

Last Session:

THE FUTURE OF TRADITIONAL ORCHARDS?

The “perfect” Traditional Orchard, fulfilling all the requirements.

Old farm or market garden orchard once supplying the markets of Ipswich. Today still part of a commercial market garden but this orchard managed for its wildlife and cultural value.

Cherry Tree Farm Lower Layham restored with additional planting under Higher Level Stewardship. Several cherries, large pears, one walnut (and once apples).

Standing dead trees, several fallen dead trees and wood partially buried for stag beetles (*Lucanus cervus*).



Natural England's definition of a TRADITIONAL ORCHARD is:

- 5 or more fruit or nut trees
- Less than 20m between canopies
- Large growing trees budded/grafted onto vigorous rootstocks (HLS specifies M25, *Pyrus communis* seedling, F12/1, and Brompton..only).
- Unsprayed trees or ground flora
- In grazed, or ungrazed and mown once annually, grassland,
- Preferably with some deadwood in canopy and left on the ground,
- With associated hedges and ponds,
- And new replacement trees.

IS THIS REALLY A “TRADITION”? IS IT THE ONLY TRADITION?

- “Paradise” dwarfing rootstocks have been with us since 16th C.
- Quince dwarfing rootstocks first recorded used for pears in 16th C.
- Dwarf trees are short-lived and some are intolerant of grassland, but veteran characteristics arise earlier. Some old unsprayed dwarf tree orchards are excellent habitats.
- Many dwarf-semi dwarf tree orchards are already recorded as “traditional”.
- Some cultivars on some dwarf stocks make trees as large as any “traditional” sized trees. Triploid apples on MM106, *domestica* plums and damsons on St Julien are examples.



**Oakley House
Orchard,
Brome & Oakley,
Suffolk.**

**Dwarf trees planted
1960's, some later.
Unsprayed.**

**A Lesser Spotted
Woodpecker site**



COULD TRADITIONAL ORCHARDS HAVE AN ECONOMIC FUTURE FROM SALE OF THEIR CROP:

- **Some do from juice, cider and perry (but possibly only 3 in eastern England, Aspals in Suffolk)**
- **A few supplement non-traditional fruit production (but only with grant aid from Stewardship?)**
- **There are suggestions that community orchards could supply surplus crop to cider and juice producers....but non have so far.**
- **This conversation is already taking place in the Three Counties of the west country, where “traditional” orchards are much larger than in the east.**

RECENTLY NEW TRADITIONAL ORCHARDS HAVE BEEN PLANTED:

- **By private landowners on private land – probably the largest areas in Suffolk in the last few years**
- **By community groups on community owned land (but also many are non-traditional orchards.**
- **By registered farm businesses and funded by CAP under Higher Level Stewardship.**
- **By “scattered orchard projects” on land where owners or land managers give consent.**

THE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF TRADITIONAL ORCHARDS IS UNDER THREAT.

RECENTLY ORCHARDS IN ENGLAND HAVE BEEN LOST ENTIRELY DUE TO:

- **Permitted development to housing or industrial. The inability of LPA's to respond to a priority habitat (this issue is not restricted to traditional orchards)**
- **Change of use to "amenity" such as horse paddocks/"horsiculture".**
- **Change of land use to arable or other agricultural use.**

TRADITIONAL ORCHARDS IN ENGLAND ARE CONTINUALLY BEING "DE-GRADED".

- **By becoming gardens.**
- **By replanting or gapping up with trees on dwarfing rootstocks (principally apples on MM106).**
- **By removal of associated habitat features, farm ponds to pond liners, hedges removed or reduced etc.**
- **By grassland mown regularly as lawn.**
- **By removal of dead wood.**
- **By ver zealous pruning (of old trees) to benefit crop production**



April 2009 This typical farmhouse orchard is only recognizable when the trees are in bloom. The big pear tree was planted in 1856; 11 other fruit and nut trees, a huge pollard cherry plum. A few recent dwarf stock plantings. Rough grassland mown once, maybe twice. Dead wood. A rough track through to Dutch barn, wood piles under trees.



Same orchard in April 2014. House and orchard sold away from land 3 years ago. Now garden with regularly mown lawn, gravel drive. Some dwarf trees removed, no dead wood. Largest trees retained.