

COLWALL ORCHARD GROUP ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22



1. INTRODUCTION

This annual report summarises the work of Colwall Orchard Group (COG)¹ during the year up to 31st March 2022.

This is a year in which we celebrated the 10th anniversary of purchasing the site which we now know as 'Colwall Village Garden'. Owning land made it possible to create our first Community Orchard and establish Colwall Allotments.

In July 2021, we held a small event (due to Covid19 restrictions) and an opportunity to pause and remind ourselves of our achievements with a video montage of photos bringing together [a decade of special moments](#). Glasses were raised and cake was cut (by current Secretary Wendy Thompson, and Chair, Lindsay Williams). We were also able to unveil our smart new entrance sign, created for us by Duncan White and featured below in a photo with founders of COG, Helen Stace and Tim Dixon.



As well celebrating this achievement and reflecting on the previous decade, 2021-22 was another year full of activities to deliver our COG objective to 'restore, promote and celebrate traditional orchards in Colwall'. Our activities are always diverse but everything we do links to delivering benefits for both people and nature. In our view this is fundamental to traditional community orchard. We are big advocates of the 'Think Global and Act Local' ethos and aim to contribute towards combatting the climate emergency and improving biodiversity.

¹ COG is formally registered as Colwall Orchard Trust, (charity registration 1142573) and is also a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee (registration 07495461)

The breadth of our work in 2021/22 has ranged from introducing a new business model for running Colwall Allotments to provide local residents with space to grow their own produce, through to maintaining and improving the two orchards we own, as well as helping others to look after their orchards and garden trees in Colwall and surrounding areas. We have also harvested and processed our produce to make juice and preserves to sell to raise funds.

Particular highlights of the year included:

- the opening our newly created wildflower meadows to many visitors including local schools;
- hosting of 'Art in the Orchard' organised by a group of local artists;
- opening a new Public Right of Way (footpath) to create a circular route around Lugg's Mill Orchard and to link to the wider network of footpaths in Colwall; and
- running our Traditional Orchards for the Future Initiative to support local landowners to restore their orchards.

As ever, a big thank you to everyone who has contributed.

2. RESTORING TRADITIONAL ORCHARDS

2.1 Looking after our site: Colwall Village Garden (CVG) and Lugg's Mill Orchard (LMO)

Community Orchards

The year brought us the first significant harvest of fruit from the orchard at CVG, especially plums, crab apples and a fair number of apples to contribute to the apple juice we produce.

Our regular grazers (the flock owned by Kath and Clive Killick) took a particular interest in the harvest, but through a mob grazing approach, helped to maintain the orchard sward and improve the meadow biodiversity. They are also very popular with visitors to our orchards.



We completed some annual pruning to keep the trees in shape, continued to clear the grass competition at the base of the apple, pear and cherry trees and applied mulch of cardboard and bark chippings to hold in the moisture and suppress the re-growth of grass. We also gapped up where a couple of trees had not thrived and replaced tree cages where they had rotted or become unstable. All the trees in the orchard at CVG now have labels showing the fruit variety.

Water

The water distribution improvements at CVG were completed in early 2022 with taps installed amongst the allotment plots and around the orchard. We still collect rainwater and store this in a tank and water butts by the Apple Packing Shed and we encourage everyone using water on the site to use it wisely and adopt techniques to minimise use. We are monitoring use of the tap water from mains supply this year to gauge whether it is realistic to invest in sufficient water storage to collect enough rain harvested water to reduce dependency on the mains supply in the future.



Meadows

We were pleased with the continuing success of our meadow creation at both CVG and LMO. The diversity of the grass sward has increased noticeably since we introduced Yellow Rattle in 2019 and added plug plants of Cowslips, Ragged Robins and others in 2020. We have also seen many more insects enjoying the enriched grass sward.



We were happy to open our meadows, in partnership with Lindsay (COG Chair) and Jane Williams, in June and early July, as part of a one-mile Meadow Trail. The route was adorned with plenty of signs to identify species and to introduce visitors to the excitement of creating a meadow. We know

from a field survey undertaken for us by Ledbury Naturalists, that the diversity of our sites is improving and the wildflower meadows have contributed significantly to this. In July 2021, it was a special delight to introduce every class group from Colwall Primary School to the delights of the wonderful world of meadows along with all of the insects that this attracts.

Hedgelaying

Hedgelaying is a skill that we have learnt and shared with more than 20 keen volunteers during the winter of 2021/22. Our target of 100 metres was completed.

The hedges were planted about 10 years ago and some have grown faster than others, depending on light and other growing conditions. We are working on the hedges in rotation around the site so that we keep a varied habitat of hedges at different stages of development for wildlife.



Improving Equipment and Facilities

We continue to improve CVG and LMO for both people and nature by improving and adding to our facilities and equipment to cater for increasing numbers of volunteers, visitors and educational activities. Thanks to funding from the Malvern Hills AONB Farming in Protected Landscape Grant we have purchased specialist orchard equipment and are converting to battery powered mowing and hedge cutting tools to reduce our carbon footprint.

Allotments

The allotments continue to thrive with full occupancy and a waiting list.

A new business model for managing the site was introduced with Tenancy Agreements now being directly between COG (as the landowner) and individual plot holders. An Allotment Policy was completed and COG has set up an Allotment Working Group to run the site, supported by the regular Wednesday mowing group.



Public access to our sites

During 2021 we completed the formal creation of a new Public Right of Way through Lugg's Mill Orchard, creating a circular route around the site and over the recently created bridge, and linking back to Colwall village across the new footpath created across the neighbouring property, Brookmead.



We aim to ensure that our two COG sites, Colwall Village Garden and Lugg's Mill Orchard, provide a welcome place for everyone. We have been pleased to see increasing numbers of people passing through both sites to relax, enjoy a walk and to observe and learn about the natural world and to admire the lovely allotments. Our sites also provide a focus for our volunteer tasks, and Colwall Village Garden in particular provides a meeting place for community activities run by COG and others.

2.2 Helping others to restore and create traditional orchards

Working with the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), we were delighted to be able to run our **Traditional Orchards for the Future Initiative** (TOFI) for a second year. This time the funding was provided through a government scheme - Farming in Protected Landscapes – which is run in this area by the Malvern Hills AONB, and designed to support environmental work within National Parks and AONBs. We planted and mulched a further 120 traditional orchard trees, and installed cages to protect them from grazing animals, in 6 private orchards across Colwall.



In addition to TOFI, we supplied 110 trees through our annual tree order, to our members and other locals, and we sold 100 trees from our tree nursery where we had accumulated surplus stock. This involved providing lots of advice and information on what to plant, where and how to plant, as well as how to look after the trees.

We also helped to do other practical work in several local orchards including mistletoe management which is required to ensure that trees do not become infested which weakens the tree and increases the risk of trees falling due to the wind resistance.



Through our orchard advisory service, we provide consultancy advice and practical work in small orchards and private gardens across the Colwall, Malvern and the surrounding parishes. In 2021/22 we raised over £2,000 from fruit tree pruning, and advice on a tree planting, pests and diseases, complimentary varieties of fruit to plant, orchard management plans and help with applying for grants. Some of this was undertaken on behalf of the Malvern Hills AONB.

We ran a tree planting course on behalf of the Malvern Hills Trust at Polly's Orchard in Malvern, and planted trees at the Downs School orchard in Colwall with lots of help from children involved with the Downs Light Railway project. The miniature railway runs along-side the orchard.



3. PROMOTING TRADITIONAL ORCHARDS

3.1 Orchard Produce: Apple juice, honey and preserves

The sale of orchard produce raises funds to support the work of COG and also raises awareness about what we do through the visibility of our brand (logo) on the jars and bottles. Profit from sales during 2021/22 was £2,610.



We made and sold over 400 jars of jam, jelly and chutney bringing a profit of over £1,200 in 2021, a significant increase of 25% from the previous year. It wasn't such a productive year for honey with the loss of our strongest colonies of bees due to swarming (a common problem amongst beekeepers that year). The 27 jars of honey offered for sale were purchased extremely quickly.

We harvested apples to make 967 large bottles (750ml) and 344 small bottles (330ml). This can be divided into:

Primary Sales: harvested, pressed, bottled and pasteurised by COG for sale direct to customers at our events, to members and via our online shop.

Secondary Sales: harvested by COG and sent to Orchard Origins (part of Herefordshire Wildlife Trust) to prepare bottles of juice for us to sell via local outlets such as the village shop and café.

Apple to Bottle service: harvested by orchard owners, delivered to COG to prepare the pasteurised juice for them to collect.

Apple Juice	750ml	330ml
Primary Sales	446	94
Secondary Sales	300	250
Apple to Bottle	221	-
Total	967	344

The profit from our Apple Juice sales in 2021/22 (from juice produced in 2020) was over £1,400.

3.2 Educational and training activities

Despite some Covid restrictions we were able to run a number of educational and training events. These included working with schools to run meadow walks in the

summer and juicing sessions in the autumn. We also included children from the Downs in tree planting (see above), and we hosted at Colwall Village Garden monthly Ledbury Wildlife Watch Club for 8-12 years olds.

Training for adults included fruit tree grafting courses for COG volunteers and for volunteers from Herefordshire Wildlife Trust; hedgelaying training, a scything course and First Aid course for COG members (funded by a Sustainable Development Fund Grant from the Malvern Hills AONB); and regular training for volunteers in pruning and other aspects of tree and land management through-out the year. For the first time in 2021, we also offered guided walks through wildflower meadows in our orchards.



3.3 Volunteer activities

2021/22 was another year of extensive volunteer activity across a wide variety of work streams including:

- Regular Friday morning practical work parties
- Wednesday pm mowing/maintenance sessions at CVG
- Consultancy work and practical pruning in private orchards/gardens
- Running education and training activities for adults and children
- Running events
- Production of fruit juice, jam, chutney and honey
- Practical project work such as creating tables and benches
- Promotion and Communications
- Fund Raising (applying for grants, processing tree dedications, etc)
- COT Board meetings and finance and governance activities

We were very pleased to achieve a full year of practical volunteer sessions on Friday mornings with only three sessions cancelled due Christmas Eve, New Years Eve and once for very bad weather! The photo shows regular volunteers having a sociable refreshment break!



The average number of volunteers attending each Friday morning session remains at 16 which is higher than pre-Covid levels. As per the previous year a large proportion of our practical volunteer time has been spent on both routine maintenance and improvement works at Lugg's Mill and CVG but also included tree planting and pruning in other orchards as reported elsewhere in this report.

We managed to run most of our events and educational activities ran as normal.

Volunteering Activity	Duration (Hours)	Volunteer Numbers	No. Sessions 2021/22	Total Volunteer hours
3 rd Sunday	3	12	12	432
Wednesday pm	2	3	15	90
Friday am	3	16	49	2,352
Events			5	400
Education			12	75
Training			2	10
Produce (Juice, honey, preserves, mistletoe)				600
Members and Communications	7	1	50	350
Finance	30	1	12	360
Governance (Secretary, GDPR, reports)	7	1	50	350
H&S processes and records	1	2	50	100
Promotion	1	2	50	100
Orchard Services				200
Allotments	5	1	50	250
Total Hours				6,262
Total Days (7.5 hours)				835

Our Volunteer Charter and new Volunteer information form were circulated at the end of March and so forms were collated from volunteers during the early part of this annual reporting year.

4 CELEBRATING TRADITIONAL ORCHARDS

Events

We managed to run the majority of our seasonal events apart from the Dawn Chorus Walk in May and Wassail in January 2022, which coincided with a period of Covid 19 restrictions and loss of confidence by volunteers and members of the public in attending big gatherings.

The highlights of the year included Art in the Orchards when thirteen local artists showcased and sold their wares in the marquee and Apple Packing Shed at Colwall Village Garden. We were blessed with a fabulous 9 days of sunshine



in early September– the crowds came, the artists had encouraging sales and we were able to present Colwall Village Garden to a whole range of new visitors. Thanks to all from the COG community who contributed. We had a lot of very positive feedback about this event.

In October we held our regular Apple Day, and again the sun shone and lots of people came along, several bringing their surplus fruit for us to help to juice and pasteurise.

Juicing demonstrations and tastings, along with music by Banjaxed, refreshments from our pizza oven and BBQ, along with cake and Jonty's cider to sample, made it an exceptional event.

We ended the year with our annual Mistletoe Fair, where we sold bottles of apple juice, and jars of jam and chutney, along with mistletoe we had gathered and wreaths we'd made from festive foragings.



5. COG BEHIND THE SCENES

Governance and finance are important and as a charity and a company limited by guarantee there are responsibilities that we must take seriously. These include how we raise and spend income, how we record our decisions and activities, making sure that we operate legally and in a way that delivers our charitable objectives, and that we are looking after the health and safety of our volunteers, allotment tenants and visitors to our sites. The responsibilities sit with the Trustees appointed by members. All of the Trustees, who are also company Directors, are volunteers, as is everyone involved in running COG.

5.1 Directors and Trustees

The Directors of the charitable company are its Trustees for the purposes of charity law. The following Trustees served during the year.

R Lindsay Williams (Chair)
Lisanne Llewellyn (Treasurer)
Wendy Thompson (Secretary)
Andy Ball (resigned 30 November 2021)
Chris Blake
Peter Key
R Clive Killick
Pam McCarthy
Jilly Rosser
Andrew Spray
Deb Turnbull (resigned 31st March 2021)

The Chair, Lindsay Williams, and Trustees were all re-appointed at the Annual General Meeting in September 2021 when we thanked retiring Trustees, Peter Hughes and Deb Turnbull, and welcomed new Trustees, Lianne Llewellyn (who had been co-opted as Treasurer earlier in the year) and Clive Killick. Within the year, Trustee Andy Ball resigned from the Board.

The Board met 4 times during the year. Matters considered included reports on all main areas of activity including external funding activities, regular updates on organisational risk and health and safety, guidance on tree planting and fruit tree pests and diseases, along with a new policy on safeguarding children and adults at risk, and an updated Environmental policy on how we run COG and manage our sites.

5.2 Our Members

At the end of March 2021, COG had 202 members (an increase of 44 from previous year). There were 26 Life members at the end of March 2022.

5.3 Finance

Our income for the year ending 31st January 2021 was £29,447 and expenditure was £29,659 (including depreciation of £6,121). Note some grants were received retrospectively after we had delivered work, and after the financial year end.

Main sources of income were from grants, allotment rental (which included a balance of £1,476 transferred from the Colwall Allotment Association, to be spent on allotment tenant related benefits such as mulch, tools and equipment), sale of orchard produce (juice and preserves), sale of fruit trees, events, orchard services (eg pruning and advice), membership fees donations and tree dedications. Our main expenditure was on site management and maintenance, allotment management, tools and equipment, insurance, volunteer training, and purchases related to supplying fruit trees and selling orchard produce.

Our end of year balance (as at 31st January 2021) shows fixed assets to the value of £153,425, and cash to value of £42,501 with no outstanding 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. Given that much of the charitable funds are not guaranteed and have to be re-applied for each year the trustees recognise that healthy reserves are required whilst at the same time seeking new opportunities to improve the environment and promote our services.

Wendy Thompson

Secretary, Colwall Orchard Group

On behalf of the Board of Trustees