



Stone's Orchard CROXLEY GREEN

Edited by
Councillor Margaret Pomfret
Croxley Green Parish Council

50p

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THE STORY OF AN ORCHARD

The introduction of traditional orchards to this country has been attributed to the Romans who grouped fruit trees together in suitable places. Cherry, quince and medlar trees were introduced at this time with chestnuts and walnuts. Sadly, when the Roman Empire declined, the management of orchards also deteriorated, although wild cherry and apple could still be found in woods and hedgerows.

During the Saxon period, apples were the principal fruit and cider became a popular drink. After harvesting the fruit, cattle and pigs were allowed to wander freely in the orchards which were called Aepel-tuns.

With the invasion of the Normans, new varieties of French apples were made available – Costards, Pearmain – pears were also introduced. Orchards then began a revival again primarily in the walled gardens of monasteries. Apples and cherries were part of the staple diet of poorer villages.

During the Tudor period, orchards were planted up where large country estates were built and needed to be self sufficient, as the poor state of the roads was a limiting factor in the movement of food around the country.

The vast elaborate feasts and entertainments held at court by Henry VIII meant that larger quantities of fresh produce were needed to feed the courtiers, servants, etc. A wider choice was now available apricots, bullaces, damsons and filberts were sought after varieties introduced by Richard Harris, fruiterer to Henry VIII.

Orchards now began to flourish and humble folk planted small orchard areas close to their cottages raising the trees from fruit stones and pips.

In the 17th Century a device for guarding against spring frosts was used to protect the early blossom. Earthenware pots were filled with small coals, lighted and covered with a tile with wet hay on top. These were hung by cords in each fruit tree.

Practice of increasing fruit tree stock in the 17th Century.

At the end of June, the bark was cut away from a tree branch. Stiff clay 2" (50mm) thick was applied to the bare part. A mixture of soil and manure was plastered around the bark of the branch above the clay, the shape of a football. The clay prevented the sap from rising and roots would form in the ball of soil and manure. This was left until the following February when the branch was cut off just below the clay and planted.

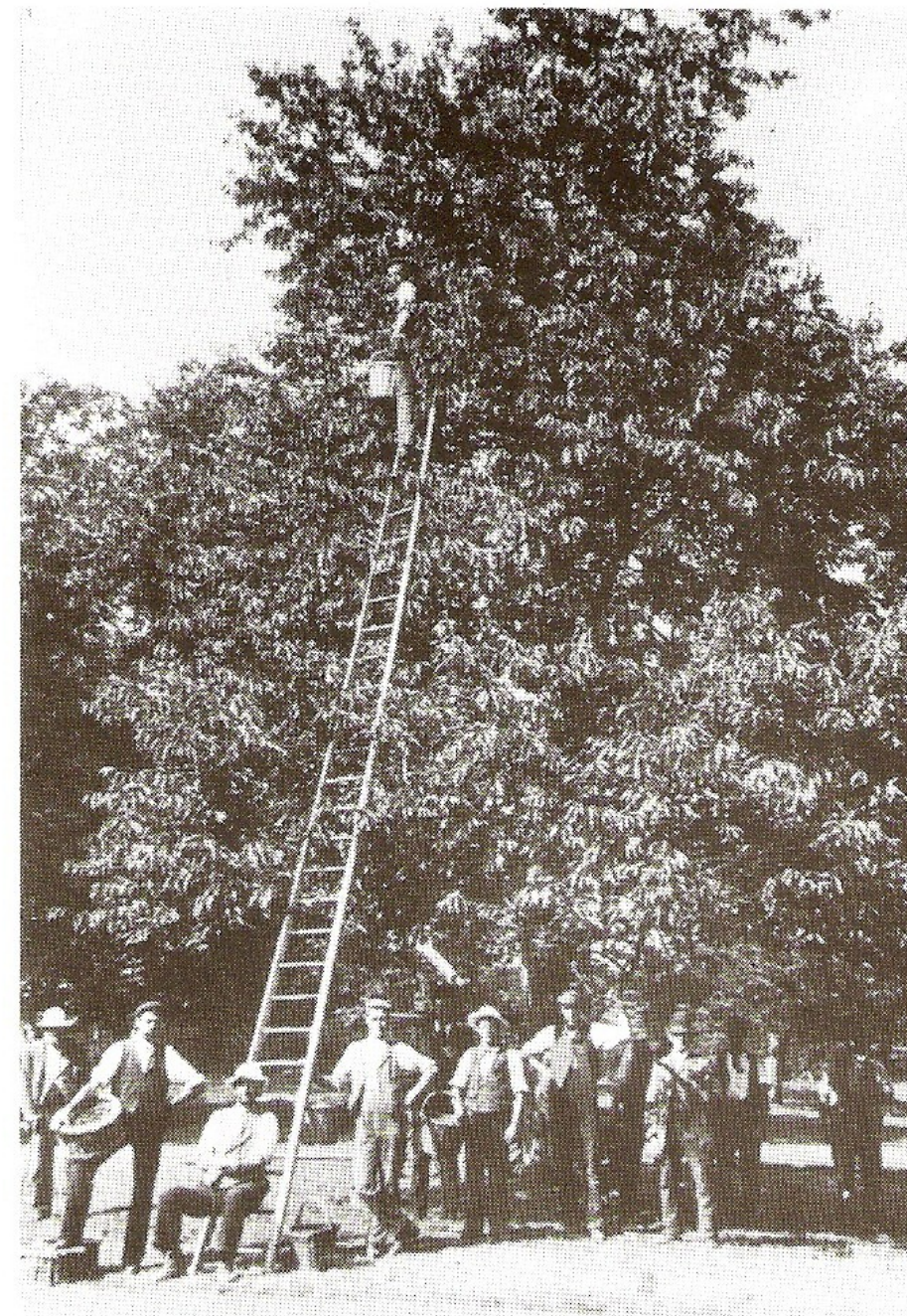
Books were now being published on orchards and by 1873 the first recorded figures on orchards were produced. The repeal of the tax on sugar in 1874 meant large quantities of fruit could be used in the jam industry to feed the growing industrial population. Railways and canals were also playing a major part in the movement of fresh produce which could be easily transported as the systems improved.

By 1905, the fruit growing industry had expanded rapidly due to major improvements in the canning processes

and better storage systems. In 1923, a campaign was launched in the British Empire with a competition to "EAT MORE FRUIT".

Fruit crops peaked about 1952 but because of World War II and the shortage of labour, trees were not adequately replaced and worn out orchards were grubbed up to make way for more basic food crops. Young trees need at least 10 years to mature to produce a worthwhile crop. The increasing cost of paying pickers to gather the fruit also made it less attractive to grow.

With the introduction of quality controls and worldwide markets, fruit growers have found it necessary to consider the economics of their orchards. Materials and labour costs continue to rise with profits showing a marked decline. Changes in fruit trees have offset some of these difficulties. Work on rootstocks particularly with apples at East Malling Research Station and John Innes Horticultural Institute, to produce dwarfing and heavy cropping varieties has meant a return to encouraging the domestic grower to plant more trees.



Cherry pickers in the orchard during 1914-18. Walter Stone is on right with bowler hat. Note round cherry baskets.

CHERRY TREES AND CUSTOMS

Cherry fairs date back hundreds of years with historical records showing villages in Hertfordshire celebrated this event usually in late June/early July.

In the south-west corner of the County, and particularly in the parishes of Rickmersworth, Sarret, King's Langley, Flaunden, Bovingdon, and partly in Watford and Aldenham, there are many orchards; apples and cherries are their principal produce. Every farm has an orchard, but the larger the farm the smaller the orchard. Orchards are found chiefly in farms of twenty to fifty acres.

Arthur Young
Survey of Hertfordshire (1804)

July with its warm and settled weather was an opportunity for families to earn extra money picking the fruit to supplement their meagre income when the cherries began to ripen.

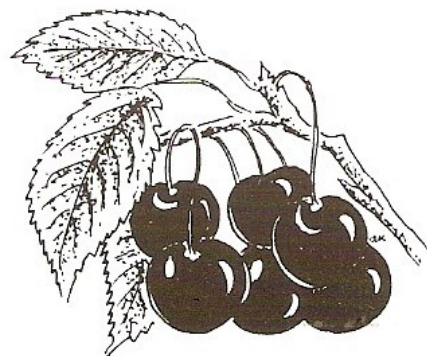
It would also be an occasion for families to enjoy themselves. The Cherry Fairs were held on Sundays and sometimes referred to as "Cherry Sundays". The Green would be busy as stalls were set up in front of the hedgerow between Parrotts and Stone's Orchard, where the freshly picked fruit would be sold. Villagers would picnic on the Green eating the delicious dark red juicy cherries accompanied by a glass of ale, whilst the children had fun disposing of the pips or putting 'pairs' over their ears to make ear-rings.

The Hertfordshire-Black cherries were also known as mazzards or carroons

(kerroons) and were popular for making the black cherry turnover or pasty which tradition shows was first made at Frithsden in Herts. Cherry cordials were another Hertfordshire speciality and recipes dating back to 1750 in the 'Country Housewife's Family Companion' by William Ellis of Little Gaddesden proved to be very popular and no doubt "tasty".

TO MAKE A VERY RICH FAMILY CORDIAL WITH BLACK CHERRIES, MULBERRIES, BLACKBERRIES, & c. . .

Pack ripe pick'd black Kerroon Cherries in a Jar, or earthen glazed Pot, with white Sugar, by first putting a Layer of Sugar about half an Inch thick, then a Layer of Cherries, next a thinner Layer of Sugar, then Cherries, and so on till the Pot is full: Then put a half Pint of clean old Molasses Brandy, or better French Brandy, into a Gallon Pot of them; cover them close, and bury them deep enough in the Ground from the Power of the Frost. After three or more Months Time, you may take up the Pot, and I will answer for it you will find an excellent rich Cordial indeed, surpassing most others.



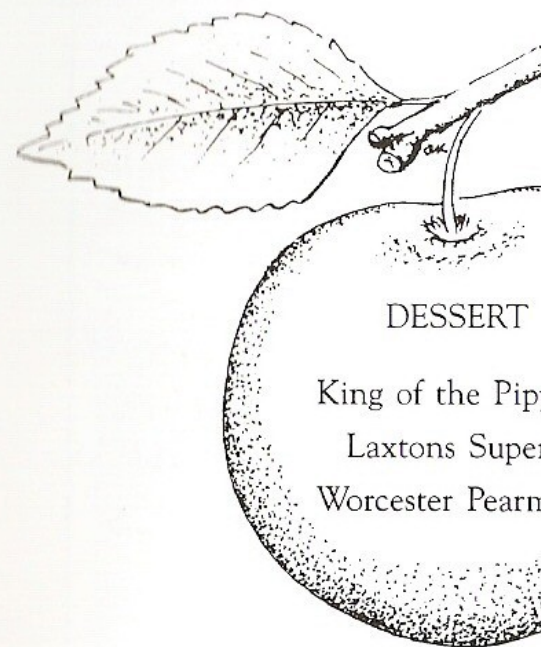
TYPES OF FRUIT GROWN IN THE ORCHARD AND SOME OF THE KNOWN VARIETIES

CHERRIES

Hertfordshire-Black

Carroon (Kerroon) see history

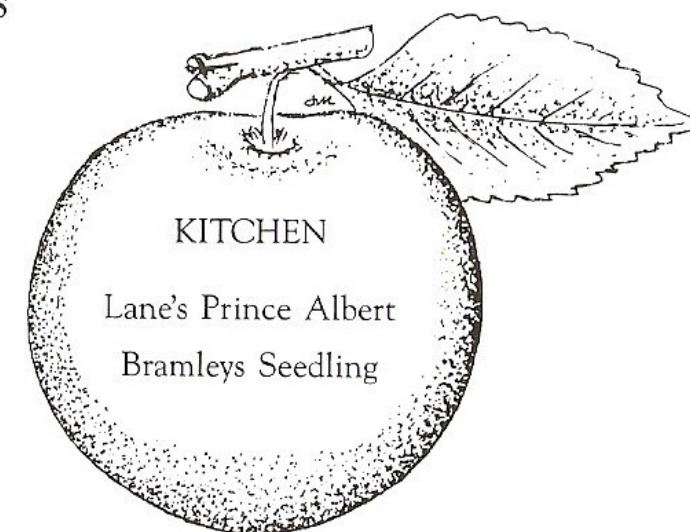
"In 10 years after planting, cherry trees begin to bear: each tree should have nine square perches of land. A full grown tree will produce 50 dozen pounds (600 lbs) in a good year: and from 10 to 20 years, six dozen (72 lbs): prices vary from 10d to 3s a dozen (12 lbs). The carroon and small black are the favourite sorts'.



APPLES

DESSERT

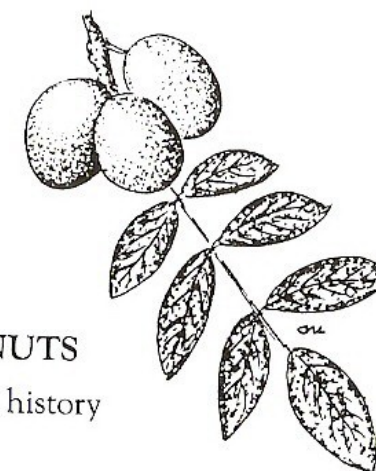
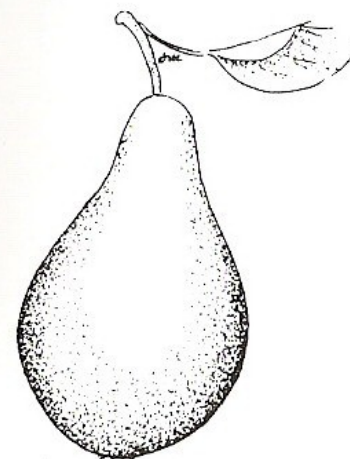
King of the Pippins
Laxtons Superb
Worcester Pearmain



KITCHEN

Lane's Prince Albert
Bramleys Seedling

PEARS



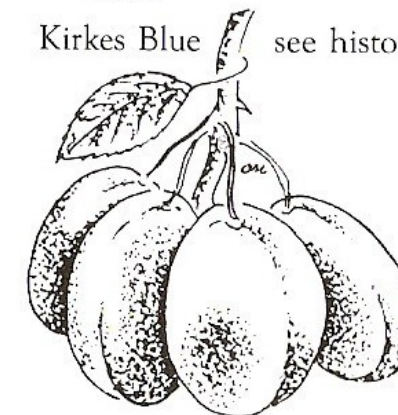
WALNUTS

see history

PLUMS

Victoria

Kirkes Blue see history



STONES ORCHARD - CROXLEY GREEN

Plant Species Recorded during visits of 28/5/93 and 21/6/94

Grassland Grasses

Common Bent Grass
Meadow Foxtail
Barren Brome
Sweet Vernal Grass
False Oat Grass
Soft Brome
Cocksfoot
Red Fescue

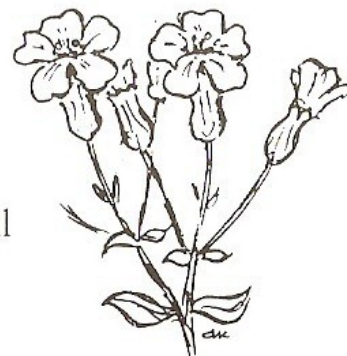
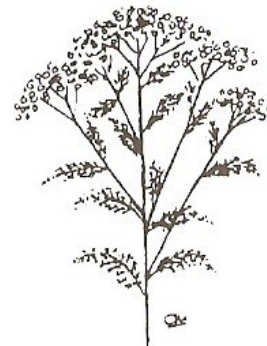
Yorkshire Fog Grass
Wall Barley
Perennial Rye Grass
Smaller Catstail Grass
Annual Meadow Grass
Smooth Meadow Grass
Rough Meadow Grass
Yellow Oat-Grass

Forbs

Yarrow
Cow Parsley
Mugwort
White Bryony
Prickly Sedge
Black Knapweed
Greater Knapweed
Common Mouse-ear
Creeping Thistle
Spear Thistle
Wild Basil
Pignut
Lesser Bindweed
Beaked Hawksbeard
Wild Carrot
Foxglove
Rosebay Willowherb
Goosegrass
Hedge Bedstraw
Ladies Bedstraw
Cut-leaved Cranesbill
Dovesfoot Cranesbill
Hogweed
Common Catsear
White Dead Nettle
Ox-eye Daisy
Common Toadflax
Birdsfoot Trefoil

Field Woodrush
Pineapple Weed
Black Medick
Ribwort Plantain
Greater Plantain
Creeping Cinquefoil
Meadow Buttercup
Bulbous Buttercup
Lesser Celandine
Creeping Buttercup
Common Sorrel
Sheep Sorrel
Clustered Dock
Curled Dock
Broad-leaved Dock
Common Ragwort
Hedge Mustard
Smooth Sowthistle
Lesser Stitchwort
Dandelion
Goatsbeard
Red Clover
White Clover
Stinging Nettle
Germander Speedwell
Thyme-leaved Speedwell
Hairy Tare
Common Vetch

N.B. Prickly Sedge is a very uncommon species in Hertfordshire.



Species not recorded on visits of 28/5/93 and 21/6/94
but listed during phase 1 survey 4/9/86

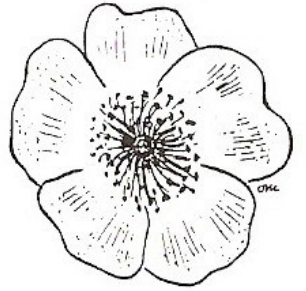
Heath Bedstraw
Perforate St John's wort

Bittersweet

Tree and Shrub Species Recorded from Boundary Hedgerow etc. (Including planted species)

Sycamore
Hazel
Hawthorn
Ash
Holly
Garden Privet
Apple
Cherry
Japanese Flowering Cherry

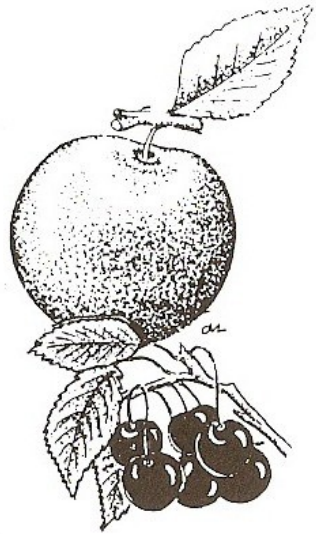
Blackthorn
Pedunculate Oak
Dog Rose
Bramble
Elder
Rowan
English Elm
Guelder Rose



Flowering plant species recorded from copse

Ground Elder
Garlic Mustard
Bugle
Angelica
Wavy Bittercress
Foxglove
Hedgerow Cranesbill

Ivy
Bluebell
Honesty
Wood Forget-me-not
Clustered Dock
Hybrid Campion
Red Campion



In total over a 100 species of Higher Plants have now been recorded from the site.

Epiphyte species Recorded on Trees

Mosses
Brachythecium rutabulum
Orthotrichum diaphanum
Rhynchostegium confertum

Fungi
Hirneola auricula-judae



Butterfly species Recorded

Green-veined White | Small Tortoiseshell

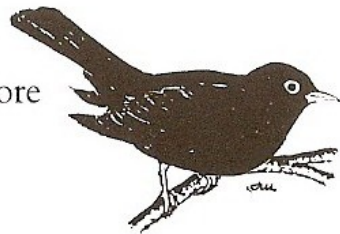
(Conditions rather dull and cool on both visits. Suspect more species would have been apparent in better weather).

Bird Species Recorded

The following have been noted on the site but far more species are likely to occur:

Blackbird
Linnet

Goldfinch
Magpie



STONES ORCHARD

The old orchard site, known as 'Stones Orchard' for many years derived its name from Walter Stone who became the tenant farmer of the land on 11th November 1893.

The land that Walter farmed was owned by the Woolwrych family of Parrotts Farm and was approximately 12 acres – consisting of orchards, meadows, buildings and arable land at an annual rent of forty-eight pounds ten shillings (£48.50), to be paid quarterly.

Walter Stone's family originally from Latimer and Flaunden, moved to Sarratt Green during the mid-1800's. Whilst living in Sarratt they were known to be dealers in fruit and mushrooms paying a penny (1d) a pound to villagers who gathered them, before selling them on at Watford Market. The business was run from a shed beside the Boot public house (one landlord for many years was

a relative of Walter's). Walter had been a gamekeeper before moving to Croxley Green with his wife Annie. He and his young family lived briefly in Copthorne Cottages prior to moving to Rose Cottage.

Much of the land was meadow for grazing and producing a hay crop. (Unfortunately in the 1920's, an old wooden barn burnt down and this was later replaced by a brick building).



Brothers George, Walter and Joe Stone, outside the Boot Public House in Sarratt.

Part of Walter's "agreement" as a tenant was to "in a proper and husband-like manner, after taking a second crop of hay from the land immediately manure the land with at least 10 tons of good rotten manure to every acre of land. To keep all trees properly pruned and when necessary substitute and plant young trees of good varieties. These should be properly planted, manured, protected, staked and screened from damage by cattle or wind."

Along the Green boundary side (part still remains) a good crop of hazel stems (cob nuts) would shelter a profusion of primroses in the spring.

The main orchard area consisted of several types of fruit trees including apple, pear and plum – but it was for the cherries that many local residents best remember the orchard.

During late June into July when the cherries were ripe and ready for picking (shotguns at the ready to scare away the birds), the familiar long ladders were



George Stone (right) and Jack Cripps in the orchard. The guns were used to scare the birds from the cherry trees, but were eventually considered too costly.

brought out to rest against the branches to enable the men to climb up into the extremely tall trees to gather the fruit. During this time, families would amble to the Green especially on a Sunday to buy the cherries. These were known as Cherry Sundays. Sometimes the children were sent early in the morning to buy the cherries so that mothers could prepare a cherry pie for pudding for Sunday lunch. Children were also able to buy a few penny-worth wrapped in newspaper to eat straight away and usually received a good measure for their 'coppers'.

Childhood memories are always best remembered as sunny hot summers and no doubt Cherry Sundays were such days with family outings sitting on the Green, with the children quietly disposing of the 'pips' (cherry stones) or putting pairs together to make 'earrings' to hang over their ears.



Walter Stone at Rose Cottage c 1920



May Stone, married to George, son of Walter and mother to Doris Woods. She would give children generous portions of cherries, wrapped in newspaper.

The gentry in and around Croxley would also take advantage of the occasion by sending boxes of locally purchased cherries to family and friends, as far away as Devon and Scotland. The orchard was one of several in Croxley Green at this time and was 'open' for scrumping – a favourite pastime of most young and adventurous school children. Walter would turn a 'blind eye' to this activity, regarding it as a natural pastime and part of the fun of childhood and growing up.

The orchard site and the meadows continued to thrive with Walter's two sons George and Jesse taking on much of the business as Walter aged and became less able. The business has broadened into a flourishing coal and coke delivery service, as well as a

haulage contractor. They were largely responsible for the removal of the spoil when cuttings through Croxley Woods were excavated.

At this time, the transport consisted of two horses and carts. One horse called Tommy was an ex Rickmansworth Fire Station horse, who, when harnessed into a cart heard a bell had to be reined in, otherwise he would take off heading for what he presumed to be an emergency.

In 1929, the family acquired their first motorised transport – a Ford coal lorry.

Walter Stone died in 1939 and with the decline of the orchards after World War II and the death of both Jesse and George the tenancy was surrendered in 1960.



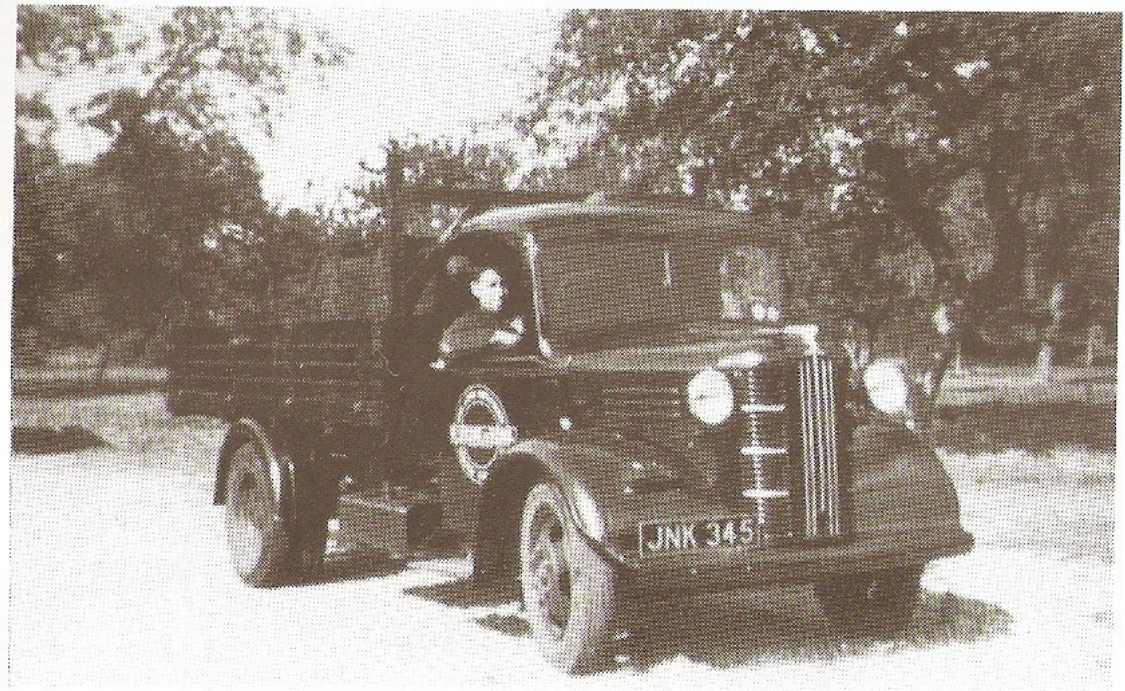
Ken Litchfield with Walter Stone's horse – 'Baby'.

The coal business was to continue for many years, run by Robert Woods who married George's daughter (Doris). He had bought this side of the family business in 1947, replacing the Ford lorry with a new Austin lorry.

Although the family were tenants for nearly 70 years, the land was sold by the Woolwrych family to John Dickinson and Company, the local paper manufacturers. Dickinsons' had purchased several areas of land in



Jesse Stone outside orchard with 'Chestnut'. In the background behind cart is the shed where fruit was sold.



Bob Woods with his new 1947 Austin lorry load with sacks of coal. The coal was collected from Croxley Met. Station and transferred to coal bays in the paddock area.



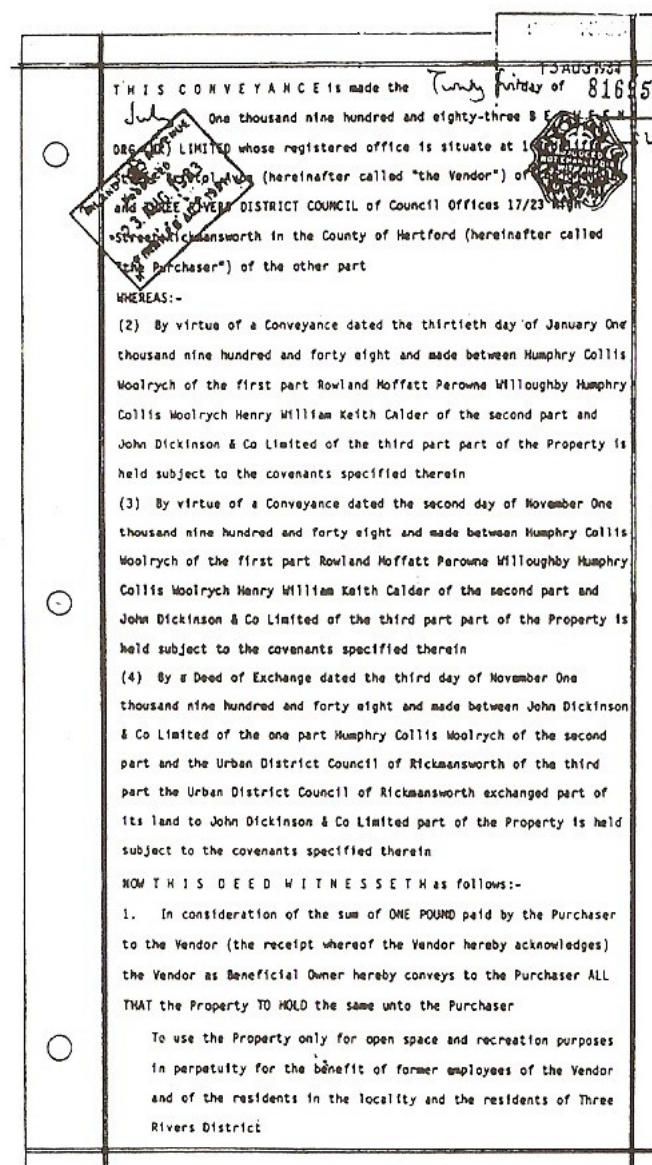
Doris Stone (8 years) in 1928 with her father George. Doris remembers delivering fresh milk to nearby villagers, she married Bob Woods who took over the coal/coke side of the business.



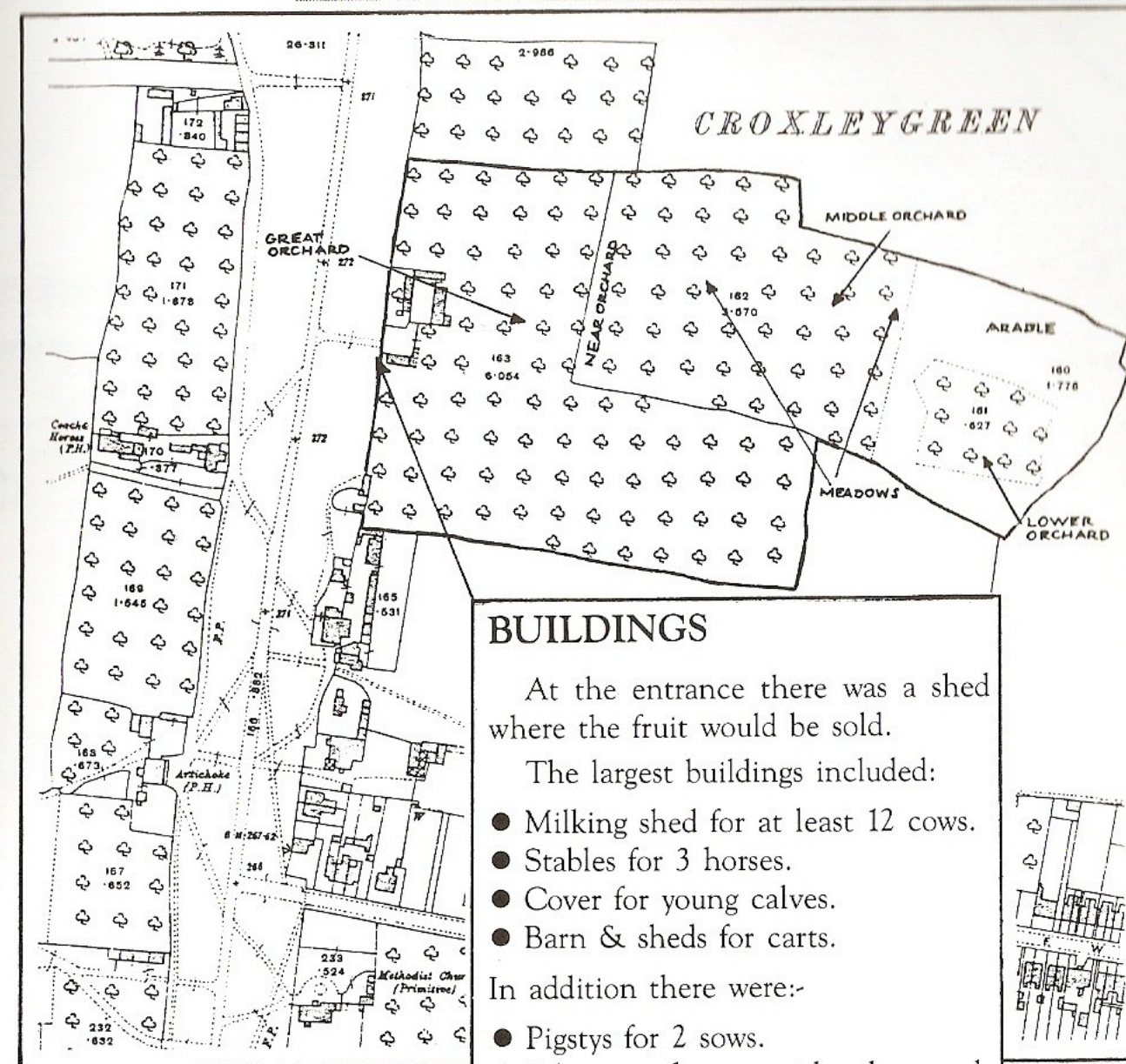
Jesse and George Stone with Jack Cripps (an engine driver with GWR).

Croxley Green for housing and leisure facilities for the benefit of their employees. Much of the site eventually was owned by John Dickinson & Company who in turn sold parts to Hertfordshire County Council for Yorke Mead School. In due course Hertfordshire County Council sold part of the school grounds for the Cherwell Close housing development.

All that remained of the original site by the 1970's was approximately 3½ acres. This land was also under threat, when John Dickinson & Company applied for planning consent to develop the site for housing. This proved unsuccessful and in 1983, Stones Orchard was sold to Three Rivers District Council for the sum of £1.



Stones Orchard



STONES ORCHARD 1839, ALSO SHOWING OTHER ORCHARDS ON GREEN.

THE FUTURE – COMMUNITY ORCHARDS?

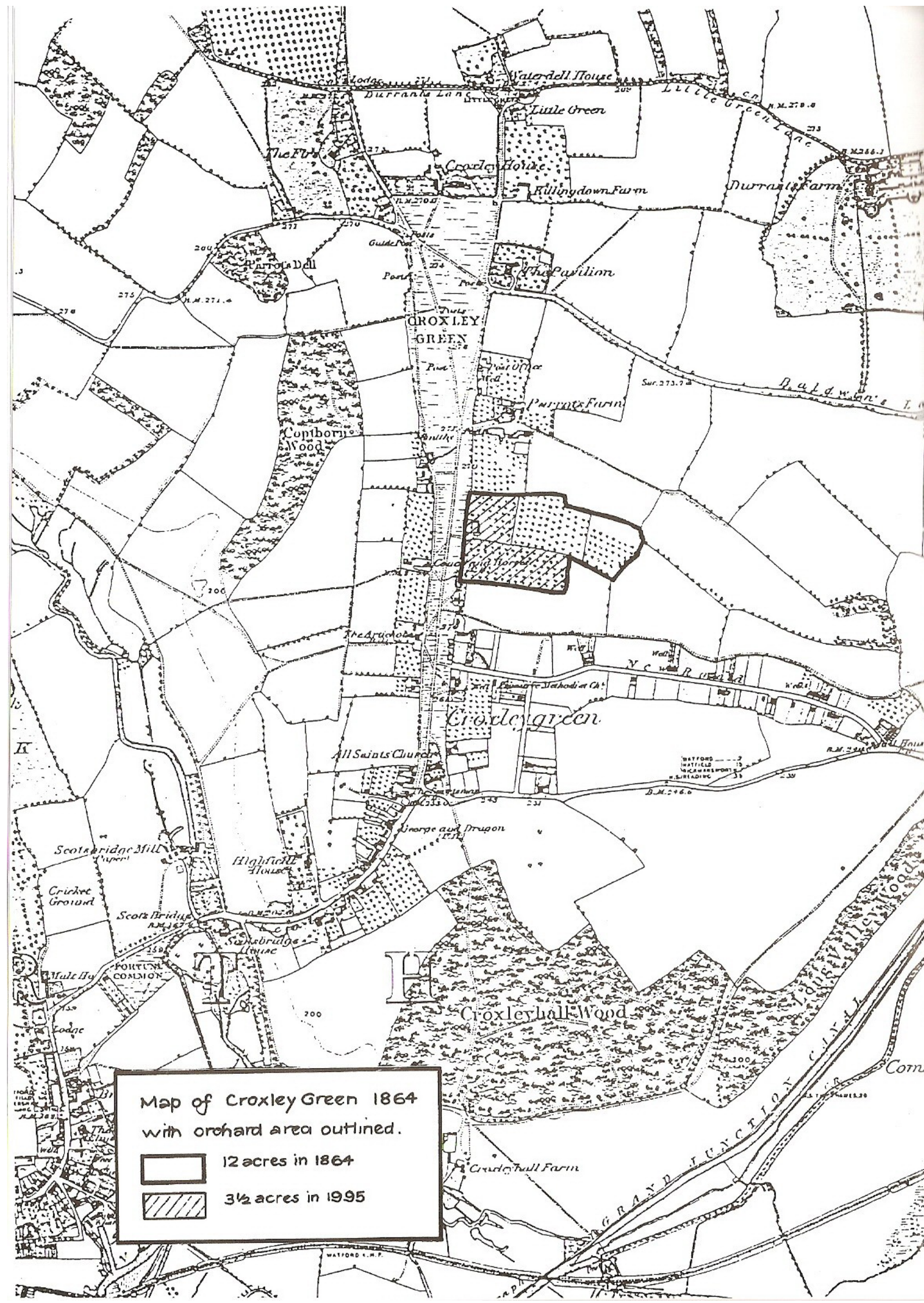
The conservation importance of old orchards has become increasingly recognised in recent years and this has been promoted nationally by organisations such as Common Ground. Orchards represent many things:

- They are surviving remnants of a former agricultural use, often intimately linked to the local communities.
- They contain old – often local – varieties of fruit trees now generally lost due to the development of modern, more productive varieties.
- Surviving trees themselves can be very old, providing very valuable ecological niches for lower plants such as mosses, as well as insects, some of which may have been closely associated with the locally abundant fruit trees.
- Associated grasslands may be herb-rich and be of conservation value in their own right.
- They can provide features of local landscape importance.
- They can be simply open 'greenspace' with a tasty bi-product!
- Old orchards can provide a living historical link with our past in addition to being of wildlife importance.
- Orchards are clearly about fruit trees and one aspect that characterises Stones Orchard is that there are now not many left.

Common Ground encourages local communities to manage old existing orchards or to create new orchards. These community orchards can then be widely used for many activities. (At present over 18 counties in England have community orchards managed by Parish District & Conservation Societies). They can act as an open air classroom for young children – a study area in support of school work eg. survey techniques, drawing up plans and

studying flora and fauna.

Orchards can provide a safe place for community activities such as 'Apple Day' celebrated on October 21st each year. This was an old custom whereby on special occasions apples would be given as a token of friendship and to wish good health. Common Ground encourage local communities to celebrate this day to save the English Apple since 1990. Traditional customs and games take place in the orchards.



Map of Croxley Green 1864
with orchard area outlined.

- 12 acres in 1864
- ▨ 3 1/2 acres in 1995

Orchards not only provide fruit but can yield valuable 'lost' wood, often in demand by local craftsmen.

- **Applewood** is used for the heads of golf clubs.
- **Pear wood** was traditional for making harpsichords.
- **Cherry** an attractive and handsome wood, in the 1700's was next popular to oak for the inside of buildings – houses and barns.

A community orchard can help conserve local varieties of fruit, such as Lanes Prince Albert and provide an area for walking, picnics and relaxation. They can also be a source of free fresh fruit for local people.

A wide range of plants can co-habit with trees in an orchard including many wild flowers. Many bird species will visit orchards and nest in the locality. Small animals such as mice, voles and shrews will make their homes close to a '24 hour supermarket'. The value of grass in orchards helps to maintain good soil structure by cutting and allowing the mowings to rot where they fall.

Community orchards are being encouraged by Brogdale Agricultural Trust, an organisation renowned for its fruit collection of over 2300 varieties of apples, 500 pear varieties, 350 plum varieties and 220 cherry varieties, as well as nuts, medlars and soft fruit in over 30 acres of orchards in Kent.



In May & July 1994, volunteers under the guidance of the Countryside Management Services removed over 1000 Ragwort plants by hand that were becoming invasive.

