

COLWALL ORCHARD GROUP

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2014-15 (April 2014-March 2015)



1. INTRODUCTION

Looking back, 2014-15 seems to have flown by, but we have been as busy as ever. The highlights of the year were the installation of the fantastic composting toilet at the Village Garden, completion of the main conservation works in the community orchard and an excellent Wassail. Also, the Malvern Hills AONB received HLF approval for their Three Counties Traditional Orchards project, which will see Colwall Orchard Group acting as an advisory 'hub' for new orchard groups in Herefordshire.

2. COLWALL VILLAGE GARDEN

Hurrah – we finished planting the community orchard. The volunteers planted all but one of the fruit trees in March 2014, and on 5th April we had the 'Three Bishops' 'topping out' ceremony to plant the final tree.

Stinking Bishop the first: we chose the Stinking Bishop pear as the final tree. Stinking Bishop is a more recent name for an old variety of perry pear known as the Moorcroft, originating from Moorcroft farm in Colwall and hence a local Colwall variety.

Stinking Bishop the second: The Moorcroft pear became known as 'Stinking Bishop' after Frederick Bishop, a colourful character, known for his love of cider and perry. The name apparently referred to his language, not his smell! On this account, we invited John Bishop, his great grandson, to help us plant the tree.

Stinking Bishop the third: Stinking Bishop cheese, as popularised by Wallace and Gromit, is a cheese flavoured by perry made from the Stinking Bishop pear. We were very fortunate to have the famous Stinking Bishop cheese maker, Charles Martell, to help John plant the tree.



John Bishop, stinking bishop & Charles Martell

We planted the tree with a slice of cheese and a libation of perry, and then retired to the Apple Packing Shed for celebratory cheese, perry and cakes.

Having completed the orchard planting and the second and third hedges in March, we had a major programme of fencing and tree caging over the summer, and installed a second wheelchair friendly kissing gate into the orchard, near the Apple Packing Shed.

In February, we finished planting the fourth and final hedge around the orchard, with the help of Joe Xia and his friend Sam, who are volunteering with COG for their Duke of Edinburgh award. My thanks go to all our volunteers, who have ventured out in all weathers to help with this work. I hope they will enjoy seeing the hedges and trees grow and thrive over time.

Most of this work in the orchard is supported by Natural England, through their Countryside Stewardship Scheme. We make a small profit on the works carried out by our volunteers and a

small loss on the works that are done by contractors (eg fencing and tree cages), but it has been a great help in getting the orchard and hedges planted and protected.

The grant also supports us in providing educational access to the site. This year Bright Sparks pre-school came to plant vegetables in the spring and harvest and juice apples in the autumn. Colwall Primary School brought Classes 1 and 3 to the site, and Great Malvern Primary brought their special needs class along. We also had a visit from the Hereford Green Oasis care farm. If you know of any other schools or related groups, who might like to visit, please contact us.

This year we had an impromptu inspection of our agreement by the Rural Payment Agency; checking we have claimed for the right length of hedging, number of trees etc, checking our soil management and generally assuring Natural England that we are doing the right things. I am happy to report that we passed the inspection and gained particular commendation for the quality of our Teachers Information Pack.

Our composting loo is now open for business - the best thing we did on the site all year was to put up the composting toilet. Our very own Deb Turnbull designed the toilet, and it is a construction of great beauty, as well as functionality. It is eco-friendly in every way – we ordered all the timber locally, and most of it came from the plantation in the background of this picture – so zero wood-miles. It was built by our volunteers, with 11 people contributing in all, working over 2 weekends, with a few people working in the intervening week. It is also working wonderfully well, with the flow of air through the base keeping the ‘compost’ dry and smell free. It is a pleasure to use, if a trifle draughty at times!



Deb with her composting toilet



Many thanks go to the Malvern Hills AONB, who funded this project.



Children from Bright Sparks formally opened the composting toilet, with Gwyneth Rees from the AONB.

Other orchards: Once again, opportunities to work in the village orchards, or help with garden orchards etc have been limited due to our other commitments, but we did carry out mistletoe

management in two orchards. We also did some outreach work at Canon Frome, where we held some training events for our volunteers.

3. COLWALL ORCHARD GROUP CALENDAR

We ran a full calendar of events this year, and as ever, the success, or otherwise, of these was rather dependant on the weather on the day! (always a problem when you have set a date ahead of time in order to do the publicity for it).

Spring Stroll – we started the year with a spring stroll, to learn about the trees and early spring flowers, returning to the Apple Packing Shed for tea and cakes.

Blossom Picnic – this year we decided to run the Blossom picnic on a ‘pop-up’ basis, to try to pick a date when we might have good weather and blossom, as most other years we have only had one or the other. Sadly, no such occasion arose, so we missed out this year.

Dawn Chorus the Dawn chorus walk was very well attended, and as a break from previous tradition, we had breakfast as a BBQ at Colwall Village Garden, testing out Waller’s Ale and Cider sausages ready for the Alehouse Festival.



The Dawn Chorus walk

Checking the moth trap

We did catch elephant hawk moths

What’s Flying tonight: another new event was our Moth and Bat BBQ evening. We set up three moth traps and two bat traps, but sadly it was a rather cold and windy evening and we did not catch much. We did have a good BBQ! We will have to try again next year and hope for better weather.

Apple Day: we did have good weather for Apple Day and enjoyed the juicing, refreshments and children’s games. An extra element this year, thanks to Dr Adam Bates and co, was a wildlife tent where people could learn about orchard wildlife, particularly noble chafer beetles and make apple bird feeders for their garden.

The Mistletoe Fair: was a great success, as usual, with our supporters coming from far and wide to support our cause, buy mistletoe and stock up on their favourite preserves for Christmas. We sold out of all our jellies, and the hedgerow jam is obviously still a firm favourite.

The Wassail: I think it would be fair to say this was our greatest event of the year and we have had lots of positive feedback from those who came along. This year Silurian Border Morris joined in and danced for us at Colwall Stone and on site. The weather was perfect, so our torches all lit and the procession running up Stone Drive was very impressive. Our Butler did us proud, and I think we made enough noise to scare off the evil spirits and wake up the trees.





The Wassail was a great success this year!

4. FUND RAISING ACTIVITIES

Our main calendar of events is designed mainly to raise our profile and engage people in orchard conservation, with fund raising a secondary concern. However, we also carry out a range of other fund raising activities, to ensure our financial viability;

Orchard services: we are still helping people out with pruning around the village, at a very reasonable price. Do let us know if you need any pruning. We also provide advice on orchard planting and management, for instance this year we have designed and will be planting up a new orchard for one of our members. We also submitted comments on the orchard heritage of the village, and our views on proposals for development, to the Neighbourhood Plan.

Preserves and apple juice: We have now joined the Malvern Hills Food Alliance and sold our produce at two of their market events. We took stalls at the Bright Sparks sale, the wonderful Alehouse Festival (well done the Ale House festival organisers) and the annual Wyche and Colwall Horticultural Show as well as some of their meetings. We also sell produce at our events and supply apple juice to Café H2O and Colwall Coffee Lounge.

Talks: We give talks to a range of organisation, usually for a small fee. This year Tim gave talks to the Birds of the Feathers, the Ledbury Naturalists and the Malvern branch of the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust. We have also organised some follow up walks in the orchard.

Tree dedications: We offer tree dedications, so that you can commemorate your loved ones, offset your carbon, or just support the Group. Dedications cost £60 per tree and we hope to get starting putting the plaques on the trees as soon as well have finished numbering the cages.

Tree order: once again, we have run a tree order, collating orders from members and customers, using our trade account with Trees for Life to get a good price, and selling trees from our own nursery. Our supplier gets a good order, our customers get cheap trees, we charge a small handling fee and best of all – we plant more orchards and fruit trees. Win, win, win, win!

Year	Soft fruit	Ornamentals	Fruit trees
2011-12	424	6	135
2012-13	104	2	200
2013-14	98	9	162
2014-15	140	3	40
Fruit trees sold on, or planted out, from stock in our nursery, 2011-15			c500
Totals	766	20	1037

Colwall Christmas Post: Colwall Orchard Group is still organising the Colwall Christmas post, as

part of our service to the village. This year we delivered over 780 cards and raised £193 for COG.

Donations: We continue to get donations on a regular basis, for example from the Birds of the Feathers (thank you, ladies!). Following their excellent fish and chips launch, the Chase Inn donated the proceeds from their quiz night in November. This year we have also signed up to Easy fundraising: if you are buying anything on line, if you do so from the Colwall Orchard Group page on the Easyfundraising website, [here](#), then the vendors will make a donation to COG. The donation is usually between 0.5 and 3%, but every bit helps. Do please join in, especially if you are planning to purchase something major, like your next holiday.

Publicity

We put a lot of effort into promoting our activities and events, issuing regular press releases to the Colwall Clock, West of the Hills, the Gazette and all the surrounding papers, placing items on various event websites and publicising events via e-circulation lists. Tim appeared, with Helen Skelton, on Countryfile, in an item on birds in Worcestershire Orchards. Joolz Webb also made a fantastic video of the Wassail, which you can find on YouTube [here](#). We still communicate with most of our volunteers and supporters by email and via the website. We decided our website needed a bit of a revamp, so have a look at the new website, [here](#), and send us any feedback.

5. TRAINING

We continued to support the AONB in the development phase of the Three Counties Traditional Orchard project (TCTOP), funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. We were pleased to hear that they were successful in securing the Phase 2 grant aid for this project. Under this project, Colwall Orchard Group will be the 'hub' organisation for Herefordshire, helping other groups across the county to develop over the next 3 years, and we will be paid for the support we provide.



Some Colwall apples, identified by our TCTOP volunteers in preparation for our Apple Day display.

This will require a major, but worthwhile, commitment of volunteer time, so the Board has agreed to share the funding with the volunteers who take part, on a 4/7ths to COG, 3/7ths to the volunteer basis (=£15 per hour for most activities). In preparation for the project, we held a training programme over the winter, covering; apple identification, harvesting, juicing, rescue pruning, mistletoe management and tree planting. We hope to start the support work in April.

6. GOVERNANCE

The Board of Trustees met four times this year, mainly considering funding, organising all the COG activities and monitoring progress against the main elements of the Business Plan. We will hold our AGM in March, to include a talk on the Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project.

7. IN PRAISE OF OUR VOLUNTEERS

Obviously, none of these many and varied activities would happen without our excellent, dedicated and hard-working volunteers. This year, COG has 34 individual and 28 family members,

and 46 supporters. We have not been logging our time accurately this year, but we have estimated how much effort has gone into key activities. This excludes the time required to organise all these activities, the treasurer's time and time spent applying for, and claiming grants.

Item	Volunteer participation	Estimated time
Work parties	Av. 8 per work party, for 3 hours, 18 work parties.	392
Composting loo	4 weekend sessions and other help from 11 volunteers	191
Stalls and sales	MHFA sale, Ale House Festival, Bright Sparks sale, and stalls at 3 Wyche and Colwall Horticultural talks and annual show, 3 talks and 2 walks.	40
Events, Walks and Talks	Apple Day, approx. 20 volunteers for 5 hours (20x5) Mistletoe Fair (8x8). Wassail (28x3 event + 8x6 setting up/clearing away). Spring stroll, Dawn chorus, moth & bat night etc. (6x3)	314
Publicity	Press releases, posters etc (12x4), Website and Annual report (52),	98
Christmas post	Putting out and collecting from boxes (6x1), sorting cards (5x2) and delivering cards (32x2)	80
Tree services	Tree order: advising customers, placing the order, collecting & delivering trees, tree pruning and invoicing	60
Governance	Board meetings, 4 at (2x8) and AGM (30x3)	154
Three Counties Traditional Orchards Project	Attending Hub meetings and training our volunteers in readiness for the project (all time spent so far has been provided on a voluntary basis)	115
Total		1444

Our total is 1444 hours, so THANK YOU, and well done everyone!

8. OUR FINANCES

Our core funds continue to rise because of all the activities outlined above. Our outstanding debt stands at £45,500. At present, we are raising sufficient funds to run the organisation and carry out further development at the community orchard, but not quite enough to meet the targets we set to accumulate funds ready to pay off all our loans, which fall due in May 2016. Since the close of our Financial Year, we have asked all our creditors to consider rolling their loans over for a further 2 years, or converting some, or all, of their loan into a gift. To date, they have offered to convert £4k of loans to gifts and roll forward £34,500. THANK YOU to all involved. Hence, with these future gifts, some loans extended and the bank balance at the end of our financial year standing at £22,892, we are still in a very sound financial position.

On the down side, we did not manage to complete the planned works on the Apple Packing Shed within the allotted timescales and we are now seeking alternative funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund. We have Phase 1 approval for the grant, and are hopeful of a positive outcome.

We are always looking for new fund raising ideas, so if you would like to run an event, do a sponsored activity, or have any other fund raising ideas, please get in touch.

Helen Stace,
Colwall Orchard Group

(Colwall Orchard Trust Ltd, known as Colwall Orchard Group, is a company limited by guarantee (registration no. 07495461) and a registered charity (registration no. 1142573))