



THE APPLE OF YOUR EYE

SLOG QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 46 – WINTER 2020

*** FRUIT GROWING ***

CONSERVING LOCAL ORCHARDS

PROMOTING HERITAGE VARIETIES

www.slorchards.com

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Editorial

Apple pressing is now almost finished after a busy and incident packed season. Earlier this year, one of our members advised that hydro presses were available direct from a German manufacturer at significantly lower price than from our UK supplier, Vigo. Given that our first (orange) hydro press had been much used for four seasons, we decided that a back-up (red) hydro press would be a useful investment. We also decided to purchase another pasteuriser to replace one whose digital display had failed.

As the season got underway, disaster struck four times! Firstly the Voran mill broke down during the first members pressing at Halecat and secondly the Speidel Mill broke down on hire so at this point we had no working mill before halfway through the pressing season. We took the decision to purchase a new Speidel Mill and fortunately Vigo were able to deliver the same week so disruption to hire bookings was minimal.

Meanwhile Dick Palmer got the Voran Mill fixed so that returned to action. Ros Taylor then got a friend to replace the bearings on the original Speidel Mill so that is now in working order as a back-up. Then the rubber bladder on the original (orange) hydro press started to leak, so that was taken out of service and the new (red) one was pressed into service. Mike Gibson effected a puncture repair on the bladder, but we decided to purchase a new one which Mike fitted to the orange hydro press so we now have a full working kit and a full back-up. The new pasteuriser failed on its first use so was returned to Vigo, who agreed to replace it with a new one.

Probably because public Apple Day pressings did not take place this year, hiring has been busier than ever, so we owe a huge vote of thanks to Mike and Christine Gibson for very patiently managing the bookings for the Spiedel Mill & Hydro press at Tarnside Farm and for so capably dealing with all the breakdowns, repairs and deliveries of replacements!

It is now tree sales season, so just a reminder that SLOG's tree sales operation is now managed by Kirsten Jones and Paul Atkins from their base in High Newton, so for all enquiries email: kirstatjoneskins@gmail.com and ackyboy@hotmail.com

Meanwhile if you still have your spring-grafted trees in pots, now is the time to plant them out. The sooner they are planted, the better established their roots will be when growth starts in spring. For information on planting, see F.P. Matthews tree care tips on page 3 and Mike & Adele's helpful hints on page 8.

We were unable to hold an AGM this year so officers' reports will be distributed to members with this newsletter.

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS

For the most up-to-date information look in:
<https://www.slorchards.com/events>

In anticipation of ongoing Covid-19 regulations, we are planning for outdoor events only for the foreseeable future, which will only proceed if permitted by prevailing government regulations. Updates will be posted on the website.

The Winter Meeting will not take place this year.

Saturday 23rd Jan 2021 - SLOG Pruning Workshop, Grange Community Orchard. 1.30-4.00pm. This workshop covers maintenance winter pruning, though all other types of pruning can be discussed on request. Please bring your own secateurs since we cannot share equipment (unless it is sanitised). SLOG secateurs and loppers will be available for anybody who does not have their own and we will have sanitiser available to sterilise them between users. This activity is deemed safe since it is outdoors and 2m social distancing will be observed. However, if the six person rule is again in place, we may have to operate a booking system. **Directions:** Near Grange-over-Sands railway station, just south of the B5277/B5271 roundabout, opposite the Ornamental Gardens. Car parking on opposite side of road or in nearby carparks.

Saturday 27th February 2021 2.00–4.30pm SLOG Grafting Workshop, Growing Well, Sizergh LA8 8AE Graft your own apple & pear trees using M26, MM106, MM111 & Quince A rootstocks and a wide range of scion wood varieties. Bring your own Stanley knife (a few will be provided) and gardening gloves for protection. Wear suitable footwear as the path to the yurts may be muddy. SLOG grafting knives will be available for anybody who does not have their own and we will have sanitiser available to sterilise them between users. This activity is deemed safe since it will be outdoors in the "giraffe house" and 2m social distancing will be observed. However, if the six person rule is again in place, we may have to operate a booking system. **Directions:** From M6 jctn 36 go 4 miles on A591 towards Kendal, then A590 Barrow, then shortly on right follow brown signs for Sizergh Castle, then Low Sizergh Barn. From Kendal go 3½ miles south on the A591 then just before the A590 interchange turn left into the car park at Low Sizergh Barn Farm Shop and Tearooms. Park at the far end of the car park and walk over the fields. Rootstocks £2.50 each.

RECENT EVENTS

AGM Associated Items: All Committee members have agreed to stand for re-election. Chairman (Andy Gilchrist) & Treasurer (Adam Walker) have agreed to stand for re-election but the Membership Secretary (Adam Rubinstein) wishes to stand down and a replacement is needed. Any additional nominations to Andy Gilchrist by end November please. The Committee proposes to hold subscriptions unchanged at current levels, again any alternative proposals by end November please.

MEMBERS APPLE PRESSING DAY Sunday 20th September, Halecat

We were fortunate to have good weather so that the pressing could be done outside without need for shelter. The Voran Mill and Rack & Cloth press were set up on a tarp to prevent spillage onto the gravel. Due to the government regulations limiting gatherings to six people, we operated a booking system of half hour slots from 10am to 3pm. Each new batch of apples was rinsed first in a sterilising solution before milling.



All went well until the Voran mill broke down in the afternoon. Fortunately we had a borrowed Speidel mill as back-up to finish the job. Many thanks to Abi & Tom for hosting us and to Dick and Anthony for a sterling days work!

BEETHAM NURSERY APPLE DAY Sunday 11th October

Given the current requirements for social distancing and minimising any contact that might spread the virus, Beetham decided not to press customers apples this year. Since the overall event had a lower profile than previous years we thought that apple identification and technical advice might be quieter – not a bit of it! It was

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probably the busiest of the last five years, non-stop through the morning with a (socially distanced) queue patiently waiting. There must have been over 50 apples to identify, including some that were left the previous day. Beetham subsequently set up a blog of technical queries and answers which can be found on: <https://www.beethamnurseries.co.uk/beetham-journal/your-apple-questions-answered>



An assortment of apple varieties for sale at Beetham Nursery. They again stocked a range of 30 different apple and 3 pear varieties for sale. Customers browsed and purchased different varieties, demonstrating that there is clearly an interest in the lesser known varieties of English top fruit.

MEMBERS APPLE PRESSING DAY Saturday 7th November, Burneside

Romola & Edward hosted the fifth version of our late season members pressing under highly restricted conditions. Members had to book a half hour slot and apples were first rinsed in “Chemsan” solution before pressing in the Speidel Mill & Hydropress. Fortunately the weather had finally dried up after all the rain in October. A batch of *Gascoyne’s Scarlet* had an unusual texture which resulted in an inefficient extraction from the Hydropress but otherwise all went well on a strictly socially distanced basis.

SLOG ORCHARD UPDATE

The devastating frost earlier this year resulted in fewer apples than trees in the orchard. The few trees which had any fruit at all were those that blossomed earliest and had set fruit before the frost, and some of the cookers which seem a little hardier than the dessert varieties. The most disappointing aspect of this situation is that we

had no fruit with which to characterise the varieties shown to be unique by DNA testing and which we had planned to submit for listing on the “Registration of Local Cultivars”.



Prima in bloom in November

A curious feature in this, a curious year, was the phenomenon of late season blossom as shown above. Several SLOG members also reported this phenomenon, the reasons for which are unclear but probably a consequence of unusual weather patterns this year.

Our next working party has been delayed by the lockdown regulations so will probably be on Saturday 5th December.

TREE CARE TIPS

Our rootstock supplier, F.P. Matthews, recently issued an information sheet on the subject of tree planting and early years’ maintenance. It is reproduced here courtesy of F.P. Matthews because now is the best time to plant trees, so this information is particularly topical and useful.

Autumn is by far the best time of year to plant trees for many natural reasons:

BENEFITS OF AUTUMN TREE PLANTING

In autumn, trees have stopped putting their energy into producing leaves, flowers and fruit so they can concentrate on developing better roots. Soil temperature and moisture levels are usually just right for promoting root growth which helps the tree to establish. Autumn planting lessens transplant shock which allows the tree settle into its new home more readily. Trees planted in autumn will have developed a good root system by the time they start growing again in spring. There is less need to water trees planted in autumn as there is more natural rainfall and the

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ground is usually consistently moist As well as stronger growth in spring, trees planted in autumn will need less watering through the following summer as they will have a more established root system There are fewer potential pest and disease problems to deal with in autumn and winter

1. Planting Dig a hole roughly twice the size of the pot and back fill with some general purpose compost. The top of the soil in the pot should be at about ground level. Water well and firm in, making sure there are no air pockets. If the tree is in an exposed site use a stake and tie to keep it steady for the first few years whilst it gets established. And if there is any danger of rabbits then put a guard around the trunk or they may strip the bark and harm the tree!

2. Watering Young trees will need to be watered in the first season, especially if planted in the spring. A full watering can twice a week will help the tree put strong roots down, more if the weather is dry. Trees planted in the autumn should require less watering as the roots will have had the winter to settle in. If your tree is to be kept in a container then more frequent watering is likely to be necessary, especially in hot weather.

3. Feeding Trees do not need fertiliser unless the soil is particularly poor or they are being kept in a container. If so, a general liquid fertiliser applied in February or March before spring growth is ideal.

4. Mulching A good mulch of bark chippings around the base of the tree will reduce competition for nutrients from grass and weeds and make the tree healthier and stronger. A circle of mulch covering at least a foot from the base is perfect. Do not apply weed killers such as glyphosate around young trees as it could kill them!

5. Pruning We will have done all the necessary formative pruning on your tree. Many trees, including ornamentals, can be pruned hard in winter to reduce their size, check the colour label or our website for more information. Apples and pears can be pruned at any time of year; stone fruit, e.g. plums and cherries, are best pruned in late summer. Pruning off tips in late June/early July will encourage flower and fruit buds the following year; winter pruning encourages more vegetative growth. Trained fruit trees (especially

step overs and espaliers) should have vertical growth pruned back regularly. Prune off unproductive 'feathers' (lower shoots) on fruit tree stems and remove any suckers that may appear from the base.

6. Fruit Thinning Modern varieties, especially on dwarf rootstocks, set heavy crops and should be thinned in late June (much of the fruit will self thin by this time). During the first year of planting it is best to remove most of the fruit to allow the tree to put energy into producing strong roots and branches. This may need to be extended into the second year if the tree has not made reasonable extension growth. Leaving a few to taste is fine! Fruit in direct sunlight will gain the best colour.

7. Pest and Disease Pests will affect trees from time to time and can be tolerated in small amounts as they do no harm. They generally appear on the undersides of the leaves so always turn leaves over for early detection! Severely affected leaves can be removed by hand on young trees. Most varieties offered will have some tolerance of diseases such as scab and mildew and the worst effected fruits can be removed when fruit thinning, always bin or burn affected leaves and rake up any in the autumn. Prune off any dieback to good wood with clean secateurs.

PLAQUES & PESTILENCE: COLLAR ROT

Collar Rot (*Phytophthora syringae/cactorum*) is a particularly nasty disease which progresses unseen through an apple tree's root system to the extent that by the time symptoms of stress in the foliage are seen, the tree's condition is terminal.



Above-ground symptoms often do not develop

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until the root decay is well advanced. They are not specific to *Phytophthora* root rot, and merely indicate that the plant is having trouble taking up water and nutrients through a poorly-functioning root system. Other factors causing root problems, such as waterlogging, drought or other root diseases (e.g. honey fungus) will cause similar foliar symptoms. *Phytophthora* is more common on poorly drained or waterlogged soil.

Symptoms such as reddish leaves in late summer may be the first identification of collar rot. Trees may then develop poor extension growth, small fruit and smaller, wilted, yellow or sparse foliage and branch dieback. In many cases the symptoms get progressively worse until the plant dies.



Phytophthora is a Greek word literally meaning “plant destroyer”.

Below-ground examination of the roots, collar and stem base of an affected tree will reveal a poor root system. Many of the fine, feeder roots will have rotted away. Some or all of the larger roots will also show evidence of decay – they will be brown or black internally, softer than normal and may break easily. Because *Phytophthora* species are microscopic organisms there will be no evidence of the pathogen itself in association with the decay, unlike with honey fungus where a prominent white fungal growth may be found below the

bark. Very similar root symptoms to those of *Phytophthora* infection can be caused by prolonged waterlogging, and the situation is further complicated by the fact that *Phytophthora* root rot is frequently associated with waterlogged soils. Laboratory examination is often required to determine whether root decay in these situations is due to waterlogging or *Phytophthora* root rot.

In severe infections *Phytophthora* invades the collar or stem base of the plant, causing a brown or black discoloration below the bark (often seen at the stem base as an inverted ‘V’). This area of infection is sometimes visible externally as bark discoloration and/or weeping, although once again such symptoms can be caused by other factors such as drought, waterlogging or pest attack. Rootstocks M2 & M9 are resistant but M26 & MM106 are susceptible. Pears are resistant.

The causative organism is a water mould which penetrates and destroys the cambium tissue. It spreads by tiny spores that swim in the water films between soil particles. These spores can travel only very short distances (a few millimetres) under their own power, but chemicals exuding into the water films from the roots of a susceptible plant may attract the spores toward them.

Phytophthora also produces long-lived resting spores that are released into the soil from the decaying roots. These can contaminate the soil in the vicinity of an affected plant for a considerable time, often several years.

Long-distance spread of *Phytophthora* may occur if the spores or soil containing them are carried in drainage or run-off water (e.g. down a slope). Movement of infested soil during cultivations or transplanting can also spread the problem.

Any such infected trees should be destroyed. The tools used to remove them should be disinfected with Jeyes fluid or similar, and the soil should not be spread around eg on boots etc. Drainage and aeration of the infected area should be improved before replanting.

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NEW APPLE VARIETY: *TRINITY*

Our rootstock supplier Frank Matthews recently introduced a new apple variety called *Trinity*. It recently won “Best in Show” at the Horticultural Trades Association New Plants Awards 2020.



Image: Frank Matthews

Trinity is a dark red-skinned and red-fleshed early cooking apple. Apparently there is no need to peel the apples as the skin dissolves when cooked. They claim it makes delicious pies and sauces that need little added sugar. It has a high content of vitamins, antioxidants, tannins and anthocyanins.

The fruit ripens in August and keeps to October. It has attractive pink blossom and is in flowering group 2 so cross pollinates with most other varieties. Claimed to be disease resistant and can be grown in most soils and situations. The breeder was Jerzy Bartoszewicz, a Polish war veteran (1922-2012) who bred it in his back garden in Twickenham after arriving in the UK in 1947 as a refugee. His granddaughter contacted Matthews about the new variety and they agreed it was worthy of commercialisation.

<https://hta.org.uk/news/hta-virtual-new-plant-awards-winners-2020.html>

HILARY'S FRUIT STORIES

“Orchard memories”

I grew up in a village just outside York. My great-grandparents had owned the village pub and built their retirement home in the orchard. One result was that when digging our garden we found lots of pieces of broken clay pipe and old coins. This was from the practice of putting the contents of the earth closets in the orchard to benefit the trees!

Most houses in the village had a long garden and a narrow field behind as they were built on the medieval strips. Given the World War 2 memories of food shortages and Dig for Victory everyone used the land to grow their own fruit and vegetables and most kept a pig and hens, including us in spite of my father being a teacher and away from home when the pig got out!!.

The remaining apple tree from the pub days was a *Keswick Codlin* but I remember it more for being the one which was big enough to hang the swing on rather than the fruit it had. Instead, we turned to the *Reverend Wilks* a larger fruit than a *Keswick*, as the early apple to go with blackcurrants and autumn blackberries. Cooking apples were important, that was what went into the pies and puddings and kept us going until the early rhubarb was ready in spring. Other cooking apples were *Monarch*, *Newton Wonder*, and my father's favourite *Howgate Wonder*. This is listed in the Guinness book of records as the biggest apple. It comes from the Isle of Wight but actually tastes better in the north where it has more acidity. These followed on from the *Reverend Wilks* and were carefully stored and used as eating apples after Christmas. We had two dessert apples. One was *James Grieve* which is a Scottish early dessert and the other was *Laxton's Superb* which was the late dessert and I have particular memories of that one. My mother always called it *Reinette du Canada* and whilst looking in a book I realised it was wrong and took it for identification to Fred Loads, the garden expert of the day. He simply took a bite out of it and declared *Laxton's Superb*! It had obviously come with the wrong label but whatever I said, mother never changed her mind! We also had a dark purple oval plum said to be *Rivers Prolific*. My own *Rivers Prolific* is a round shape and I have never found another like the one which my parents had.

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At the top of the garden was a *Victoria* plum and I remember we had a neighbour who came to take a strip of bark from the trunk of the tree to make it start fruiting. I have since found most plum trees take a long time to bear fruit and although the remedy seems drastic it did work.

The third plum was a rather poor specimen growing behind the pigsty and left over from the original orchard. I still have a graft from it and it bears a large yellow fleshy fruit, it is probably a *Pershore* or *Yellow Egg*. That variety used to be grown on its own roots and be used as a rootstock.

The final tree was a *Conference* pear which was very reliable and we canned the pears and plums for the winter.

The *Howgate Wonder*, *Rev Wilks*, *James Grieve* and *Laxton's Superb* did not do well in the rainy area of Cumbria where I came to live but are all surviving happily at Acornbank the National Trust property in the Eden Valley. *Newton Wonder* does well there and is growing partly under another tree at Dalemain, a stately home near Penrith, so is also a good survivor. It is one of the varieties that can be identified by its leaves several yards from the tree. They are more oval than most and slightly undulating so look a bit like a hazel. It is found in most old orchards and more resistant to canker than a *Bramley*.

Whilst I did not take notice of the fruit trees when playing with friends in their gardens I did go to look at them when older and tried to work out what they were. One was called *Red Balsam* by its owner and I took a graft of it and it went eventually to Hallgarth Community Orchard in Kendal. Another was called *Cockpit* and was a small green cooking apple readily identifiable by the leathery feel of the skin. It was a tough never fail disease free apple and one graft survives at Acornbank. I also met *Cockpit Improved*, which is a dual purpose apple and the famous *Ribston Pippin* for the first time. One further tree that came from the back of the village is a *Greengage*. I was given a sucker and told *Greengages* came true from seeds and suckers. It still survives on the wall near an old barn near Appleby.

There is also a story about how the *Greengage* got its name as it was known as *Reine Claude* in France after Queen Claude, wife of Francis 1st (1492-1547) but in the early C18 it was sent from Paris by Rev Thomas Gage to his brother William in England and the label got lost so has

been known as a *Greengage* in Britain ever since. The problem of lost labels has a long history!!

ORCHARD GRANTS

The SLOG tree planting grant scheme continues to progress. The most recent beneficiary is the charity Grizedale Arts who own Lawson Park, a hillside garden high up on the east side of Coniston Water. Head Gardener Karen Guthrie planted a "Union Orchard" eight years ago consisting of varieties originating from the four countries of the United Kingdom.



The Union Orchard at Lawson Park with fruit not yet picked in November on the *Brownlee's Russet* on right

To commemorate Brexit she wanted to plant a "Brexit Orchard" consisting of varieties originating from the countries of the European Union. SLOG has provided twenty such trees grafted onto MM106, many being almost unpronounceable (especially the east European ones) and probably the first ever of those varieties to be planted here in Cumbria.

SCION WOOD ORDERS

Scion wood from a multitude of varieties of apples and pears will be available at our grafting workshop next year. However if there is a particular variety you want, it can be ordered from Brogdale. SLOG will consolidate all such requests (£5 per variety) into a single order to save on carriage & handling charges. Send your orders to Hilary at overmoor@btinternet.com by December 31st for delivery in February 2021 for our grafting workshop.

