

THE ORCHARD STORY

The English orchard as we know it today is founded on fruit cultivation for thousands of years by major civilisations who made this an integral part of their existence. Although Eve's famous temptation of Adam is more likely to have been made with a Fig or Pomegranate, the Fifth Book of Moses (Deuteronomy) includes a passage which translates as 'the apple of his eye' and the Song of Solomon laments 'comfort me with apples for I am sick of love'!

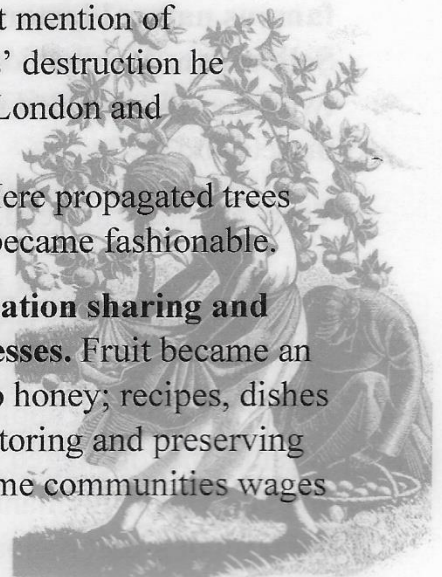
The invading Roman armies brought with them the larger, sweeter apples grown on mainland Europe (our native apples were too bitter for their taste!) but these early extensive fruit groves were abandoned as the empire collapsed. The Monastic system brought an organised approach to fruit cultivation, with clearly designated areas for different fruit species – the Benedictine Monastery of St. Gall from the 7th Century lists apples, pears, quinces, plums, almonds, walnuts, hazelnuts, peaches, mulberries and figs. **By the 9th Century this fruit area was known as an 'ortyard'** from yard and the Latin 'Hortus' for garden. Translated into Middle English it became 'orchyard' and finally 'orchard'.

Post their invasion we can thank the Normans for their meticulous documenting of the extent of fruit growing and importantly, importation of fruit from Europe, on merchant ships returning from delivering fine English wool. Whilst the highly productive orchards of nobility and royalty feature loudly, it is clear that a good proportion of ordinary folk were also benefitting nutritionally. **By the 14th Century surplus fruit and veg was being sold in London street markets with fruit and Kentish orchards noted by Chaucer in his Canterbury Tales.**

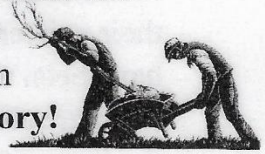
Of course no historic timeline would be complete without mention of Henry VIII! Understanding the impact of the monasteries' destruction he encouraged commercial fruit growing especially around London and from a fact finding tour he sponsored across Europe, established The Royal Fruit Garden in Teynham, Kent. Here propagated trees were shared to Kent and Surrey landowners as orchards became fashionable.

Fruit growing flourished in the early 1500's as information sharing and documentation was facilitated by the new printing presses. Fruit became an important seasonal food as well as a desired alternative to honey; recipes, dishes and drinks were developed and all kinds of methods for storing and preserving were devised to prolong the harvests of sweet fruit. In some communities wages were even paid partly in Cider!

But, not unlike the threats we see today, climate and economics from the late 17th Century put paid to these plentiful times. Britain's little Ice Age saw the dominant chills of Eastern Europe override the warming Gulf Stream and



mild westerly winds. Early, harsh Winters with long intense frosts and heavy snowfall were followed by late, brief Springs before hot and dry Summers left folk tending orchards incapable of managing them. Coupled with the agricultural revolution, a move to cereal crops and dairy consumption ordinary folk lost ready access to fruit. **So now to the crux of our story!**



The damage to the health of rural communities was first noticed in country parishes witnessing increasing numbers of early deaths. **Clergy set about planting orchards in their large rectory gardens**, invested time and money in developing new, more productive varieties and, as fruit was distributed under the auspices of the Parish Church, Rectors documented the improving health of their parishioners. Constipation and coughs were cured, better skin and general well-being improved. Of course we know today that powerful anti-oxidants and vitamin C were playing their vital nutritional role.

Many of the heritage apple varieties grown today were developed by these Reverend gents and named in their honour. Tom Putt (a Somerset Rector) and Revered Wilks to name but two. However **it is the history and notes of one particular orchard that underpins this place that you are visiting today.**

The Revered Gilbert White became Curate at Selbourne, a rural area near to Southampton in 1747. An educated man with a deep interest in nature he kept detailed, precise records of his experiences growing flowers, vegetables and fruit. This diary covering 1751 to 1768 is today widely known: **The Garden Kalendar**. But more notable, and **still in print today as it is one of the most famous natural history books ever published**, is **The Natural History of Selbourne**. A collection of White's records, and extensive correspondence with two other like-minded naturalists, of the weather and observations on animals, insects and birds.

Truly a wonderful read...

...and **the inspiration for The Church Orchard here at Addingham**. White grew sufficient fruit from a piece of land very similar in size to this orchard providing a steady supply to parishioners from midsummer until the onset of winter. Soft fruits, apples, pears, plums, peaches, apricots, figs and nuts. Truly organic, they managed without pesticides and fungicides. They grew melons and cucumbers on manure beds topped with a simple cold frame. Just imagine the taste of sweet melon in June for ordinary agricultural workers!

As you walk around today and witness the buds on the trees and the expectant harvest to come I hope the fruits of 40 years' labour brings this story alive and plays homage to nature's wondrous beauty and bounty. **Derek Law. June 2022**