project.

We will aim to have fruit of everything in season available for tasting.

New to the site is the presence of Webbs Garden Centre, now our partner at Ryton. The familiar shop and restaurant are still there but are now run by Webbs, with a clear intention to retain the organic and sustainable ethos of the site as far as possible. That means lots more plants for you to buy!

Members should arrive at 10.30am for an 11am start. There will be the opportunity to pre-order lunch unless you want to bring your own picnic. Numbers will be limited to 60 for everyone's comfort.

If you are interested to join this visit, please fill in the booking form and return to:

Mr. A. P. Benham, Treasurer, RHS Fruit Group, Essex House, 31 Beacontree Avenue, London E17 4BU

If you cannot join us for the Fruit Group visit, why not visit Garden Organic yourself – it is well worth it, and you will be assured of a friendly welcome and an inspirational gardening experience.

Nestled in the Warwickshire countryside, Ryton Organic Gardens is the home of the UK's leading organic growing charity, Garden Organic. With over 32 individual gardens, including a Rose Garden, Orchard, Fruit Circle and Paradise Garden, everything there is designed to demonstrate and inspire people how to garden organically.

Ryton Gardens is open every day from 9am - 5pm. Admission charges apply. Garden Organic members get in free. RHS members also get in free (some restrictions apply).

For more information visit www.gardenorganic.org.uk or call 024 7630 3517.

Garden Organic, Ryton Gardens, Wolston Lane, Warwickshire, CV8 3LG

Fruit Growing at The End of the Decade

by Adrian Baggaley

The decade started out extremely wet, as indeed was the last year of the old millennium. At the end of the decade, 2007, 2008 and 2009 were also excessively wet - the only significant dry spells in Nottinghamshire being spring 2007 and September/October 2009 – once again dull and overcast. None of this dull back-end dry spell actually ‘finished’ the apples off - the fruit was generally scabby and dingy. The best year for me was 2007, when the fine spring set the scene for some top class fruit despite continuous rain from July onwards.

Spring 2009 was mostly air frost free, there was plenty of blossom across the board, and despite an abysmal

summer there were plenty of pears. However, this third poor summer in a row highlighted the pear varieties that are still a success as regards cropping and flavour, even under such conditions.



Adrian in front of his display of 9 dishes of apples and pears (Class 11) at the RHS Autumn Fruit & Vegetable Competition, October 2009, which, despite his comments on the 2009 season, won him a First Prize.

The variety *Doyenne D'ete* coincided with the end of July Tatton Park Show. The fruit carries a little bit of colour, is small and should not be left to ripen, eat it crisp with your soft fruit. To get a succession of pears from July to February I would recommend *Beth*, *Marguerite Marillat*, *Conference*, *Concorde*, *Comice*, *Beurre Dumont*, *Beurre Papa Lafosse* and for January/February *Winter Nelis* and *Josephine de Malines*. All of these I can recommend together with *Beurre Hardy* and *Louise Bonne of Jersey*. Two scab resistant varieties worth growing are *Beurre Bedford* and *Durondeau* the two being related, but beware - *Beurre Bedford* is strongly biennial. Dismal failures are *Clapp's Favourite*, *Dr Jules Guyot*, *Moonglow*, *Glou Morcea*, and *Invincible/Delwinor* (this has been no good for three years).

In 2009 virtually all my outdoor stone fruit cracked and rotted. This was due to endless downpours the first being on July 7th, deluge followed deluge for weeks. My fruit picking steps just sunk into the ground. All this rain affected the dessert apples which were misshapen and far too large for showing. The most serious side effects were scab and physiological effects like bitter pith. Paradoxically one of the worst affected apple varieties in the orchard was the supposedly disease resistant *Red Devil*, most fruits were covered in scab. One of the cleanest varieties was the *Cox* which is always clean as a whistle in my fruit patch, and has never been sprayed – that's gardening I suppose!

Returning to stone fruit and in particular cherries. Having grown cherries for several years I have come to the conclusion, that growing them outdoors in wet areas is doomed to failure. They are best grown indoors or semi-enclosed. Indoor fruit are a far superior product as they keep longer on the tree, although acidity decreases with time.

The UK has an infinite range of cooking apples, matched nowhere in the world. Going through the season we have *Emneth Early*, *Reverend W Wilkes*, *Peasgood's Nonsuch*, *Lord Derby*, *Blenheim Orange*, *Bramley's Seedling*, *A W Barnes*, *Annie Elizabeth* and many many more.

Occasionally I am asked 'Which are the best cookers?' In the past many of my cooking apples have either not been picked or put into store and forgotten. I thought it was about time to sample the varieties so I asked the winner of the annual Bramley Apple Pie Competition in Southwell, to show me how to make short crust pastry – resulting in a series of pies and one or two pear Tarte Tatins.

Marking the apples pies on a scale of one to ten, here are the results for the top six:

6th. *Lord Derby*, never even got to the pastry, severe physiological problems, presumably due to the wet weather.

5th. *Howgate Wonder*, this variety had big bitter pit problems due to the continual rain, the flavour was poor in comparison and going on 2009 could be bettered by other varieties. 4 out of 10

4th. *Peasgood's Nonsuch*, I thought these were past their best, but was proved wrong, flavour was excellent 8 out of 10

3rd. *A W Barnes*, the ones in store are in pristine condition, and appear to be better keepers than *Bramley's*. The flavour was excellent and couldn't be faulted. 9 out of 10

2nd. *Annie Elizabeth*, keeping qualities are excellent, and like *A W Barnes* still in excellent condition at the end of January, flavour indistinguishable from *A W Barnes*, another that is faultless. 9 out of 10.

1st place. *Bramley's Seedling*, I have to be careful what I say here, living six miles from the original tree. Renowned as a keeper, but I thought it was outclassed by the previous two, which had no bitter pit problem. Further trials may be necessary; The jury is out for the time being. As for flavour, it was comparable with the previous two, and seemed to cook down easily. A very diplomatic 9 out of 10.

The apples were cut into chunks and part pre-cooked in a saucepan with 6mm of water and shaken occasionally to prevent them cooking down, and I should point out that only one tablespoon of sugar was sprinkled over the fruit in each pie, so as not to destroy the flavour of the apples. In further trials I may totally cook the fruit inside the pie as segments.

And the pastry making? Excellent. Then I would say that wouldn't I?

Adrian Baggaley, grows fruit in Nottinghamshire

Booking Wisley Fruit Group meetings

Will members sending their booking forms to me, please take care to ensure that the slip sent carries your name. I now have 2 applications without name. The first was sent in Autumn, one of the earliest to arrive: '1 person for each of the March and the August meetings' - there was no indication from where, or by whom, it was sent.

I have now just received a similar one '2 members for each meeting' more easy to trace, in that it had a first class stamp and was posted on 21st January, but the name is still a mystery.

Please contact me if you recognise your application, or are waiting for a booking acknowledgement.

Howard Stringer

Cider with Ginny

by Barry King

This is a report on a coach trip around Worcestershire in October to visit cider makers, view them making cider and sample their products. It was organised by CAMRA (Campaign For Real Ale), which Ginny and I had joined last year.

It started with a short rail trip to Worcester (standard class) and on a beautifully sunny Saturday we boarded our coach.

First stop, we arrived at Greenstreet Farm, Hallow, just to the north of Worcester. We decoached, met farmer John Barker and set off through his orchard (1850 vintage). I couldn't believe I was in an orchard; I know apple orchards, but this was just a grass field with a few trees in it, and very tall trees at that – you'd need scaffolding to pick these apples and pears.

Well, this was a traditional cider orchard – trees 40 feet apart so that sheep and cattle (removed prior to harvest) could safely graze beneath, and trees far enough apart to hinder disease spread. This was an old orchard – several of the trees were missing, and there were some new replacements. John gets his replacement trees from Westons – the perry pears are double worked, with a sprinter stock in-between to gain height. Cider apples were largely Dabinette (red bittersweet ones) and Michelin (green bittersweet). The fruit was gathered by wheelbarrow after it had fallen off (so no scaffolding required) taken to the barn, and loaded into the hopper. Apples and pears had been grown here by the farmer's grandfather and back in those days, Weston's would collect the harvest. Later his father had to deliver them to Westons who demanded minimum loads of 1 tonne. So in 1996 Farmer John, who had only a half-ton trailer, went his own way. First, he enrolled on a cider production course and then purchased second-hand equipment from a local college which was closing down. Now John supplies local pubs and CAMRA festivals. Off we went then to see the kit, and sample the cider and perry, visit his cellar where about 10 plastic cubes of 1000 litre (ex fruit juice) sat quietly bubbling away. Local cider makers can now avoid the Excise man if they produce for sale less than 7000 litres per

year, and amazingly and not surprisingly the three independent cider producers we visited stayed within this limit. In the barn we saw the fruit drop down from the hopper into a water bath where John washed the fruit using a broom, and they then journeyed up a conveyor belt, where rotten apples could be picked off and then milled into a pulp i.e. cell walls broken so that juice could be squeezed out. (see photos to illustrate these points).



The next stage is the pressing.

All John's cider is fermented using natural yeasts and the juice starts at a specific gravity (SG) of around 1.056 (the .056 being largely fructose) and ends up at 7% ABV, with an SG of around 1.00. The ABV (Alcohol by Volume) has to remain below 8.5% or again the Excise man becomes interested – and once again they all succeed! Farmer John provided us with half-pint

beakers and some small barrels of cider and perry. I tried the cider which was drinkable - especially with the bread and cheese that the farmer's wife provided.

Our next stop was Tardebigge Cider (www.tardebiggecider.com) near Bromsgrove. Tardebigge is renowned for the longest flight of locks (Birmingham-Worcester Canal) in the country and the deepest. The orchard is situated on a south facing slope above the canal and had been planted up since 1995. Now this was more like an orchard, perhaps too much so, as you couldn't see much sky. Steve Cooper (cider maker) had been promised that they were dwarfing rootstocks and so planted closely, but the battle was on – even more so as he handpicked rather than await the drop and use a shovel, like Farmer John. Varieties included Yarlington Mill, Michelin, George Cave, Dabinett, Harry Masters, Jersey, and so on. Barrels of cider (medium and dry) were laid on and after a tour we sat down to lunch, more cider and a presentation from Steve that took us through the cider process. I discovered that sweet and medium ciders are made by adding sugar to dry ciders and not by stopping fermentation at a higher gravity and using its natural fructose. Now, I'm sure that you all know, but I didn't, ciders undergo two fermentations – the first, a fiery explosive one in the autumn and then later in the winter a slow malo-lactic fermentation which reduces the acidity. Steve did not rely on natural yeasts and used special white wine yeast to give his distinctive flavour. A few bottles were bought and then we set off south down the M5, crossing the Gloucestershire border to visit Kevin Minchew's Cydery near Tewkesbury.

Kevin has no orchards, just a couple of sheds off the A46, where his cider and perry matures. He has been a leader in the revival of perry, by seeking out old trees and establishing new ones by grafting. His raw juices are fermented naturally and matured in old oak scotch whiskey barrels. Kevin was pressing apples when we were there – see before and after pictures.



And here I had another surprise – I had always expected the raw juice to taste as terrible as a cider apple, but it was pleasantly sweet. We all wobbled back to the bus and the tour ended at Shrub Hill Station.

For further reading I recommend Joan Morgan's *'The New Book of Apples'* Ebury Press (2002), which has a very good chapter on cider, and the CAMRA 'Cider' book, published in 2009 which includes information on some of the cideries visited and lots more besides, it is available to non-members - try Amazon.

Barry King, who disloyally drinks tannin-free, naturally sweet, Normandy cider (ABV 4.5%) at home in Coventry, and took all of the photographs in this article.

Europom – what's it all about?

Enthusiastic report on Europom 2009, from Maike Windhorst



Photograph at Europom 2009
by Maike Windhorst

Last year's Europom outing took us to the Province of Limburg in Belgium. We stayed at a lovely B+B in a very rural setting surrounded by majestic Boomgardens, lush meadows sprinkled with substantial standard old fruit trees. These turned the daily stroll to Alde Biesen itself into a pomological experience. Where else can you pick up samples of rare historic *Reinettes* or aromatic old pears for free on

your way from A to B? After less than half an hour's amble, the Alden Biesen Castle itself arose, a fairytale setting of towers and passageways. Yet there were no knights strutting the Alden Biesen courtyard but pomologists in their droves, mainly members and helpers of the Boomgarden Stichting, the Belgian equivalent to the RHS Fruit Group and English orchard projects. Lots of stalls and stands had to be put up for the public and then a first glance into one of the vast mediaeval halls - tables with displays of apple and pear varieties as far as one could see. Lots of local groups under the Boomgarden Stichting umbrella supplied the best of the past and present. Some early fruit like *Gravensteiner* apple, well preserved into the late season so that the public could view them all the same. At the other end of the hall another passageway and more top fruit - cherries preserved in large jars so they, too, attracted the pomologists' attention. In fact, there seemed to be no orchard fruit that was not displayed in some form. Across the cobblestone courtyard in the great hall on the other side, we found the entrance to the fruit sanctuaries from outside Belgium. France occupied part of the ground floor with three different collections. New to me, some young people from the Jardin de Luxembourg, Paris, all very knowledgeable about historic fruit. We left the ground floor and its vast array of exhibits to climb the stairs and find displays from further north. At the top of the staircase we were greeted by Jim Arbury and Alessandra from the RHS Fruit Department. They showed pyramids of spotless fruit in the English tradition. Pride of place was occupied by the *Bramley* which had its birthday last year. A lot of the Flemish pomologists are very knowledgeable about English fruit and some prefer the *Ashmead's Kernel* to any of their own varieties. There followed a symposium with excellent speakers on the Sunday. We were given a Flemish transcript but after a while the enthusiasm of the speakers and the common interest had us understand a good deal of what the talks were about. Fruit identification was conducted by the Mechelen Fruit Group (or Malines if you prefer). They had two rows of identifiers with the experienced ones sitting in the front and the younger ones standing behind to learn and observe. All of them had the occasional round of distilled fruit spirits to replenish their identification ability.

Maike Windhorst, who grows fruit in Essex

Tchik ! Tchik !

Peter Collett reports on a close encounter of the natural predator kind, in his garden.

Picking the last of the apples and pears, plus generally attempting to clear up leaf debris where possible over the last couple of weeks, that persistent yet well remembered bird call, heard many times before, had totally failed to register with the ever weakening memory banks. A fact, of course which we of ever increasing maturity would never admit to. The cognoscenti twitchers amongst you will, no doubt, have already divined the maker of this very distinctive sound.

This morning however, for me, all was revealed. Finishing a post breakfast coffee, often the only one of the day, looking through the kitchen window towards the cordon apples, a sudden flash of red, white and black at the base of the trees, had all the lemons jolting to a halt in the same row. Jackpot! Or rather, a Great Spotted Woodpecker.



Photograph: Steffen Hannert. courtesy of Wikipedia

Instant remonstrance with oneself - of course you should have remembered that was the origin of the call!

Continuing to observe the GSW, I suddenly realised what he was up to. Moving methodically up the row, each tree in turn, from south to north, he was most definitely feeding avidly on what one can only suppose and hope, was over-wintering insects of the pestiferous kind, on the base of each tree, around and on the very rough-barked graft section. The union being quite large in many cases, and the only place where bark is not relatively smooth. Each tree was dealt with in its turn, none were missed. Reaching the last fruit tree, he then flew into a nearby liquidamber.

Turning away, I just caught another glimpse of him as he flew back amongst the cordon fruit trees - to begin on the next row, containing the cordon pears!

All I can hope is, that in his persistence, he will have rid me across all 140 or so fruiting trees, of a fair percentage of those over-wintering pests which are often the bane of my life, come next year's harvest time. So, if you are a reluctant sprayer as I am - get yourself a Great Spotted Woodpecker!

Peter Collett, Tangmere, West Sussex, November 5th 2009.

Don't forget that we all have a chance to visit Peter Collett's garden with its extensive collection of fruit trees later this year, on Wednesday 25th September, when he has kindly invited fellow members of the RHS Fruit group to pay him a visit.

If you are interested to join this visit, please fill in the booking form and return to:

Mr. A. P. Benham, Treasurer, RHS Fruit Group, Essex House, 31 Beacontree Avenue, London E17 4BU.

Not so much money for (even more) old books

by Jeff Bull

It seemed longer ago than Oct '07 that I contributed a piece on the hunt for, and discovery of, the old fruit books, which I got from a dealer (FG Newsletter #35, October 2007).

The hunt for old fruit books continues. Since then I have more than satisfied my appetite for such things, courtesy of my local Methodist Church's annual spring 3-day (Thurs-Sat) mega book fair.

The savvy organisers call for contributions months ahead, the 'response' being kept in donors' homes until only 3 days before the event, so that the use of the church for its Sunday services is not interrupted.

Come the Monday, the flood of donations start arriving and are put in to cardboard fruit/veg trays according to topic. The entire church hall and about half of the church are taken up with trestle tables bearing the full trays. The organisers look out for potentially special items (eg 1st editions/signed copies/antiquarian value) and put them on one side for special pricing, but a few things do slip through. Dealers can have first look - for £10 - on the evening before opening, viz 10am Thurs, when we ordinary punters start flocking in.

My purchases in the last three sales have included:

2008:

The Fruit Growers' Guide, Horace Wright. 1924, 680pp in 2vol [updated & revised edition of his father's (?) original of 30yrs before].

2009:

The Fruits and Fruit Trees of Monticello (Thomas Jefferson and the Origins of American Horticulture). Peter Hatch. 1998, 220pp.

2010:

Science and Fruit Growing, Duke of Bedford & Spencer Pickering. 1919, 350pp. [an account of the work and results at Woburn Experimental Fruit Farm since it started in 1894, front fly-leaf bears name: E.Markham, Gravetye].

Practical Guide to Garden Plants and Best Kinds of Fruit and Vegetables. John Weathers (former Asst Secy to RHS). 1901, 1200pp.

Cultivation of Berried Fruits. Chas. Oldham (Gen. Inspector, MAFF). 1946, 374pp.

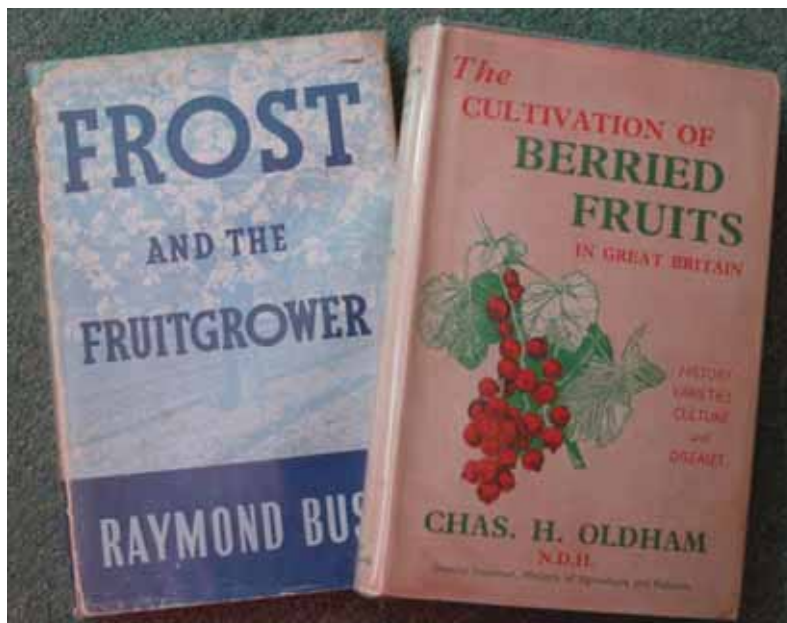
Frost and the Fruit Grower. Raymond Bush. 1945, 120pp.

Peach Orchards in England. Justin Brooke [farmer at Cropton Hall, nr Newmarket]. 1947, 85pp.

Practical Treatise on the Grape Vine. W. Thomson [of Tweed Vineyard]. 9th edn, 1879, 99pp. (first published 1862, and dedicated to the Duke of Buccleuch).

There are a lot of old fruit growing books out there, and it is always worth keeping an eye out – you never know what you might find.

Jeff Bull, grows fruit in Surrey



Hugh Ermen, Brogdale research expert - 1928 to 2009



All of Hugh Ermen's new varieties were bred in the back garden of his home in Faversham, Kent. Photograph by Malcolm Withnall

Fruit growing lost one of its most knowledgeable practitioners in December when Hugh Ermen sadly passed away. Born in 1928 and growing up in Northamptonshire, Hugh developed a taste for fruit, and apples in particular, in his father's garden, becoming familiar with the 30 or so varieties growing there.

After National Service in the RAF, Hugh embarked on his horticultural training, first at Writtle Agricultural College and later at the RHS garden at Wisley. His father had hoped to start a small fruit farm, but his untimely death just before Hugh sat his Final exams necessitated a rethink of career.

Hugh joined the National Fruit Trials and spent the remainder of his career there – some 29 years – working on variety trials, the National Collections, pollination and propagation work. Hugh developed an unrivalled knowledge of varieties and was well known in international research circles for his work on pollination of fruit crops contributing to the ISHS Working Group on Pollination. He was skilled in propagation and always looked for ways of improving bud take and rooting of cuttings. With colleagues at Brogdale he developed a runner tip propagation system for strawberries and improved rooting of hardwood cuttings in Garner bins which led to an interest in 'own root' trees that remained with him throughout retirement. Hugh loved bouncing ideas around with colleagues and was always keen to try them out. At Brogdale Hugh always had time for younger members of staff and took many under his wing, sharing his knowledge, guiding and encouraging them. Many students had their placements enhanced as they helped Hugh in many of his experiments or learnt skills from him.

He was also an accomplished photographer collaborating with his friend John Bultitude on the book "Apples: A Guide to the Identification of International Varieties" and was responsible for many of the images of fruit in the National Fruit Collection archives. He did not seek the limelight and was happiest working in the background allowing his infectious enthusiasm full rein in exploring why plants behave as they do and how to improve a way of doing things. He was not afraid to question accepted wisdom nor to learn from the past - above all relishing the fun of discovery. In 1988 the RHS conferred the award of Associate of Honour on Hugh for distinguished service to horticulture.

In 'retirement' Hugh pursued his interest in fruit with the help of his wife Laura and typically insisted on describing himself as an "amateur fruit breeder". But whilst he had access to none of the equipment which breeders at research institutes might consider essential and did not focus on the DNA or genome of fruits, he brought a highly professional approach and a wealth of knowledge to the choice of parents in his crosses, together with keen eye for selection of their progeny. His programme resulted in varieties such as *Bright Future*, *Cobra*, *Herefordshire Russet*, *Jumbo*, *Limelight*, *Red Devil*, *Scrumptious*, *Sweet Society*, *Winter Gem*, together with *Malus Laura* and *Malus White Star* ornamental cultivars.

This obituary by Dr David Pennell first appeared in 'The Fruit Grower' magazine <http://www.actpub.co.uk/fruitgrower.php>
Many thanks to Chris Tanton, Editor of 'The Fruit Grower' who gave us permission to reprint it here.

Here is a personal note from Nick Dunn, of Frank P Matthews, who worked with Hugh over many years:

As the nursery that introduced his varieties, may I say that Hugh and his breeding made a large contribution to UK gardens and with occasional commercial success, such as *Scrumptious*. We still have further seedlings of Hugh's to assess for at least another 5 years and there are one or two good ones in mid-trial at the moment. *Sweet Society* was chosen by the RHS for their bi-centenary as you will know. Hugh leaves his wife Laura who helped him tremendously in the last 15 years and although she will not continue breeding she will maintain her interest in Hugh's legacy. We miss him greatly of course, and although he was the most modest of men, I would say, by his record backed up by the trees we have sold, the most successful post war top fruit breeder in the UK.

Nick Dunn, Frank P Matthews Ltd, Berrington Court, Tenbury Wells, Worcestershire, WR15 8TH www.frankpmatthews.com

Dates for 2010

Wednesday 24th March, Wisley, 1.00pm (RHS)

Alex Deadman 'Growing currants, gooseberries, strawberries in Malvern'. The second half of the meeting will be a 'Fruit Growers' Question time' with all-star panel of fruit growing experts.

Saturday 5th Jun 2010 visit The Royal Bath and West Show. (M) & (SW)

Wednesday 14th July, visit Garden Organic,

Ryton, nr Coventry, CV8 3LG, 10.30am, (RHS)

FG Vice-Chair, Bob Sherman, will give us a tour of the organic gardens, its soft fruit and orchards.

Wednesday 4th August visit Wightwick Manor and Garden, Wolverhampton. (M)

Tuesday 24th August, Wisley. 1.00pm (RHS)

Focus on Cane Fruit – talk, followed by walk through the cane fruit collection.

Thursday September 2nd Morning Visit to Adrian Baggaley's orchard, Lowdham; PM visit to Sir John Starkey's Bramley planting at Norwood Park (M)

Wednesday 15th September, West Sussex (RHS)

10.00am, Visit Paul Barnett's spectacular *Bramley*, grafted with 200 different varieties of apple +

afternoon visit to **Peter Collett's garden**, Tangmere.

Thursday 23rd Sept. Morning visit to **Three Choirs Vineyard and Winery**, Newent; afternoon visit to

Castle Fruit Farm Apples and Pears Orchard. (M)

4th October AGM at Ryton coinciding with Apple Day at Garden Organic Ryton (M)

Thursday 11th November, Wisley, 1.00pm (RHS)

Winter pruning demonstration, plus Gerry Edwards & Peter Collett on 'Exhibiting Fruit and what judges are looking for'.

Other Events

Chelsea Flower Show, 25th-29th May

Summer Fruit & Vegetable Competition

21st – 25th July @ Tatton Park Flower Show

Autumn Fruit & Vegetable Competition,

Westminster, 5th & 6th October

Taste of Autumn & Europom, Wisley 21st-24th Oct.

Late Fruit & Vegetable Competition, 12th & 14th November

Don't forget that at all Wisley meetings there is a chance to meet with other members before the meeting proper begins. Come to the Hillside Events Centre from 12.30 onwards for some refreshment to meet other members, swap ideas, and 'talk fruit' with other enthusiasts.

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), Julia Mitchell, John Poole (Webmaster),

John Sale, Howard Stringer, Eric Spanier

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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: 30th June 2010

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