

Ten Years on

The Wolvercote Community Orchard.

The Forest of Oxford was launched at the end of 1990 as a means of encouraging the greening of the city and its steering committee first met in January '91.

One of the objectives was to establish a net work of Tree Wardens from among the parishes. These people would ^{make} recommendations that would benefit their area and by the middle of 1992, Wolvercote had established a small group of enthusiasts who made plans for planting during National Tree Planting Week that year.

Something else which had also been established in the country, was Apple Day, a celebration of different fruits which were ready for picking in October. One of the Wolvercote members went to Sulgrave Manor that year and was greatly taken by the idea, championed by Common Ground, to establish fruit orchards to preserve the old apple varieties which were in danger of disappearing in the face of mass produced foreign imports.

Because he had an allotment in the village and a large portion of the land was uncultivated, the idea quickly germinated ~~into~~ converting this to orchard land. Fortunately, the land owner was the Oxford Preservation Trust and their approval of the idea was enthusiastic.

Ergo. December 1993 saw the Tree Group clearing scrub, burning grass and generally preparing the Community Orchard, a fertile plot of about 1500 sq.meters adjacent to the Trout Inn car park. March '94 was a good month and we planted our first twelve trees, assisted by the village Junior Watch Group. Since then, more planting has taken place every year and we now have over 40 varieties of apple, also pear, plum, gage, cherry and quince. A walnut and ~~a sweet chestnut~~ have been planted on the rear boundary and as an experiment, there is a peach.

Already existing on the land was a well which needed restoring. This was rebuilt in time for the first Apple Day in October 1995. Apple tastings, juices, jams and cakes were for sale and old style games such as apple bobbing and conkers (also in season) were played. The newly completed well was dedicated to Ralf Austen, a 17th. century horticulturist who lived in Oxford and who owned a large orchard. Austen was an adviser to Cromwell who was keen to improve the diet of the population and amongst other things, advance the quality of cider making.

Since that first Apple Day the celebration has grown better and better and given a fine day, visitors come from further a field than just north Oxford. The fruit we sell is organic and because the range of varieties ripen over several weeks/months, not everything can be for sale at the same time. Nevertheless, we try to bring together as big a variety as possible, augmented by the produce from some of the village gardens.