

COLWALL ORCHARD GROUP ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2015-16 (April 2015-March 2016)



1. INTRODUCTION

I started this report thinking that we had not achieved very much this year, but once I started looking through the diary and checking our press coverage and photographs, I realised that we had done far more than I imagined.

The highlights of this year were installing the fire-pit, finishing the hedging and fencing round the orchard and finally gathering in enough funds to start work on the refurbishment of the Apple Packing Shed. We also had an excellent Wassail with over 400 people.

2. COLWALL VILLAGE GARDEN

Early in the year, we made a fire-pit – which we wanted as a focus for volunteers, for our public events and for other organisations to use. It has been an instant hit, with its first use, as a sand-pit, by children from Colwall Primary School. Since then we have used it for several events including a pumpkin planting evening for Colwall Beavers. Many thanks to Trafford Hall who provided the grant for the fire-pit, and to John Fallas, of Colwall Stone, who gave up his weekend to supervise our volunteers constructing the fire pit.



Colwall Primary school sandpit!



Christening the fire-pit, and....



Beavers toasting marshmallows

This year we dug a pear-shaped pond in the orchard, which has filled up nicely – we look forward to watching the wildlife colonise the pond. We also completed the fencing work around the orchard, so it is now completely stock proof and we were able to bring in cows and sheep to graze the orchard and keep the grass under control. These are the last of the capital works paid for under our Countryside Stewardship agreement, and complete the major phase of development in the orchard.

British Gas also mended the gas leak which had been bubbling away for years!

Since mid-summer, we have been holding ‘Sunday Morning in the Orchard’ sessions on the third Sunday of the month, for Colwall Orchard Group volunteers and the allotmenters. This has been very successful in keeping the Village Garden in good condition.

3. REFURBISHING THE APPLE PACKING SHED

Throughout the year we have been applying for grants to help us to refurbish the Apple Packing

Shed. We initially applied for a Heritage Lottery Grant, supporting work on the Apple Packing Shed and for a programme of recording oral histories and making records of other buildings and structures linked to the historic fruit enterprise in the village. Our aim was to match fund the HLF grant with grant aid from a range of other sources, including charitable trusts.

In June, we were awarded grants of £4,412.58 from John Spedan Lewis Foundation and £2,480 from Ernest Cooke Trust, to buy a range of equipment to support our environmental education activities at the Apple Packing Shed. We have now purchased all the kit and held a moth trapping BBQ in August to inaugurate some of the kit.

HLF turned down our grant application, but by January, after concerted fund raising efforts, we had amassed just over £36,000 in grants and donations. When we went out to tender, the quotes from the builders came in over our estimated budget, leaving a funding gap of approximately £10,000.

In January, we contacted all our benefactors asking them to consider re-profiling their land purchase loans. We held a Special Board Meeting to review their responses, our finances and our cash flow and decided we should proceed with the works, paying the additional costs from our own resources.

The table opposite summarises our grants. Many thanks are due to the organisations who are supporting COG and to the many benefactors who agreed to extend their land purchase loans to make this possible.



Organisation	Amount
 Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty	£2,000
THE ROWLANDS TRUST	£3,000
THE GILLIAN BULMER CHARITABLE TRUST (KNOWN AS THE PIPPIN TRUST)	£5,000
	£250
	£1,500
	£8,000
	£2,000
	£9,883

4. ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

This year we have been expanding our environmental education. This has been made easier by the installation of the composting toilet, which addresses previous concerns about hygiene arrangements. We have had repeat visits from Colwall Primary School and Wells and Wyche Pre-School Group and new visits by 4 classes from the Elms and 2 from the Downs School as well as a visit from Go with the Flow - a home education group. We hope to continue to expand our educational offer, especially once the classroom is in place, so if you know of any other schools or related groups, who might like to visit, please contact us.

5. COLWALL ORCHARD GROUP EVENTS

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! This is a recurrent problem when you have set a date ahead of time in order to do the publicity for it.

Blossom Picnic – this year we had a rare co-incidence of weather and blossom, so the Blossom picnic was a good chance for our volunteers to relax and enjoy the orchards.

Dawn Chorus – conversely, the weather on the day of the Dawn Chorus was atrocious, so we cancelled that one.

Fire-pit Christening – having worked hard to install the fire-pit, we had an impromptu christening event which showed how lovely it was going to be to have a fire-pit on site.

Moth BBQ – this summer we received grants from John Spedan Lewis Foundation and Ernest Cooke Trust to purchase educational kit, including some new moth traps – so we held a moth evening and BBQ. The weather was clear and bright, which was good for a BBQ, but not moths!



Apple Day: we did have good weather for Apple Day and enjoyed the juicing, refreshments and the revival of the Apple Catapult. Vic Westaway came to weave a giant willow apple which now graces the children's play area.

The Mistletoe Fair: the day we originally set for this was wet and blustery, so we cancelled the Fair, although lots of people called in to The Cottage to get their supplies. The following weekend a pop up Mistletoe Fair was a great success.

The Wassail: I think it would be fair to say this is still our best loved event, with a record 400 people this year. Thanks to Old Meg for coming to dance at the Stone and to all the people who made the event so special. Blue Cedar Homes generously sponsored the event, so we were able to add to our stock of lighting and make sure we had some good rockets.

All in all, an excellent year of events, which were well supported by members, volunteers and the village.



6. FUND RAISING ACTIVITIES

Much of our fund raising this year focused on trying to get grant aid to cover the repair of the Apple Packing Shed (see above). Other sources of funding include:

- Our main events, which were very successful
- Our concerts by Kongero and Anne McCue
- Sales of preserves, honey and apple juice from stands at the Wyche and Colwall Horticultural Show, the Colwall Charity Fun Day and the Hellens Garden Festival
- A small income from orchard services, mainly pruning
- Running the Christmas post (for the final time)
- Our tree order, which includes supplying trees for 9 other orchards
- Giving talks e.g. to Colwall Village Society, Ledbury and District Civic Society and at Hellens
- From donations, including a generous donation of over £2,000 to support the refurbishment of the Apple Packing Shed.

7. THREE COUNTIES TRADITIONAL ORCHARD PROJECT

This year is the first of three years delivering the Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project (TCTOP), funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and run by the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Under this project, Colwall Orchard Group is the 'hub' organisation for Herefordshire, helping groups in Breinton (7 sessions this year), Hildersley (4 sessions) and Whitbourne (4 sessions). So far we have covered an introduction to orchard management, pruning techniques, tree and hedge planting and wildlife surveys.



Support sessions at Breinton,

Hildersley

Whitbourne

There has been a range of central training events for the project. We ran a training day for the whole project on Mistletoe Management, one volunteer attended a Digital Storytelling training course and another has been involved with the historic research and mapping projects.

8. OTHER ADVICE AND SUPPORT

We have also provided advice outside the TCTOP project, supporting orchard owners in the surrounding Parishes for example training Malvern Hills Conservators volunteers in pruning. Our Tree Order this year includes new trees to gap up two orchards and to create one new orchard and a new extension to a second orchard.

We are also approached for advice on other elements of our work including harvesting, juicing and events, including advising another local group on how to run their own Wassail.

9. IN PRAISE OF OUR VOLUNTEERS

Obviously, none of these many and varied activities would happen without our excellent, dedicated and hard-working members and volunteers. This year, COG has 6 family memberships, 72 individual members (including 18 honorary and 3 concessions) and 54 supporters.

They have helped in our work in so many ways from behind the scenes governance and admin, through cooking preserves, organising and publicising events to delivering our projects in work parties, public events, through training etc. We have made an outline estimation of the work involved and reckon that between us we have clocked up more than 2,100 hours. So thanks to everyone who helps in any way with our work.



Some of our lovely volunteers taking a well-earned break!

10. FINANCES

Our core funds continue to rise because of all the activities outlined above. Our average surplus of income over expenditure has been in the region of £11,700 for the last few years. Our outstanding debt against the land purchase still stands at £45,500, originally due for repayment in May 2016. However, we have asked all our benefactors 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 £40,500, so we only need to repay £1,000 this May. This will allow us to complete the works on the Shed from our own funds.

We consider that we are still in a very sound financial position and will review our finances in full once we have completed the works on the Apple Packing Shed. 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.

11. GOVERNANCE

The Board of Trustees met five times this year, mainly considering funding, organising all the COG activities and monitoring progress against the main elements of the Business Plan. We held an extra meeting in February to review funds raised for the refurbishment of the Apple Packing Shed against our future funding requirements and current cash flows. We will hold our AGM in March, to include a discussion session to shape our future direction.

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))