

COLWALL ORCHARD GROUP ANNUAL REPORT 2019-20



1. INTRODUCTION

This annual report summarises the work of Colwall Orchard Group during the year up to 31st March 2020.

It's been a year of contrast and change and writing this, on Tuesday 31st March, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, it seems strange but comforting to think about all the wonderful gatherings and activities we've packed into the year gone by.

Our volunteer teams have excelled in a wide range of tasks which you will read about below. From wildflower meadow to pizza cob oven, from footpath to jams and juice - our creations have been as diverse as ever. The skills that emerge from the team never cease to surprise and there is always someone with a solution to every practical challenge we face! The regular Friday morning session along with events and making juice and preserves, have resulted in more volunteer hours being contributed to COG than ever before.

We are now facing a springtime of uncertainty about when we'll be able to meet again – but we look forward to that time and know that it will lift our spirits and caress our souls! COG is about many things but as a community group we share a passion for improving our local environment by creating and caring for the traditional orchards and improving them for wildlife as well as for people to enjoy. We also look forward to resuming our events programme to celebrate traditional orchards when it is safe to do so. These are important occasions when we involve our wider community in our passion for orchards.



We enjoy welcoming everyone to our two community sites including our resident allotment tenants at Colwall Village Garden, who keep the place friendly with their presence, as well as our members, regulars from the

neighbouring area and occasional visitors walking through and sometimes stopping for a picnic.

Colwall Orchard Group continues to create space for both people and nature.

2. COG BEHIND THE SCENES

The section about Governance and Planning is usually tucked away at the end of the report but it is important and also serves the purpose of explaining the order and structure of what follows.

2.1 The COG Board

COG is run by a small team of volunteers who are both Trustees and Directors of the Charity and the Company Limited by Guarantee. During 2021 there have been significant changes to the team including the retirement of the two founding members, Tim Dixon, who had also been Chair of the Board for 10 years, and Helen Stace. Their contributions at Board level will be missed. The Board Vice Chair, Lindsay Williams, has also taken a break from Board activities due to illness. We advertised for new Board members and are pleased to have co-opted Chris Blake, Peter Key and Jilly Rosser. The Board were also delighted that one of its members, Andrew Spray, has agreed to be Chair.

These changes would have been reported and confirmed at the Annual General Meeting on 25th March 2020, but this had to be postponed due to the Covid-19 restrictions announced by the Government on 16th March.

The Board met 5 times during the year to consider finance, strategy and business planning, risks and health and safety, special projects and operational matters referred to the Board by the Estates Committee and Events Committee.

The **Estates and Events Committees** are made up of volunteers from the COG Board of Trustees, the Colwall Allotment Association and representatives of COG volunteers. Estates Committee oversee the management and maintenance of COG sites, plans the work in other orchards, oversees the production of juice to sell and considers any other strategic land-based issues. The Events Committee coordinates and organises events and oversees education and training activities.

2.2 Objectives, Strategy and Business Planning

During 2019 the COG Board of Trustees/Directors completed and signed off a Business Plan for the period 2019 to 2024. This report was based on the strategy produced in 2017/18. It provides details to guide us in determining our priorities and helps us to plan our finances and the time we need to deliver our aspirations. It is also a way to communicate what we do and why we do it to all our members and others interested in our work, including funding bodies and others wishing to set up an orchard group. The Business Plan is organised around our objective to:

Restore, Promote, and Celebrate traditional orchards in Colwall for the benefit of people and the natural environment.

2.3 Our Members

At the end of March 2020, we had 124 paying members of which 15 have Life membership. In addition, we have a further 32 regular and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) approved contacts. We also have 280 followers on Facebook, 180 on our new Instagram account and 42 on the recently re-launched Twitter account.

2.4 Finance

Our income and expenditure were closely matched in 2019/20. Major land purchases and building renovations had been completed in the previous years and there were no significant items of expenditure or grants received. The final repayment of the loan to COG for the purchase of land for the creation of Colwall Village Garden in 2011 was completed during the year leaving COT free of debt. The bank balance includes a reserve for future special projects which we would use to provide any match funding required by a funding body.

During the process of preparing the Business Plan we reviewed financial expenditure and concluded that essential costs could be met from the income raised from land management activities, orchard services, events and sales. Special projects to improve our sites will be met from additional grants and donations.

Our end of year balance (as at 31st January 2020) shows fixed assets to the value of £151,009, and cash to value of £41,860 with no outstanding debt.

The remainder of this annual report is presented the three headings we use in our objective:

Restoring traditional orchards,
Promoting traditional orchards,
Celebrating traditional orchards.

3. RESTORING TRADITIONAL ORCHARDS

3.1 Colwall Village Garden (CVG)

CVG continues to provide a welcoming place where people visit to relax as well as to work on allotment plots or on volunteer tasks.

In the summer of 2019, we embarked on a challenge to



improve the richness of the grass sward in the community orchard at both CVG and Lugg's Mill by creating a new one-acre orchard wildflower meadow at each site.

Working with Plantlife and Herefordshire Meadows and with funding from the Prince of Wales Community Fund we surveyed the area, prepared the ground, collected donor seeds from other local meadows, spread the seed and then waited.

By early spring 2020 there were good signs of yellow rattle establishing which is ideal for suppressing grass growth and giving other wildflowers the opportunity to thrive. We will survey the sites again later in 2020.

Late summer brought an opportunity to create a cob pizza oven supported by a generous donation and the time of a group of volunteers who attended an enjoyable 2-day, very muddy, cob-oven building workshop.



The oven provided a great attraction and tasty pizza at Colwall Apple Day in October when it was lit at a public event for the first time.

Inside the Apple Packing Shed we invested in new shelving and a new hard wearing floor covering in the Orchard Room which has spruced up the space which we use for meetings, as a volunteer base, a space for courses and educational activities as well as a venue to hire.



During the year we also prepared a Management Plan for CVG and undertook a range of practical tasks including looking after and improving the boundary hedges, the community orchard, social spaces and paths on the site.

3.2 Lugg's Mill Community Orchard

A Management Plan for Lugg's Mill was produced during the year and work there has included formative pruning of the young cherry and apple trees, improving the field boundary with 120 metres of new native hedge plants, the creation of a wildflower meadow (see above), putting up a Barn Owl nesting box and clearing obstacles from the stream. Towards the end of the year we worked with the neighbouring landowners to create a new public footpath link from the main path network from The Crescent in Colwall to Lugg's Mill. There will be an event to formally open this as soon as possible after the restrictions on gatherings is lifted.

3.3 Working in orchards owned by others

We have planted another 17 fruit trees across Colwall during the year at Colwall Primary School, the Downs Malvern independent school, Walwyn Meadow (outside the library near the Aunt Alice clock), and in the memorial garden at St James the Great Church. Some of these were funded by the Malvern Hills AONB in celebration of the 60th anniversary of its creation in 1959 and others were purchased by Colwall Parish Council with COG volunteers planting them for the community.

After a slow start to the harvest and concerns about lack of fruit we eventually harvested from orchards in Colwall and slightly beyond in Bosbury and Bishop's Frome. This provided plenty of apples for juicing by local schools as well as to bottle for us to sell. A big thank you to all who donated the fruit.



As the winter season set in, we undertook mistletoe management at Sunfold and Maybole orchards and pruning across several private orchards in and around Colwall.

3.4 Traditional fruit varieties

Providing advice on planting traditional orchards is complemented by ordering fruit trees for our members and contacts. Tree orders were gathered during autumn and distributed into the new year. We ended the season with a tree sale from our own surplus nursery stock at the end of February.

4.PROMOTING TRADITIONAL ORCHARDS

4.1 Harvesting fruit to juice and make preserves

During the autumn and winter, we made 21 batches of jam and chutney (over 200 jars). Sales of preserves and juice raises funds for COG (around £900 profit in 2019/20) but is also an important part of reminding people about the significance of orchards for people and nature. Over 82 volunteer hours were donated to achieve this.



We harvested 60 crates of apples much of which was sent to Orchard origins (a Community Investment Company owned by Herefordshire Wildlife Trust) to be pressed and bottled. This produced 473 x 750ml bottles and 100 330ml bottles which is sold at Colwall Provisions and Café Morso in the village and is also sold at our own events.

4.2 Educational and training activities

Apple juicing sessions with children from Colwall Primary School, the Downs Malvern School and Kings School Gloucester were as popular as ever and involved around 80 children in harvesting apples and turning these into juice to drink.

We also had regular educational sessions with our local home education group, throughout the year covering wide ranging environmental projects included trapping small mammals to identify, seeing birds close up and investigating the pond at Colwall Village Garden.

Training sessions included a pruning course for the Beauchamp Community in Malvern.



4.3 Volunteer activities

COG relies on volunteers - it could not exist without the time given generously by many dedicated and hard-working individuals. Each Friday we hold a practical volunteer session when a team get together to work in COG orchards at the Village Garden and Lugg's Mill, or in other orchards in Colwall and occasionally outside of the village. We rarely cancel the Friday morning sessions (until the COVID-19 restrictions were introduced at the end of this reporting year) and we managed to run 51 sessions in 2019-20, including a few extra weekdays for the meadow project. With an average of 12 volunteers attending for 3 hours that equates to over 1,800 hours (or 245 working days). The work has ranged from planting new fruit trees, coppicing, removing balsam and bramble, collecting meadow seed and preparing the ground to receive it, harvesting, juicing, making flaming brands for Wassail, putting up gazebos for events, grafting trees, mistletoe management and fruit tree pruning. In addition to these days our volunteers regularly turn out on the third Sunday of each month to help allotment tenants to look after CVG (a further 120 hours) and on Wednesday afternoons, from April to October, a small group of volunteers meet to mow and strim the site paths and social areas, as well as undertaking other maintenance on the site (another 300 hours).

Our volunteers also help to run events, make jam and chutney, make cakes, look after the bees, run educational activities, coordinate sales of juice and fruit trees, update the website and promote our work through

social media, clean the Orchard Room and the loo, apply for money and do the finances and admin! Our estimation of the total volunteer time contributed to COG is more than 3,000 hours (400 working days over a year or 7.7 days a week).

5. CELEBRATING TRADITIONAL ORCHARDS

Events

With the leadership of the COG Events Committee and the help of many volunteer hours (estimated at over 900, equivalent to 120 days) we organised eight events in 2019/20 and also provided stalls at 2 events arranged by others. Together these have:

- contributed over £5,000 to our funds (takings over £9,000),
- helped to promote the importance of traditional orchards for both people and nature,
- attracted new volunteers and members, and
- importantly they were enjoyable!

Our year started with a Blossom Picnic and the launch of Colwall Orchard Heritage Trail on 28th April. This was closely followed by our ever-popular Dawn Chorus Walk in early May, and a lively fundraising performance by The Malvern Delta Blues Band in June.

After a summer break we held a Moth Spotting breakfast in early September and then Apple Day with the launch of our new cob pizza oven in October. For once we were blessed with some lovely sunny autumn weather! As usual we had a display of local apples and pears alongside the full production line of juicing from chopping to scratting, pressing, bottling, labelling, pasteurising and even drinking! While in the Orchard Room we ran a cosy café with hot drinks and a wonderful selection of cakes.



At the end of October, we were then treated to a further fundraising evening of music to celebrate orchards at Colwall Ale House by Serenata our local a capella ensemble.

After some frantic making of produce including over 200 pots of jam and honey, Christmas wreaths and bunches of mistletoe we held our annual Christmas Mistletoe Fair in December.

The warm mulled apple juice and mince pies and apple cake were appreciated, and we had a successful morning making an extremely healthy profit as well as continuing to raise the profile of COG in Colwall.

Wassail! We had to make some changes to Colwall Wassail in 2020 to restrict the number attending to under 500 in order to meet insurance, licensing and health and safety regulations. After a nerve-wracking couple of months planning an event entirely based at Colwall Village Garden, without the usual procession



through the village, we were relieved that it was a great success. The weather was perfect – a crisp winter evening, and the atmosphere was super with torch-lit procession through our community orchard, a fantastic cast of characters, a fire juggler, music provided by Old Meg and friends and the wonderful choir singing around the bonfire. What more could we want? Well food and drink of course! This was provided by a Pig Roast as well as samosas, soup, cakes and a bar with locally produced mulled cider. All good - Waes Hael!

As well as our own events we ran stalls at Colwall Primary School summer fete and at the Colwall Ale House Christmas Fayre and in July we ran a guided walk, with tea and cake at CVG, as part of the Malvern Hills AONB 60th anniversary celebration.

6. NEW VENTURES

There is always more to do and while the Board of Trustees will be reviewing our priorities our ambitions currently include:

- exploring what to do with orchard produce in anticipation of harvesting more of our own fruit;
- working with other orchard owners to improve the old traditional orchards in Colwall;
- improving the biodiversity of our new orchard at Lugg's Mill as well as exploring the archaeological heritage on the site.



Wendy Thompson

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 1142573))