

Apple Day October 2024



On Saturday, 19th October, Transition Horsham held its first Apple Day at the Unitarian church hall and garden. It was a success with over 150 people coming through the door. Visitors were treated to an amazing selection of apple varieties to admire and taste, children's drawing activities, refreshments including apple cakes and apple juice, a nature trail in the church garden, and two Morris dancing sides.

Roger Brown, an apple grower from Steyning Community Orchard was there to advise and describe the local varieties. Apples and apple juice were also provided by Tom Scanlon from his Nuthurst Orchard. Unsurprisingly the apple cakes and chutneys sold out. With climate change now making its presence felt, October was a bit late for the local harvest, September may be more appropriate next year. And there will be a second Horsham Apple Day in 2025!

Apple Days are proving popular in many British towns and villages, so how did this idea start? The first one took place in Covent Garden, London, in 1990, to celebrate the many local varieties of apple which were fast disappearing. It was all part of a project set up by Common Ground, a charity founded in 1983 by three members of Friends of the Earth concerned with local distinctiveness, landscape history, culture and arts. As part of their apple project they produced an Apple Map of Britain poster with 300 traditional varieties identified county by county. Common Ground have done much to promote diversity and conservation of old apple orchards and promote new ones. Since the 1960s they estimate that two thirds of Britain's orchards have been lost to development, roads and the easy availability of limited choice supermarket fruit. Of the 2000 old cooking and desert apple varieties, and hundreds more cider varieties, only a handful are now known and available today.

Research by The Grocer magazine revealed just 18.6% of the Tesco apple range were of UK origin, while Aldi managed to get up to 22.5% of its apples UK sourced! Justifications given by the supermarkets include the apparently longer shelf life of the foreign varieties, and 'customer expectations' which is presumably shoppers wishing to see the same six varieties week upon week with no seasonal variations!

It is still possible to find an old Sussex variety in a garden or field, for example in the garden of the Blue Idol Quaker Meeting House at Coolham an old apple tree, possibly over 100 years old, collapsed but remained rooted. Its identity was confirmed by Roger Brown as a Bossom variety, of which there was only one other tree in a garden in Graffham. Cuttings have now been taken and this variety will live on.

Community orchards are a great way of maintaining our old local apple varieties, and in addition they provide a focus for community activities in a healthy outdoor space - a sort of open-air village hall, a real community asset. So, wouldn't it be worth considering a community orchard for Horsham town?

