



Steyning Community Orchard Newsletter.

December 2023

Hello everyone,

**It's been a while since our last Newsletter, mainly down to your editor's reluctance to come indoors, sit down and write it !
Please read on. There is a lot to catch up on.**

Reflections on the 2023 Season

Now that the apple picking season is over, it's a good time to look back at the season just past and reflect on how it went.

In late Spring after a cold, wet, windy spell, it seemed that the year would be a poor one for the fruit that depends on pollinating insects, as there were almost none to be seen for weeks on end. As a result, our early apples had a very poor fruit set, and this led to a very poor crop in early summer. But as the weather

improved, the insects emerged and what seemed like being a poor year, ended up a pretty good one.

Fruits such as plums, quinces and pears had the best crop we have seen so far. Many of the trees we manage in our orchards are ones that we have planted over the last 9 years, and these are now beginning to become mature and cropping well.

On the whole, the apple trees also cropped well. Some of our rare heritage Sussex apples had their first crop. But as often happens, especially on the Memorial Playing Field orchard, the apples are picked long before they are ripe, by passers-by who can't resist just trying one! So, we still wait to taste a ripe Blackjack or Capper's Pearmain.

That is something we can't control – it is a Community Orchard after all. Hopefully as the trees become fully mature, there will be enough apples for everyone to try.

Apple Juicing

In early September we held our Apple Juicing event. This was well supported as ever, with lots of families bringing their apples along to press into delicious apple juice.

Then in October we took over 60 bottles of apple juice to the October Steyning Farmer's Market and sold out. This together with sales of our own grafted apple trees, raised over £200 for orchard funds.



Day Tripper..

The Community Orchard had an 'awayday' in late September when we were invited to do an Apple Juicing demonstration at the **Weald and Downland Living Museum** near Chichester. We were sited outside Bayleaf, the stunning Tudor Farmhouse. We had hundreds of visitors and were kept busy all day. Lots of folk now know where Steyning is, and that it has a Community Orchard! One of our group is a volunteer at the Museum, and some of the apples we pressed were from trees that we had helped to source and plant for the Museum in recent years.

The Museum were so pleased with how the day went, we have been invited back again next year.



Good News Story 1

We were delighted to hear in early October, that Bramber Brooks has been saved from an uncertain future after being put up for sale by its previous owner. Horsham District Council are the new owners.

On part of the site is an 18 tree Orchard. The Steyning Community Orchard worked closely with the previous owner to source, help plant, and then help maintain the trees here. We are keen to continue our involvement with the Bramber Orchard and have offered our help to HDC.

Press release from HDC

"Horsham District Council excited to announce that it is set to acquire some 34 acres of green space on land in the south of Horsham District for the benefit of local communities and to provide a vital boost to local biodiversity. The site, known as Bramber Brooks, benefits from public access, a private nature reserve **and a community orchard**, and is currently enjoyed by many members of the public. This acquisition will secure Bramber Brooks as public green space for the future in order to retain the community benefits of the land and enhance biodiversity on the site, ensuring that it will continue to operate as a well-loved and much enjoyed area for people to enjoy. The site is already well-used by local people and has strong links with the local community through schools and scout groups. Adding Bramber Brooks to the Council's countryside estate will benefit our District by:

- Retaining public access to the land for residents and visitors
- Enhancing delivery of biodiversity improvements via a fully funded Environment Agency approved project to create more wetland areas
- Providing other improvements which could include, the introduction of seasonal cattle grazing, thistle and bramble scrub control, formal rights of way improvements and improved signage for users
- Positively contributing to the Council's existing successful flagship Wilder Horsham District initiative, delivering improvements to habitats and wildlife along the River Adur, as part of a wider nature recovery network."

Pictured: Bramber Brooks Orchard



Good News Story 2

We were invited to join the Brighton Permaculture Trust when the Mayor of Brighton and Hove planted a new Sussex Apple tree in their Home Orchard at Stanmer Park. The reason we were invited was because they were planting a ***Steyning Scarlet** apple tree! Stanmer holds the National Collection of Sussex apples.

We'd provided their apple grower with some Steyning Scarlet graft material a few years ago and now the tree was ready to plant out in their Sussex tree orchard.

(* For those who may not know the story of Steyning Scarlet. We found this tree growing on the side of the Steyning by-pass. It looks quite old, so possibly growing from a pip of an apple core tossed out of a train carriage window before 1966, when the line closed. It is a lovely large, juicy and quite sweet apple. So we took grafts from it and have been producing our own Steyning Scarlet trees for planting in our own and other orchards. We have one in our main orchard on the Memorial Playing Field Orchard. Once we'd proved by a DNA analysis that that it is a unique variety, we were able to register the name with the National Register of Local Cultivars.)

The Mayor of Brighton and Hove Cllr Jackie O'Quinn planting a
Steining Scarlet apple tree (yes in the rain!)



Wassail Saturday 20th January 2024. 6.00pm.
Starting outside the Cricket club pavilion.

Our popular Wassail event will return on Saturday 20th January 2024. Mythago Morris will again lead our celebrations.

Free event with bucket collection - (so please bring some coins with you!)

At 6pm we meet outside the Steyning Cricket Club, when the Mythago Morris Side will perform their traditional Wassail Dances whilst explaining the tradition of Wassailing. (Called Apple Howling here in Sussex)

At 6.30pm we process to the Steyning Community Orchard where Mythago will continue telling the Wassail story with songs and dance around our specially decorated Wassail tree.

Part of the ceremony involves making as much noise as possible, banging pots and pans, whistling and shouting to scare away the evil spirits and at the same time awakening the fruit trees to prepare for the coming spring. So don't forget to bring some noise-making utensils, and torches, with you!

We should be back at the Cricket Club before 7.30pm

This is a great family event, but might be a bit scary for very little ones.





Finally, a special mention for our team of volunteers who help look after our orchards and help man our events. We couldn't manage without them !

If you'd like to join our happy band, drop us an email to steyningorchard@gmail.com and we'll be in touch.



Copyright © 2023 Steyning Community Orchard, All rights reserved.

You are receiving this email because you have opted in to the Steyning Community Orchard mailing list.

Want to change how you receive these emails?

You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#)

