



THE FRUIT GROUP NEWSLETTER

No. 36

March 2008

WISHING YOU GOOD FRUIT GROWING IN 2008

A message from Gerry Edwards, Fruit Group Chairman

At the beginning of my New Year message in 2007 I was terrifyingly accurate in suggesting that the year ahead could be wet and dismal all year long - a complete reverse of the year before. We did have a pretty awful year weather-wise and our visit to Audley End in August was more like a visit in April - let's just hope that 2008 gets 2007 weather out of its system and gives us a long, warm summer.

Our two main visits away from Wisley in 2007 were to West Dean Gardens - where we did have a really good day weather wise - and Audley End. As many of you will know the visit to Audley End was not in our original plan, but was necessitated by the illness of Ken Muir which prevented our planned visit to Essex. At exceptionally short notice Bob Sherman was able to persuade English Heritage to open up on a closed day which meant that we had the place to ourselves - many thanks to Bob and we won't blame him for the weather! Both visits were outstanding days which were very well attended by our members. I was delighted that our summer visit to Wisley was also very well supported. Once again I have to thank Jonathan Keyte and his team for looking after us at Wisley because without them the Fruit Group would not exist as we know it.

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Fruit Group Meetings 2008

Wednesday 19th March, Wisley.

Mini Talks. Maïke Windhorst and Gerhard Petri on 'Restoring an Edwardian orchard'; Peter Collett on 'Moving a mature orchard'; plus question and answer session.

Tuesday 24th June, Wisley

Topical event organised by the Fruit Department at Wisley, likely to focus on soft fruit, with tasting of soft and bush fruit if possible. Please note: this event will be held out of doors - so please come equipped to face whatever the weather throws at us on that day.

Tuesday 12th August

Morning visit to Cam Valley Orchards, Meldreth, nr Royston, Herts., SG8 6ND for a tour of plum and gage orchards (36 cultivars) also visit recent planting of local apples and 19 commercial varieties; afternoon visit to Wimpole Gardens, Wimpole Hall Farm, Arrington, nr Royston, Herts., SG8 0BW. National Trust property with walled kitchen garden, many varieties of rhubarb, and a national collection of walnuts (60+ named cultivars).

Wednesday 3rd September

Visit to Poultry Farm, Plain Road, Marden, Kent, TN12 9LS to see Peter Hall's organically grown hops, and the new organic 'Concept Orchard', supported by Orchard World, grapes and on-farm conservation projects

Tuesday 4th November, Wisley

Nurseryman Terry Read on 'Warm Temperate Fruit' and chair of the Northern Fruit Group, Hilary Dodson on 'Moving the Harlow Carr fruit trees' plus question and answer session.

Please note change of date - the summer visit to Wisley is confirmed as Tuesday 24th June and not 1st July as published previously.

Also, minibus transport for Fruit Group meetings, from the station to Wisley, will cease at the end of 2008. Any bookings made for this year will be honoured but there will be no minibus service from the beginning of 2009.

On that note I have to inform those of you who were not present at our October meeting that Jonathan Keyte has moved on to pastures new and he goes with our very best wishes for the future and we hope to see him as a Fruit Group member in due course!

I was delighted to see that Fruit Group members exhibited in very good numbers at the July, October and November Fruit Shows - where both Doug Palmer and Brian Fox did particularly well - well done both of you. I can confirm that the 2008 Summer Fruit Competition will be held on the last weekend of the Hampton Court Show albeit in a different location in the Showground and in a different format. It would be great to see an even larger entry into the Competition by FG members - incidentally, enter the Competition and you will be provided with free entry to the whole Show.

And so to 2008 - and I hope that you will all thoroughly enjoy the year's Fruit Group programme. It looks good as usual and includes visits to an organic fruit grower in Kent and a visit to a plum, gage and apple orchard in South Cambridgeshire coupled with a visit to the National Trust gardens at Wimpole Hall. As usual we have three visits to Wisley and you will find full details of these as well as our 'outside' visits 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 and once again I remind members to let me or any other Committee member know of any potential visits that they would like to see considered, any subjects for discussion at one of our meetings or an offer of a talk at one of our meetings.

Finally may I take this opportunity of wishing you good fruit growing in 2008 and I look forward to seeing you somewhere during the year.

Gerry Edwards, Fruit Group Chairman

We still have copies left...

If you do not have a copy of our own book 'Everyone Can Grow Fruit' we still have some available – get them while you can at the special price for Fruit Group members.

The book contains fruit growing advice and opinion - written by members of the RHS Fruit Group and a host of fruit growing experts.

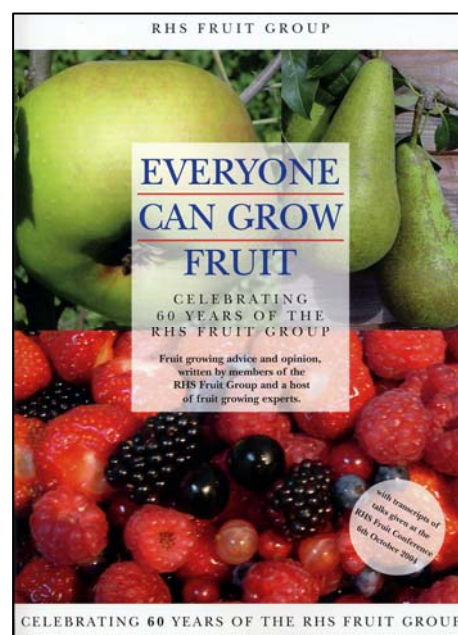
The book has over 160 pages and a cover price of £15.00.

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



TASTE OF AUTUMN 2007 – AND BEYOND...

First of all, a big thank you to my band of helpers who made our presence at the Taste of Autumn event, at Wisley this last October, such a success. I think we all enjoyed ourselves. It was very hectic with over 25,000 visitors during the 4 days. The visitors certainly enjoyed the wine tasting, apple pie and cake tasting as well as the jams, jellies and chutneys. Our theme this year continued last year's, showing the gardens of FG Members and the development of their fruit trees and bushes.

There was a great deal of interest in our photographs and descriptions of container grown fruit, which made non-fruit growers think about the possibilities this could open-up for them.

Now, of course, we must think about this year. We could continue with the theme we have had for the last two years, i.e. members' gardens with possibly a slight 'climate change' twist to the story. Did anyone suffer during the floods of 2007 and/or early 2008? Have your trees suffered wind damage or any other climate-related problems? Do you have weather records/photographs of your garden? This theme could also include ideas like: a survey of new pests and diseases, or can you grow new fruit because of temperature rise? If you have any photographs or material that we could use, or any other ideas, please contact me as soon as possible. To radically change the display will need quite a large number of photographs related to your fruit growing, and time will be needed to ensure that we can make a coherent story of what is going on!

Visitors to the display are also interested in the fact that we are prepared to show our problems and failures – as well as our successes. Do you have a story to tell about problems which have been overcome or of a failure? If so, again, please let me know (anonymity will be preserved!)

2009 The Year of the *Bramley's Seedling*



Now to turn our thoughts to 2009 which is the 200th anniversary of the *Bramley's Seedling* apple – and we would like to mark the occasion with a *Bramley* themed event. Do you have a *Bramley* apple tree? Are you about to plant a *Bramley*? If so, could you please take photographs of your *Bramley* at every stage of the year over the next 18 months. If you have a *Bramley* which is about to undergo 'serious' pruning then before and after photographs would be very useful.

Also if any of you have favourite *Bramley* recipes these would be welcome – the recipe leaflets went down very well last year.

Finally if you have any ideas for the display do please contact me either by e-mail juliaemitchell@hotmail.com or by post 49 Broadhurst, Ashted, KT2 1QD

Here's hoping for good growing conditions for 2008

Fig Diary 2007

Adrian Baggaley reveals his secrets for growing figs successfully

Up to this year the only conspicuous success I have had with figs is the fan-trained *Brown Turkey* in the polytunnel. The tree is around 17 years old and is set in the bottom half of a Silaid barrel (a chemical used for fermenting silage) let into the ground, but leaving a few inches of the rim above ground level. The drainage is 25mm holes drilled into the bottom, which is covered with crocks, broken or unbroken Rosemary tiles (a traditional plain clay roof tile) are a good substitute. There should be enough to stop the roots escaping through the drainage holes. The barrel is filled with a 3:2:1 medium of soil:peat:sharp sand. After planting, the surface is covered with 1½" – 2" of pea gravel to within 2"-3" of the rim to allow for watering. The purpose of the gravel is to discourage vine weevil from laying eggs in the medium.

The Brown Turkey, whilst providing first crops of large figs - the biggest being up to 4oz, does not produce a second crop readily, in my experience. However, I have managed to produce the odd second crop fig after 'oiling'. For anyone not familiar with the bizarre practice of 'oiling' it is simply this –if a fig is showing some signs of swelling, put a droplet of vegetable oil on the eye of the fig. For some reason unknown the oil spurs the fig into further swelling and ripening.

Up until two years ago other figs in the polytunnel in containers were *White Marseilles*, *Rouge de Bordeaux* and a fig that found its way from Tenerife. These trees were in free-standing, cut-down barrels, smaller than the one in which the *Brown Turkey* is planted. These trees did little - glasshouse red spider mite continually halted fruit production, not to mention the *Rouge de Bordeaux* escaping through the drainage holes and trying to make a getaway out through the tunnel cover.

After years of aspiration, I decided to move the free-standing trees out of the polytunnel. They were left outdoors all summer to rid them of the red spider, and then planted in the greenhouse. The trees were taken out of the containers, more tiles laid in the bottom, the planting medium replaced and the containers sunk into the border on the north side of the greenhouse. The training mode for these figs is not a fan but multiple cordons. When one cordon reaches the top of the greenhouse it is pruned back to near the bottom to an advantageous bud, and the growing process starts all over again. One cordon may be pruned back each year.

During the summer of 2006 the *White Marseilles* produced a small crop of large figs, the other two varieties dropped their first crop. The *Rouge de Bordeaux* produced a second crop of small figs in the autumn, as did the *White Marseilles*. This year, 2007, the *White Marseilles* produced a good crop of large figs which lacked flavour somewhat. The *Rouge de Bordeaux* once again dropped its first crop, as did the Tenerife fig. But all was not lost, in late September both the *White Marseilles* and the *Rouge de Bordeaux* produced a

second crop unexpectedly. In fact the *White Marseilles* produced so many figs that I made about 8lbs of fig and apple jam, and although the fruit was smaller the flavour was spot on. The *Rouge de Bordeaux* produced a large crop of very large superior flavoured figs. These were dealt with in two ways: split and served with cream, or split and served with Parma ham. The last *Rouge de Bordeaux* fig was eaten the first week in November.

As I write (13th November 2007) a fourth fig, one that came from the Algarve, has been just 'oiled' since the fruit appears to be trying to swell – nothing lost...

Other varieties given to me by Clive Simms are *Black Jack* (grows fruit as big as an apple) and *Dessert King*. Neither cropping yet.

Outdoor Figs

The outdoor *Brunswick*, planted against a north-facing wall as an experiment, defies all attempts to train it – so I have left it to do its own thing. The outdoor *Brown Turkey* trained as a multiple cordon against a fence panel produces inferior quality fruit compared with the one in the polytunnel - they are best described as 'cooking quality'.

Recipes

Surplus *Brown Turkey* figs can be poached in a saucepan in ½" of water and a tablespoon of honey. This is an excellent way of preserving the crop because they can then be frozen.

***White Marseilles* and Apple Jam**

For anyone fortunate enough to have sufficient quantities of surplus figs.

3lb fresh figs
1 ½ lb cooking apples
1 pint water
3lb sugar
Juice of half a lemon



Peel and core the apple, cut into small chunks, part cook in a large saucepan or preserving pan (maslin). When the apple is tender, add the figs, water and lemon juice. Cook gently until figs are tender. Add sugar and boil furiously. Keep stirring to prevent the fruit at the bottom from burning and 'catching' the pan. Check for setting after about 10 minutes. Keep stirring all of the time or the fruit will burn on the bottom of the pan. When setting point has been reached remove pan from heat. Remove any scum that has formed on the surface of the jam. Allow to cool slightly and then fill into pre-warmed jars. Leave to cool further then cover and apply lids tightly.

Editor's note: having acquired a jar of this excellent jam I can confirm that it is lovely for breakfast on toast or croissants.

Jeff Bull's article 'Money for old books' in the FG Newsletter #35, October 2007, and his display of historic books on fruit at the 4th November FG meeting, has generated a lot of interest.

A PRICELESS FRUIT CATALOGUE by Tony Gentil, fruit consultant, Cheshire

I first became intrigued by the idea of collecting old gardening books when I read an article on the subject in the RHS Journal. The date was 1966 and I was a student at horticulture college in North Wales. There was an advertisement in the journal from Bernard Quaritch, the London antiquarian bookseller and for years their catalogues were an invaluable source of learning and inspiration. Back in those days Quaritch listed some cheaper titles along with fabulously expensive colour plate books.

Before going to college I had spent some years working on nurseries and I always had an affection for nursery catalogues. Although originally printed in their hundreds, because of the ephemeral nature of their content, they were usually discarded at the end of each year on receipt of the next year's edition. As a result after only a few years there are not many copies still in existence.

In my early collecting days I acquired a copy of John Scott's Orchardist and Lawson of Edinburgh's catalogue of 1854-5, the year they received seed of the Port Orford cedar, later known as Lawson's cypress. Scott's catalogue is mind blowing. His knowledge and familiarity with a wide range of fruits leaves one breathless with envy. His collection of pears makes even Brogdale's current list look inadequate. To quote him: *'out of nearly 1800 sorts of pears cultivated by me, I do not think I have fifty wrongly named in my collection.'* Oh for the chance to work alongside someone like that and to share his knowledge!

Daniel Lloyd was another great source of books for many years and I obtained quite a few from him.

Of all my fruit books I prize one above all the rest. To me it is very special and priceless although no second-hand bookseller would give me above 10p for it in its present condition! This is a tattered and battered, well used catalogue entitled 'No 295 Fruits for 1910-11' issued by Clibrans of Altrincham.

There are several things that make it very special to me. Firstly I worked at Clibrans in the early 1960s as a trainee knifeman. Clibrans was a nursery firm of the old school where virtually all the stock was grown in the open ground and lifted by hand with spades. Even trees 25ft tall with a root spread of 12ft were lifted by hand by gangs of four men. All pruning was done with knives kept sharp on oil stones and leather strops.

When I was there just before the firm closed down in the mid 1960s there was a nursery manager called Harry Newton. Harry used to drive from nursery site to nursery site in an old green Landrover. When he retired, after Clibrans ceased trading in 1966, his daughter carried on a nursery business on one of Clibrans sites. When she finally retired in the 1980s I was able to acquire her collection of Clibrans catalogues that had been handed down from nursery manager to nursery manager over the years. Among them was this 1910-11 catalogue.

This is not simply a copy of their fruit catalogue but the actual working copy used by the foreman of the fruit department. Several pages are annotated by him as comments for future reference. For example on page 66 for plums there are the pencil notes *'Put Diamond on Mussell. Those marked Mus I find do here best on that although they will do on common Plum. But stocks vary in different districts. Damsons do very well on Myrobellan. Those not mkd will do on Mus or c.Plum.'* There is also a handwritten list of 52 gooseberry varieties and 23 *'Lancaster Show Gooseberry'*.

In 1910-11 Clibrans plum maidens sold for 1s 6d and 2s 6d. Dwarf trained trees 3/6d, 5/- and 7/6d. Standard and half-standards were 7/6d, 10/6d, 12/6d and 15/- each.

Holding this catalogue in my hands and reading his observations, I feel very close to someone with a very deep knowledge of his subject. I can picture him sitting in his office, an area partitioned off in a corner of the packing shed. His chair is a wooden Windsor chair superbly comfortable with redundant cushions brought from home. On his desk is this catalogue, his Saynor knives, oil stone and a strop made from a leather belt attached to a batten of wood. On a shelf above him, lie piles of dusty older catalogues and reference books. Dependent on the time of year there are a number of fruits on his desk for identification or in the lifting season there would be a sheaf of orders sent down from the office. Outside the gangs of men were working in the fields. How many of them were soon to be called away to the war, leaving the familiarity of Clibrans' fields to die in the strange fields of France?

When the walled kitchen garden at Tatton Park, Knutsford, was being revamped, I was asked to supply the apple trees. When I asked the project manager, Simon Tetlow, what the target date was for the restoration, he replied that it was to be around 1910. It was a happy coincidence that I was able to propagate a range of apple trees from the list in my 1910-11 catalogue. It is very likely that original plantings at Tatton would have been purchased from Clibrans as their site adjoined Tatton Park on the north side. History was able to come full circle due to my copy of the fruit catalogue.

When the BBC were filming the reconstruction of the walled garden at Tatton they asked to borrow my copy of the catalogue for filming. No way! I offered them a photocopy, but they were not interested in that. There was no way that I was letting my priceless bit of history out of my hands!

In Praise of older books on fruit growing

Chris Abbott writes from Hampshire

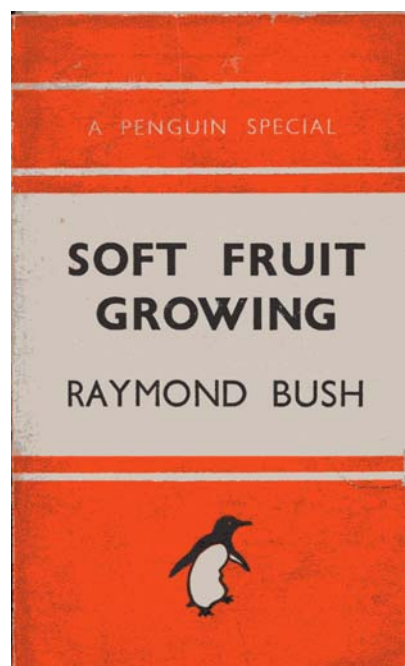
I admire Mr. Bull's enthusiasm for collecting rare fruit and gardening books and thank you for bringing some to the November 2007 meeting, and indeed I wish him well for his collection.

What stands out for me with some of the fruit books published between the 1940's and I suppose the late 70's or early 80's, are that publications were designed primarily to instruct and educate those of us not fortunate enough to be set to work as garden boys when aged 14 and to be taught by the Head Gardener on a great Estate.

These books for instructing the amateur were very well written and the quality of the hand drawn line illustrations were easy to follow – for me much easier than the brightly illustrated tomes of today, with, I freely admit, wonderful photography – but as 'educators' they are not so good!

Such books as Raymond Bush's 'Soft Fruit Growing' and Mary Spillers, 'Growing Fruit' – as well as the Seabrooks' family writings are I think lovely pieces of fine English prose, so easy to follow both when reading and pruning, potting and all the other jobs necessary to delight the amateur when growing fruit.

I liked a remark on the fly cover of the Penguin edition of Raymond Bush's book, (pub.1942) when it described the writer as having '*neglected his education at Rugby and has been trying to catch up ever since*'. In modern parlance: 'I know the feeling...!'



Blackcurrant crop failure

Michael Moulton provides a possible explanation

At the Fruit Group meeting on 4th November 2007 a member asked why their blackcurrants had failed to produce a crop this year.

Whilst several suggestions were put forward, without knowing the variety and the situation it is difficult to give a firm answer. However the most likely problem is attributed to the warmer winters. Blackcurrants require a period of hibernation if they are to crop to their full potential. On average plants require a temperature below 6^o C for a minimum of 2,000 hours. If they fail to get this winter chilling, then crops will be disappointing.



Beecham first became aware of this problem when contract acreage in Kent in the 1980s let us down badly. As a result we opened up a new contract area in Scotland.

Someone commended that we should get back to the old East Malling varieties. As you may be aware more than 90% of the UK commercial acreage goes for Ribena. Since the Government reduced funding for minor crops we have carried out our own breeding programme for blackcurrants. Any new cultivar has to meet strict agronomic and processing standards. So far only the *Ben* varieties from SCRI have met these criteria. (Photograph shows the splendid *Ben Sarek*)

Michael Moulton

As Chief Field Officer for Beecham then SmithKline Beecham, Michael (now retired), worked for them for nearly 30 years. During that time he was responsible for their world-wide supply of blackcurrants for processing.

PROFESSIONAL FRUIT TREE PRUNERS IN POWYS

In what is thought to be one of the first events of its type in the UK, twelve professional tree surgeons and landscape gardeners have received special training from the 'Orchard Doctors' as part of a project to regenerate orchards in Powys.

The training day was specially designed by consultants, Tony and Liz Gentil, to develop the practical and business skills of tree surgeons and landscape gardeners, so they can offer a professional fruit tree pruning and maintenance service to orchard owners in the county.

The training day was held at Penlanole organic orchard near Newbridge-on-Wye on 12th December 2007. The trainees were taken through the theory of pruning old and young trees, and took part in a practical exercise to test their ability to assess an orchard and give recommendations on work needing doing.

RHS Fruit Group members Tony and Liz Gentil have been providing technical support to the Perllanau Powys Project for over two years. The project is run by Glasu, the LEADER+ Programme in Powys, as part of its remit to promote local food.

For further details or information, please contact Tony Gentil direct on 01270 780828 or email tlgorchards@tiscali.co.uk

A Visit to the Europom 2007

Maike Windhorst reports



‘Bongerts’ was the main theme of this year’s Europom event in Luxembourg. Only passing the Dutch and Flemish exhibition stalls featuring ‘Boomgardens’ made the penny drop for me - ‘Bongerts’ is Orchards in the Luxembourgian language.

Exhibitors came from more than 10 different European countries and regions. New this year were collections from Bulgaria and Romania. The two scientists from Bulgaria showed an impressive array of walnuts all of them the results of their breeding programme. Representatives from both countries agreed that they had not even started to look at old fruit varieties that might have survived in private gardens and on odd plots.

The first conference day witnessed a number of talks about existing national fruit collections which already successfully maintain old and new varieties. The benefits of such collections vary from aiding scientific research and historic heritage to old and new fruit growing and processing techniques. The latter is high on the agenda for wildlife enthusiasts in Luxembourg and part of their concepts to secure the survival of orchards. ‘Bongerts’ are seen as part of a wider culture which comprises biodiversity as well as crop utilisation.

Quite similar to our Wildlife Trusts, they promote ‘Bongerts’ as a haven for fungi, birds, and even rare beetles. There was a slide show on the type of fungi that preferably grow on apple trees and it was astonishing to find that those toadstools and sponge discs in our orchard actually have names.

‘Bongerts’ are also a source for apple juice, cider, and even spirits. The event organisers ‘Helef fir Natur’ played a major part in setting up a huge industrial juice press which can process orchard fruit in bulk. There was plenty of opportunity to discuss juicing and orchard management during the outings on the second day of the congress.

From the various talks, the one given by a professor from the research station in Geisenheim really stuck to my mind. He praised the health benefit of old orchard apple varieties. Their research had shown that in order to match the anti-cancer properties of just one traditionally grown *Boskoop*, you would have to eat 11 *Braeburns*. Interesting was his chart of overall health benefits of various fruit. Here the humble blackcurrant skyrocketed and surpassed apples and blueberries by a comfortable margin. The question from the audience was inevitable: What happens to the apple’s health properties in the fermentation process that turns it into the slightly alcoholic ‘Viez’? A sigh of relief from all the students and hobby vintners present. Yes, most of the benefits are preserved, but still surpassed by products derived from the blackcurrant like jam or squash syrup.

The 2007 Europom gave a good overview of ways to marry nature conservation with fruit culture and cultivation.

Maike Windhorst and Gerhard Petri will be giving a talk on ‘Restoring an Edwardian orchard’ at the Fruit Group meeting at Wisley on 19th March.

R.H.S. SOUTH WEST FRUIT GROUP REPORT FOR 2007

Our first event was held at the National Trust Gardens of Knightshayes Court, Tiverton, Devon, on 15th September. It was an afternoon visit and we were very fortunate to have excellent weather. John Lanyon the Head Gardener at Knightshayes conducted the tour of the gardens, which focused on the newly restored walled kitchen garden, the walls of which were a good height and gave improved protection and significantly higher temperatures for the crops grown. It was good to see the range of trained fruit being grown on the walls together with some free standing trees, a significant number being local varieties. The group also found particular interest in the recently planted vineyard, from which the National Trust were hoping to provide wine to sell in their on-site shop. At the end of the tour there was an opportunity for Members to have a walk around the grounds.

The second event was held in conjunction with The Midlands Fruit Group and was a visit to Quoins Organic Vineyard at Bradford on Avon in Wiltshire, on 22nd September. During the morning we had the opportunity to see the vineyard and appreciate the requirements and problems of organic culture. In addition to the grapes a range of other fruit was grown on a small scale in various locations around the vineyard; this included plums, gages, apples, pears, quince and medlars. After this we had a tasting of organic wines, followed by a picnic lunch, which made it a pleasant social occasion. In the afternoon we visited another vineyard near-by and were able to view some of the more modern developments in training structures. This second vineyard, was somewhat larger than the one viewed in the morning, the vines however were not as mature. It was also interesting to see a new top fruit orchard plantation; again, these were very young trees. Unfortunately this had to be cut short as the weather deteriorated significantly.

Our final visit was to Kevin Croucher at Thornhayes Nursery, Dulford, near Collompton, Devon, held on 27th October. To start, Kevin gave us a talk on techniques of growing trained fruit, this covering a range of top fruit, their rootstocks, culture and types of training. Following this there was a demonstration of tree planting and pruning of trees to be grown on strained wires. The building of these structures was also discussed. After a picnic lunch there was a demonstration of planting free standing trees, covering apples, pears, plums and cherries, together with subsequent pruning for different types of culture. Apple Day at Rosemoor was again a busy day, with significant numbers of people requiring apple identification throughout the morning and into the early afternoon; this was with four expert identifiers covering most of the period. The help of Alessandra Valsecchi from Wisley throughout the day was much appreciated.

Brian Fox, Chairman South West Branch

The Regional Branches are an important part of the RHS Fruit Group. In addition to the events staged and organised at Wisley, the Regional Branches organise events open to all members. They provide a chance to meet other members, practice fruit growing, make local contacts and to visit gardens and orchards all across the country. There is the Northern Fruit Group, plus Branches in the Midlands and the South West. Contact details can be found on the back page of this Newsletter.



We all know that, don't we?

John Poole, Chairman of the Midlands Branch, challenges the elitism in fruit growing

Eating apples are always red, and cooking apples always green. We all know that – OK, perhaps that's too easy.

What about *Pitmaston Pineapple* isn't a pineapple, *Autumn Bliss* isn't a state of mind, and *Whitesmith* isn't the next township to Ladysmith? We all know that too.

But, and here's the point, even if WE know, the Great British Public (GBP) does not. My local supermarket today was selling just six varieties of apples so that, to an extent, the GBP only had the chance to interact with those six varieties. Big deal, in a world which contains more than sixty times 6 times 6 varieties.

Seen a lot of plums in the shops this year? Cherries and pears too? Same old story – same old intensely limited selection at your friendly mega-store. Corner shops, if such still exist, may be slightly more adventurous and the occasional farm shop can come up with unusual treasures. But the general pattern is appallingly clear: very little choice.

It's true that Apple Days, currently swinging into action across the nation, offer great opportunities for tasting and comparing. But when the show is over, how many of the potential recruits to fruit growing – to our ranks, in a word - do anything about it? Not many is my guess.

To a degree this is probably a problem of supply, some tree and bush retailers having a wide range, but many stocking just a few trees tucked away behind the weeping willows and the horse chestnuts. Can we ourselves, the dyed-in-the-wool enthusiastic fruit lovers, possibly have something to answer for?

What about elitism, for a start? The beginner from round the corner comes looking for advice: 'Well actually old boy, I grow a whole lot of stuff, far too tricky for you of course. I'd stick to *Bramley* if I were you.' [Scab? – oh, don't worry him with that, he's only vaguely interested. I think].

Or 'Why not have a bash at ...' although admittedly there's the problem of pollination, of course, and you'll need to be very careful with the super-phos, and it's a partial tip-bearer, and it won't flower for ten years and.....'

Another convert lost. So, please, can we climb out of our bunkers and make an effort to bring newcomers into the wonderful world of fruit by encouragement, advice and help *at a realistic level*. You could be doing yourself a back-handed favour by setting up a rival at the local shows whose exhibits will make the prize cards really worth fighting for.

John Poole

What do you think? Is John right? What should we be doing to encourage more fruit growing? Please send your emails and letters to further this discussion in future Newsletters. Editor.

Dates for 2008

Wednesday 19th March, Wisley.

Mini talks. Maïke Windhorst and Gerhard Petri on 'Restoring an Edwardian Orchard'; Peter Collett on 'Moving a Mature Orchard'; plus questions and answer session. (RHS)

Saturday 12th April, RHS Garden Rosemoor.

Author and fruit expert Barry Juniper. Morning talk on researching his book 'The Story of the Apple', Afternoon Barry will talk on the history of early orchardists in the UK. (SW)

Saturday 19th April. Visit Thornhayes Nursery,

St. Andrews Wood, Dulford, Cullompton, EX15 2DF. Kevin Croucher demonstrating top working of orchard fruit. (SW)

Tuesday 24th June, Wisley. Topical event organised by the RHS Fruit Department at Wisley, likely to focus on soft fruit. (RHS)

Saturday 12th July. Visit Thornhayes Nursery,

St. Andrews Wood, Dulford, Cullompton, EX15 2DF. Kevin Croucher demonstrating summer pruning and training of top fruit. This event is being run by Kevin Croucher, all bookings must be made with him direct on 01884 266746. (SW)

Tuesday 12th August. Morning visit to Cam Valley Orchards, Meldreth, nr Royston, Herts. SG8 6ND for a tour of plum and gage orchards; afternoon visit to **Wimpole Gardens,** Wimpole Hall farm, Arrington, nr Royston, Herts. SG8 0BW. National Trust property with walled kitchen garden, many rhubarb varieties, National Collection of walnuts (60+ cultivars). (RHS)

Wednesday 3rd September. Visit Poultry Farm,

Plain Road, Marden, Kent, TN12 9LS to see Peter Hall's organically grown hops and the new organic 'Concept Orchard' supported by Orchard World, grapes, and on-farm conservation projects. (RHS)

Saturday 20th September, Visit Doug Palmer's Prize Wining Fruit Collection, Yealmpton, South Devon. Apples, pears, plums, cherries, apricots, peaches, outside and in polytunnels. (SW)

Tuesday 4th November, Wisley. Nurseryman Terry Read on 'Warm Temperate Fruit' and chair of the Northern Fruit Group Hilary Dodson on 'Moving the Harlow Carr Fruit Collection'. (RHS)

Branch contacts will have details of all local events.

RHS Fruit Group (RHS)

For more information contact:
Stephen Colfer, 01483 212342

South West Branch (SW)

For more information contact:
John Pledger, Treasurer 01805 622493

Midlands Branch (M)

For more information contact:
John Beswick, 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, whatever their geographical location. Members may attend any event organised by any of the Regional Branches.

YOUR COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Chairman: Gerald Edwards
Vice-Chairman: Bob Sherman
Secretary: Alessandra Valsecchi
Treasurer: Tony Benham
Committee members: Peter Collett, Hilary Dodson (Northern Fruit Group), Brian Fox (South West), Alan Mansfield (Editor), Julia Mitchell, John Poole (Midlands), John Sale, Howard Stringer, Peter Smith, Eric Spanier

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, The Editor, RHS Fruit Group Newsletter, PO Box 74, Hertford, Hertfordshire, SG13 7UG. Telephone: 01992 550175 Ideally, copy should be in electronic format emailed to:

alanmansfield@ntlworld.com

Deadline for next issue: 30th April 2008

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FRUIT GROUP MEETING Wisley, Wednesday 19th March

Will you be attending this Fruit Group meeting? Would you like to meet fellow members on a social footing? If so then why not come for some refreshment in the Hillside Events Centre from 12.30 onwards to meet other members, swap ideas, 'talk fruit' with other enthusiasts. If you would like to help with serving the tea or coffee then please let us hear from you. Please contact Julia Mitchell (e-mail juliaemitchell@hotmail.com, or telephone 01372 276511).