

# COLWALL ORCHARD GROUP ANNUAL REPORT 2018-19



## 1. INTRODUCTION

This annual report summarises our work during the year up to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019. It is always encouraging to look back and see what we've achieved and we hope that you'll enjoy reminiscing about some of the activities you will read about below.



Bringing together our supporters, whether to work together on practical volunteer tasks or to socialise and enjoy the spaces we have created, is what feeds and sustains the community spirit that keeps COG going from strength to strength. Colwall Village Garden is a welcoming place for local people and visitors to enjoy and we feel proud that the efforts of many volunteers over more than a decade have created somewhere special. We are optimistic that the pleasure we gain from restoring, promoting and celebrating traditional orchards

will continue. In another decade the community orchards at both of our sites - the Village Garden and Luggs Mill - will have reached a level of maturity which we expect to be magnificent!

The work that we can do in other orchards around Colwall is also helping to enhance the village as a place to live as well as a place to share with visitors. Our new Colwall Orchard Heritage Trail guide will help people to explore our orchard history and wildlife, whilst learning about the challenges that COG has been established to tackle.

We need volunteers and supporters to achieve our objectives and to continue to keep our mission fresh and purposeful and so we are always grateful to all our members.

## 2. COLWALL VILLAGE GARDEN

Home to our first Community Orchard and to Colwall Allotments, the Village Garden continues to provide a welcoming place where people visit to relax as well as to work on allotment plots or on volunteer tasks. The allotments, managed by Colwall Allotment Association, have all been fully occupied for over a year and the waiting list is getting longer as they become ever more popular. The restored Apple Packing Shed has provided a venue for our own events and meetings as well as those run by others.



The site has become a destination for local people to bring their friends and family from outside of the village and we were particularly pleased when one family visiting the site informed us that their daughter had wanted to bring them to see the site after she had attended an apple juicing session with Colwall Primary School. We have recently installed a new Welcome panel near the entrance gate so that visitors are introduced to the site and of course to COG.

Through-out the year our volunteer 'Mowing Team' has kept the site looking good by cutting grass pathways and social areas as well as undertaking practical maintenance tasks around the site. This work has been supported by volunteer sessions on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of each month.

We have also welcomed a group of young off-road bikers who we gave permission to create a small stretch of track and jumps. They worked hard during school holidays and summer evenings bringing a new younger group to the Colwall Village Garden community.

### 3. LUGG'S MILL

We have started to get to grips with the management of our new site at Lugg's Mill. We have completed the planting of orchard trees comprising 35 cherry trees to the north of the stream and a mix of 55 apple trees and 15 cherry trees to the south. All of the trees now



have tree guards and grazing sheep have helped keep the grass sward under control. Volunteers have helped to coppice and pollard trees to the ditch to the south-east boundary and this work has helped to open up the site to more light and air. Coppicing of the overgrown alder trees in the stream has begun and planting of native daffodils on the stream banks has resulted in a cheery flowering display this spring. We are currently working on a Management Plan for this site and there will be some further improvements

in the next year or two. We have also been maintaining the public footpath - keeping the grass cut, clearing litter and filling in potholes, so it's well worth taking a stroll round this fabulous plot of land whenever you can.

### 4. ORCHARD PROJECTS

This year we have completed two externally funded projects:

#### Colwall Orchard Heritage Trail

We have researched the history of Colwall orchards and brought this together in the form of a self-guided trail leaflet. The 2.8 mile route starts and ends at Colwall Railway Station and includes a visit to Colwall Village Garden. We plan to sell the leaflet through various outlets, mainly in the Malvern, Ledbury and Colwall area for £2, but all COG members will receive a free copy. We are grateful to the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty,



Colwall Parish Council, Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project and Ledbury and District Civic Society for their contributions towards the design and print of the guide.

### Colwall Fruit DNA testing

Over many years we have attempted to identify as many fruit varieties as possible found in Colwall but there continued to be a number that remained a mystery. With thanks to Finnis Scott for a grant of £4,000 we have been able to send leaves collected from apple, pear and cherry trees to laboratories in Brogdale for DNA testing. This has shed light on the commercial varieties grown during the Ballard era. Interestingly, some have come back as unknown and some, including two perry pears, are very rare varieties

Under Tim Dixon's direction COG volunteers have collected wood from the trees with unknown varieties and have grafted these onto new root stock now planted in the COG nursery amongst the allotment plots at Colwall Village Garden. Once we have produced new trees with fresh leaves and hopefully fruit, these can be tested again. So a long intriguing process which will help to conserve traditional varieties of fruit.

## 5. ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Apple juicing with Colwall Primary School as well Kings Gloucester was as popular as ever and involved around 100 children in harvesting apples and turning these into juice to drink. We also had regular educational sessions with Go with the Flow, our local home education group, throughout the year covering wide ranging environmental projects from trapping small mammals, to investigating owl pellets, seeing birds in the hand, investigating ponds and more!



## 6. COLWALL ORCHARD GROUP EVENTS

We ran a full calendar of events this year, and despite the weather (too windy, too wet and even too hot!) all were successful at getting our message across, raising funds, attracting new volunteers and members and importantly they were enjoyable.

We started the Spring with a concert by Swedish Folk'appella group Kongero in Colwall Village Hall on 21<sup>st</sup> April which attracted a good crowd of both loyal and new fans.

This was followed by our annual Blossom Day Picnic on 22<sup>nd</sup> April at Snatford Orchard in Broadwood Drive. Our thanks to Freda Ballard for providing such a lovely location beneath her cherry blossom trees. A perfect mix of sunshine, blossom, music, play and good food!

Another of our regular events is the Dawn Chorus Breakfast. This year we based ourselves in Colwall Village Garden at 6am on 7<sup>th</sup> May and as we enjoyed



coffee, scones and croissants around the fire pit, Tim Dixon helped us to identify the birds we could hear. There were plenty and we were graced with herons flying overhead, an early cuckoo calling, along with a whitethroat singing its heart out, wrens, blackbirds, and many more!

### Malvern Spring Show

We were invited to be a part of the Eco, Green and Growing feature - designed by Hannah Genders, at the show on 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> May. We worked hard to create a mini allotment plot and orchard. It was a good opportunity to talk about our community project with visitors and Tim Dixon had a daily slot on the platform to talk about how we set up and continue to manage Colwall Village Garden.

Tim at the Malvern Spring Show explaining how COG was set up



### All About Orchards – On 7th July we had a very enjoyable open day at Colwall Village Garden



as part of the Colwall Ale House Festival. Starting with an early Moth Spotting breakfast, as the day heated up we provided a self-guided trail around the orchard to tell the story of our orchard heritage and the importance of orchards for wildlife. There was also pond dipping and bug hunts, a museum of artefacts and animal skulls, art and crafts, music, flowers and produce for sale, a BBQ, cafe and bar.

From Little Pips – Also as part of the Ale House Festival, Helen Stace was invited to talk to the Colwall Women's Institute Next Generation (WINGS). You'll find her presentation on the history of orchards in Colwall ['From Little Pips'](#) on our website.

COG Produce for sale! We had stalls to sell our produce at several events including the Ale House festival, Wyche and Colwall Horticultural Society Annual Flower Show and West Malvern WI. These all provided great opportunities to raise awareness about our work as well as to sell our produce.



Outdoor Movie Night – 3<sup>rd</sup> August With the amazing long hot summer what better way to celebrate than a social night at Colwall Village Garden! Thai Curry and an Aussie movie on one of the balmiest evenings of the year went down a treat!



Apple Day was on 6th October. Poor weather (again!) meant that we had to bring everything inside the packing shed apart from a few brave people running the BBQ and some venturing out to test their skills with the apple catapult! Inside the packing shed was lively with a display of local apples and pears alongside the full productivity line of juicing from chopping to scratting, pressing, bottling, labelling and even drinking! While in the Orchard Room we ran a cosy café with hot drinks and a wonderful selection of cakes. Our thanks to Kate Stock and Rough Notes for providing music to add to the happy atmosphere!



Mistletoe Fair on 8<sup>th</sup> December was the busiest ever with locals 'jostling' to purchase our jams and chutneys before we'd managed to unpack the produce. The warm mulled apple juice and mince pies and apple cake were appreciated and the mistletoe sold like hot mistletoe with promises of cheeky kisses according to the size of the bunch! All in all we had a successful morning making a very healthy profit and we continued to raise the profile of COG in Colwall.



Wassail! 19<sup>th</sup> January 2019. It's official - our Wassail has become legendary! With 600 people attending this year it was the biggest so far which resulted in both a few Health and Safety challenges as well as a huge success in terms of fund raising, letting people know about COG (our posts on our Facebook page reached over 10,000 people!) and as an enjoyable celebration of orchards. With thanks again to Old Meg Morris for entertaining until the flaming torch-lit procession began. It was a night full of atmosphere, accompanied by the rhythm of drums and horns and the clatter of pots and pans!

We welcomed the mystery Butler and our magnificent Mistletoe Man to entertain the crowds. The young Tom Tit and Jessie Wren (Wassail Queen) performed delightfully in feeding the birds with bread and sprinkling cider around the tree and a final gun-shot and fireworks marked the end of another great ceremony - Waes Hael! The food and bar were all welcome and the choir was in good voice for singing traditional Wassail songs around the fire.



All in all, an excellent year of events, which raised funds of over £6,000 and which were well supported by members, volunteers, the village and beyond.

## 7. 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 and managed to run 50 sessions in 2018-19. With an average of 8 volunteers attending for 3



A new apple tree planted by COG in Stamps Orchard

hours that equates to 1,200 hours. The work has ranged from planting new fruit trees, coppicing, balsam and bramble bashing, harvesting, juicing, making flaming brands for Wassail, putting up gazebos for events, grafting trees, mistletoe management and fruit tree pruning. Skills and knowledge were freely shared and we also had several discovery sessions when we found out about mammal trapping, meadows and apple identification.

During the autumn we held 18 jam and chutney making sessions and made 29 batches of preserves. Sales of preserves and juice raises funds for COG, but is also an important part of raising the profile of orchards and fruit trees, and reminding people how to use the fruit. Over 120 volunteer hours were donated to achieve this.



We have re-established an Estates Committee made up of volunteers from the COG Board of Trustees, the Colwall Allotment Association and a representative of the volunteers. This group keep on top of 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.

This year we have set up an Events Committee to plan, coordinate and run events with the help of a regular and loyal group of volunteers. We have estimated that events have involved over a 600 volunteer hours during the year.

We also have volunteer Trustees who manage the finances, governance, membership, communications, Health and Safety, forward planning and reporting. There are currently 9 Trustees who we estimate have clocked up over another 500 hours annually for Colwall Orchard Group. As a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee it is important that we have dedicated Trustees to ensure that COG is meeting its legal and corporate responsibilities.

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).

Thanks to everyone who helps in any way with our work.

## 8. THREE COUNTIES TRADITIONAL ORCHARD PROJECT

This year was the concluding year of the very successful Three Counties Traditional Orchard project, and it was time to tot up the results. Across the Three Counties, the project recruited 900 volunteers, aged from 25 to over 75. Between them, they contributed 1,500 days of time, attending 167 training days and 83 orchard work parties, restoring 34 orchards. 40 volunteers became orchard champions, contributing over 2,000 hours of time. Our COG member Lindsay became the Champion of champions for donating the most time (over 4 times the average, and more than a tenth of the total). They talked to over 900 members of the public and over 700 people came to our events. We also welcomed the formation of Whitbourne – Topfruit, a new orchard group in our county.



Colwall Orchard Group benefitted hugely from TCTOP by saving more orchards, training lots of volunteers, improving and extending our reputation, building new contacts and securing our financial base. Many thanks to the AONB and Karen Humphries the TCTOP Project Officer for running such a successful project.

## 9. OTHER ADVICE AND SUPPORT

We have also provided advice outside the TCTOP project, supporting orchard owners in the surrounding Parishes. For example we have helped to plan and create an orchard for Roger Oates Ltd in the Parish of Eastnor. As previously, we ran a Tree Order service this year to provide more fruit trees to COG members and friends, raising another £1,266.

## 10. OUR MEMBERS

We currently have 117 paying members of which 8 are Life members. In addition we have 8 Honorary Members and a further 20 regular and GDPR approved contacts. We also have 191 followers on Facebook and 211 on Twitter.

This year COG has prepared a Privacy Policy Statement to meet the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulations introduced in May 2018. The statement has been placed on our website. To meet our data obligations we asked all members and contacts to permit us to hold their contact details and we also informed them how to unsubscribe and remove their details from our records. The consequence of this is that we have fewer

contacts (non-paying supporters) but this has been balanced by an increase in paying members through-out the year.

## 11. FINANCES

Our funds continue to rise because of all the activities outlined above. We consider that we are a sound financial position and as we finalise our Business Plan for the next 5 years, our Trustees will prioritise how best to spend the money we have raised to meet our objectives.

This year we paid off most of the outstanding debts against the purchase of Colwall Village Garden. Our end of year balance shows fixed assets to the value of £153,305, and cash to value of £45,492 with outstanding debts of only £4,500.

## 12. GOVERNANCE

The Board of Trustees met four times this year, mainly to consider finance, data protection, strategy and business planning, risks and health and safety, special projects, operational matters referred to the Board by the Estates Committee and Events Committee.

## 13. 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))