



# North Cumbria Orchard Group Newsletter

Issue 1

Spring 2012

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Welcome to the first newsletter from North Cumbria Orchard Group. We intend that the newsletter will become a regular part of way we communicate with members. We envisage it appearing quarterly. It is not intended to merely duplicate the content of NCOG's website. Reports of past events and information about future events will normally appear both in the newsletter and on the website. The content of the website can be kept up to date when planned events have to be changed between editions of the newsletter.

Each newsletter will be emailed to members and can be viewed on NCOG's website. Distributing the newsletter digitally avoids significant production costs for NCOG and only puts you to the expense of printing it if you choose to do so.

Producing an interesting newsletter regularly will only be possible if members are willing to contribute articles, letters, photos and drawings. All contributions will be very gratefully received. The size of the newsletter will be determined by the quantity of contributions received. Please e-mail your contributions to [editor@ncorchards.co.uk](mailto:editor@ncorchards.co.uk)

You may well have opinions about what types of article should appear within the newsletter. Please feel free to express them. Please bear in mind that the best way of getting the type of content you want to see is to contribute it.

The deadline for contributions for the next edition is 20<sup>th</sup> June.

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## Recent Past Events

**Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> February 2012**

### **A fine afternoon's pruning**

Our winter pruning workshop was held at Bill and Mary Potter's garden orchard in Crosby, near Maryport. Their orchard has about 25 apple trees which have not been pruned for over 30 years. So there was plenty to go to at.

Sixteen NCOG members attended. Excellent tuition was provided by Niall Wildwoode and Chris Braithwaite, and members had ample opportunity to have a go themselves; this they did with great gusto and many of the trees were looking much smarter as a result. The weather was mostly fine apart from one squall which drove members to take shelter, where Bill and Mary (and assorted family members) provided a superb spread of tea and cakes. In fact the food was so good that despite the weather turning fine and sunny again, members took some persuasion to return to the task in hand!



Niall demonstrating (please ignore the date!)

## Recent Past Events (continued)

**Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2012**

### Grafting Workshop at Whitehaven

Following last year's very successful grafting workshop at Keswick, we held a similar event at Whitehaven Garden Centre. Members were shown how to graft apple trees and then went on to graft their own. There was a good turn-out of members and over 40 new trees were created in the afternoon. The session was ably led by Hilary Wilson assisted by Niall Wildwoode. Many thanks to Stuart Murfitt for letting us use the polytunnel at his garden centre, which was ideal for the job, and for his generous hospitality.



**Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2012**

### Allerby Community Garden



When NCOG held its summer pruning workshop at Allerby in August 2011 various experts expressed the view that the fruit trees were suffering from the effects of the wind. The site is rather exposed and fairly close to the sea. The trees were judged to need staking and the orchard judged to need an effective windbreak. Since then there had been some discussion about how this might be achieved and how NCOG might assist. A previous attempt to organise a working party to assist with some of the work required was defeated by the weather.

So a small band of volunteers pitched up at Allerby to plant a willow hedge and stake the trees. A fair number of calories were both expended and consumed and a lot was achieved in the morning's work. We hope to return later to admire the result.

## Recent Past Events (continued)

**Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012**

### **Damson Blossom at Wreay**

Just at the end of the spring warm spell around 20 members turned up at Kath and Shaun Halfpenny's garden at short notice to admire the early damson blossom. This was truly magnificent but not the only impressive feature in a well-cared for garden of great variety and interest. The list of fruit varieties we were provided with presented a challenge in identification for expert and novice alike. There was also some discussion about various types of damson trees and the best places to plant further apple trees (from last year's grafting). We ended the visit with the traditional excellent tea and cakes. Many thanks to Kath and Shaun for their excellent hospitality.



### **Windbreaks for Cumbrian Orchards**

Many places in Cumbria are exposed to strong winds so it is important to consider windbreaks whenever an orchard is being created or altered. The west side of the county is often exposed to westerly winds from the sea (as at Allerby Community Garden – see report). In the Eden Valley the strongest winds are usually the easterly Helm sweeping down from the Pennine ridge.

Windbreaks work best if permeable to permit some of the wind to pass through. Solid windbreaks such as buildings, walls or close boarded fences can create funnelling effects and strong eddies. So the ideal windbreak is either a hedge or a fence with boarding covering about half to two-thirds of its surface area. Windbreaks are best grown to the height of the trees they are protecting or slightly less. Tall windbreaks risk casting shade on the trees in the orchard unless there is space to position them a sufficient distance from the nearest trees. In all but the smallest orchards in relatively sheltered locations it is worth considering intermediate windbreaks within the orchard in addition to those at the edges.

There is a view that wind is at least as big a problem as frost for pollination of fruit tree flowers. Effective windbreaks can certainly help to reduce the effects of winds at pollination time. When windbreaks include planting which comes into leaf before the fruit trees they are protecting flower their usefulness at pollination time is increased.

It is hoped to provide more information about suitable planting for windbreaks in a future newsletter. Does anyone want to contribute their experience and/or opinions?

## Orchards as Havens for Wildlife

There seems to me to be something of a perceived conflict between the need to make an orchard productive and the objective of maintaining it as a haven for wildlife. In non commercial orchards the wildlife can be encouraged to thrive on the variety of habitats that untidiness provides. The temptation to remove unproductive old trees and fallen timber should be resisted if wildlife is to be encouraged. Controlling the undergrowth between the trees is understandably often regarded as essential for access for pruning, picking etc. There are periods of the year when not much access is needed and a more laid back attitude to mowing may appear to be appropriate.

We tend to judge an orchard (or a garden) by how well maintained and tidy it looks. In doing so we are missing opportunities. What do you think?

### The old orchard at Acorn Bank (in the Dandelion season)



## How many trees make an orchard?

### Squeezing them in at Acorn Bank

It seems to me that gardening is a job that leaves a fair bit of scope for thinking – a lot of tasks undertaken; digging, grass cutting, edging to name a few, require only part of the average brain to complete successfully. There is also a good bit of time moving stuff from one place to another which again affords time for speculation. Now once I have spent enough time working out if the job in hand could be done more quickly or maybe with a better result, and after 30 years I can easily fool myself that I know what's best; I find the grey cells turn to speculate more widely – Why? Why garden at all? What makes it such fun? Is it fun? Even when it's raining? Snow? Sleet!?

You probably have your own answers; mine include: control – there is a good deal of comfort to be found in the illusion that because we can manage a tiny part of the world; we will be able to make the whole thing work. Being useful and growing useful, seasonal things. The joy of making a series of inconsequential decisions - should I cut the grass today or leave it till tomorrow. The opportunity of being outside whenever the sun shines. Add that most distinctly human habit of collecting and naming things, and the idea that the garden allows creativity. And we have some of the answers.

So what, you may wonder, has all this to do with orchards? Well for garden read orchard – all the many satisfactions of a garden can be found in an orchard at a fraction of the labour. Giving a lot more time to wonder, as well as baskets full of fruit in season.

How many trees? – three is a good number always likely to pollinate each other, but one tree if you have close neighbours to share pollen works for me.

Acorn Bank has 112 apple trees at its core plus a few repeats and now thanks to the enthusiasm of Hilary Wilson a new experimental branch into pears and plums with blackcurrants gooseberries and strawberries thrown in just for fun. Hilary is often there on Fridays throughout the season and always brim full of fruity goodness.

The orchard like the rest of the garden is there forever, for everyone.

Chris Braithwaite



## Our Expanding Membership

Since its formation in 2010, NCOG's membership has grown rapidly. By the end of our financial year (September 30<sup>th</sup> 2011) we had 37 household subscriptions and 13 individual subscriptions. Counting household subscriptions as 2 members, this equated to a membership of 87 people. As at April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2012 we have 42 household and 24 individual subscribers – equivalent to 108 members.

Our members now cover a large part of North Cumbria, with some natural concentrations around Carlisle, Penrith and the West Coast (see the map below). We have now held events in all of these areas and have had consistently good turn-outs of around 20 people each time.



## Contributions to the Newsletter

It would assist the process of assembling each newsletter if contributions of text (without embedded photographs or scanned drawings) are e-mailed as attachments in .doc format. Each photograph, scanned drawing etc should be e-mailed as a separate attachment in .jpg format. The best file size for photographs and scanned drawings is about 100 to 200 Kbytes.

Please e-mail your contributions to [editor@ncorchards.co.uk](mailto:editor@ncorchards.co.uk)

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Kath Halfpenny's Damson Blossom

Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent the views of NCOG.

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