

Apple Detectives. A search for the lost varieties of Worcestershire

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Worcestershire was once renowned as an Orchard county, from the plums of the vale of Evesham to the Cherry orchards of Wyre Forest, apples of the Teme valley or the Pears of Pershore or Pearshore as it was supposedly once named.

As a result a good number of fruit varieties originated here in the county, that is to say they were either found as local seedlings or were bred by local nurserymen crossing existing varieties. Some 25 years ago that excellent little charity Common Ground in its celebration of Local Distinctiveness put together an Apple map of the UK, listing the varieties that supposedly originated in each county. Their Worcestershire list numbered 20 apple varieties., three pears and two plums. In the years that followed Worcestershire County Council in conjunction firstly with Pershore College and then later with Walcot nursery ran a scheme encouraging the propagation and planting of these County varieties and as a result in the last 20 years many of our local apples, plums and pears have been grown in orchards, gardens and allotments across the county.

Having responsibility for this scheme as Worcestershire County Council Countryside officer I began researching further and have over the last 15 years managed to add to that original Common Ground list a number of the more obscure and rarer County varieties, taking the list to 32 known apple varieties and a dozen lost ones.

The study of fruit, especially apples, or Pomology as it is known peaked in the mid 1800's when a number of great reference works or Pomona's were produced. Most notably the Herefordshire Pomona of 1876 published by the Woolhope Dome society.

By going back and looking at the varieties described in the 1800's as well as those in earlier reference works from the 1700's and even the 1600's we find a good number of varieties described which are no longer known today, they are effectively lost, presumed extinct.

My particular interest being apples I have attempted to list and describe all the Worcestershire apples in one place for what I believe is the first time ever, as there has never been a Worcestershire Pomona. Along with Becky Lashley I created www.worcestershireorchards.co.uk where they can all now be viewed. This set me wondering if any of these lost varieties were still out there somewhere. By lost we mean they are not in the National collection at Brogdale in Kent or known to the collections of the Marcher Apple Network, and they are not available as trees from any nursery and so as far as we can tell there are no known examples (That we know of!). Perhaps the most referenced work is Robert Hogg's *The Fruit Manual* of 1884 in which he records the varieties he encountered at that time on his travels around the country. I meticulously went through all the apple varieties looking for any with Worcestershire references and then cross referenced those against what is known today, hence the Lost Varieties list (below).

In terms of trying to find them it's a case like any other detective story of looking for clues. Most of these varieties have an association with a specific village or parish as being their place of origin, so that seemed the best place to start. Back in 1999 Peter Weekes, then Tree Warden for Ombersley, had rediscovered the Chatley's Kernel apple within the Parish so there was precedent for this approach.

For one particular variety The Martin Nonpareil of Martin Hussingtree, first introduced by the Rev George Williams in 1795 which seemed to have disappeared for most of the 20th century, the parish seemed the best place to look, so I submitted an article to the parish magazine about their lost village apple. This resulted in a

lady getting in touch saying she had two apple trees that sounded like the description. A collection of specimen apples from her trees were looked at by various authorities (RHS Wisley, John Edgeley (ex of Pershore College), Marcher Apple Network etc)., No-one had ever seen it before and could not put any other name to it so they concluded they had no reason to believe it wasn't the Martin Nonpareil as written about by Hogg in 1884 but not seen or known of for decades. Here we had two trees of the same age and same variety in the garden of an old cottage in the village of origin that were a really good match and could not be identified as any other known variety, hence the case is made that we had indeed rediscovered a lost variety. I grafted a few in that first year and Walcot nursery have produced a small number which are now available to buy. In this instance we were lucky in that there was an illustration of Martin Nonpareil from a Pomological publication of the early 1800's, in most cases we have only descriptions to go on. The fact there were two trees, was also highly significant and ruled out the possibility of a chance random seedling, these were clearly the same variety and planted at the same time. Pictures of the apples are shown in 01 02. 03 is a stored apple photographed in January. They turn completely yellow but the shape and skin are identical to the historical illustration. 04. is the picture from *The Pomological Britannica* Volume 2, London published in 1841, identical to 03



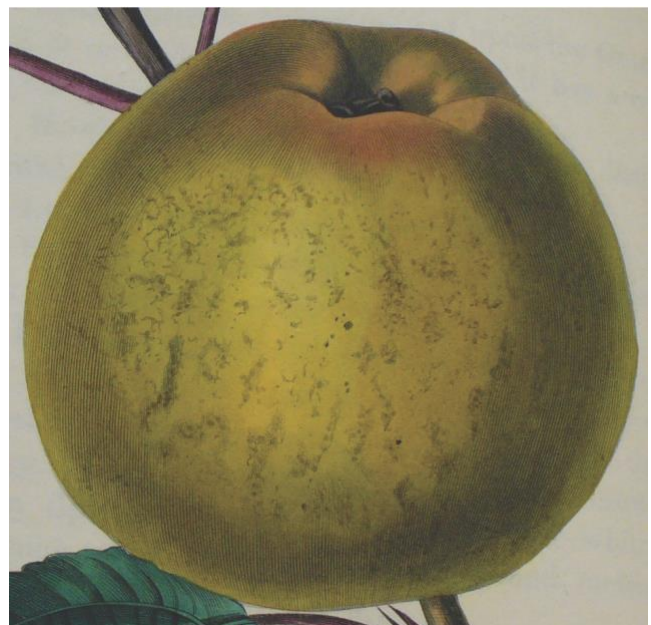
01. The Martin Nonpareil. Wade Muggleton.



02. The Martin Nonpareil. Wade Muggleton.



03. A Martin Nonpareil stored until January. Wade Muggleton



04. Martin Nonpareil from 1841 The Pomological Britannica Vol II, London.

Anecdotal evidence is another way of searching out lost varieties, several contacts in the Teme Valley, all now in their 80's talk about an apple once grown in the valley known as Jones's Seedling. This does not appear in any of the Pomona's or reference works, yet four individuals all verify it was an early season apple grown on various farms around the Rochford and Tenbury Wells area up until the second world war. There is a Jones's Seedling in the national apple register (1971) listed as a late season cooker from Surrey but it is

clearly not the same apple, the Teme Valley one being a red early season eater. One of those individuals, John Edwards of St Michaels, claimed to have one remaining very old tree, (to date we have yet to find another). Extremely old trees can be very difficult to propagate due to the lack of young scion wood suitable for budding or grafting. Finding what we could I budded six onto young rootstocks in the July of 2014, and amazingly by the following

summer all six had taken. Who Jones was we shall probably never know, and we can only speculate when it originated, but I feel there is enough anecdotal evidence to support this as being a previously unrecorded variety which could have been down to the last tree? Pictures of the apples are shown in 05 and 06.



05. Jones's seedling from the Teme Valley. Wade Muggleton



06. Jones's Seedling from the Teme Valley. Wade Muggleton

The following varieties are at the time of writing still lost: unless you know otherwise that is! Any information would be most gratefully received. Those with only the most minimal description are unlikely to ever be found as there is not enough detail to verify them so bar finding a tree with a label on it they will not be found. contact@worcestershireorchards.co.uk

Barn Apple - the only known record is an exhibition date of 1883 from Worcester. No other information known.

Jones' Favourite - the only known record of this apple is from 1883 when it was exhibited by a Ritchie of Worcester. Described as a large, conical apple, ribbed with a pale yellow skin and a dry flesh, mid season.

Knott's Kernel* – reported in 1884 to have been much grown in the orchards of Worcestershire. This is a striped, medium sized, early season cooking apple. It is roundish if slightly flattened in shape, with skin said to be citron coloured and considerably covered in dark purplish stripes. It has a crisp juicy flesh with a brisk acidity.

Pigeon's Heart* - recorded in 1861 from Smith of Worcester. Said to be a large to medium-sized cooking apple with yellowish-green skin flushed with brown streaks and red russet dots. The flesh is crisp and tinged green and the flavour subacid. It harvests very late and is said to keep until May. It is possible this is the same apple as Pigeon de Jerusalem a French variety from the 1700's.

Red Splash* – said to have been widely grown in the Newland area of Malvern and surrounding parishes and sold mainly to the producers of pickles, chutneys and apple jellies. A small apple of about two inches in size, golden-yellow skin with extensive crimson streaks. It is in the Herefordshire Pomona (1876) as a cider apple.

Sytchampton Russet* - a medium sized eating apple with a skin of grey russet with brownish flush. The flesh is crisp, tender and yellowish and the flavour is aromatic. It keeps well until February. It may also have once been called Sitchampton Pearmain.

Pitmaston Golden Wreath* - a tiny yellow crab apple originating from J Williams Esq. of Pitmaston, Worcester. Said to be a cross between Golden Pippin and Siberian Crab.

Pitmaston Golden Pippin* - a small, yellow desert apple, seemingly similar to Pitmaston Pineapple if the description is to be believed. Again originating from Williams nursery in Pitmaston.

Worcester Russet – in the National Apple Register (1971) as being recorded in 1853. No other records.

Worcestershire Russet – in national apple Register (1971) as being recorded in 1864 no other records.

Worcefter Apple – (old English spelling) in John Rea's Flora, Ceres & Pomona of 1679 no other records.

Worcester Silk – mention is made of this in some Marcher Apple network notes for the early 1990's however it is unclear if this refers to an apple or pear. No other records.

For those marked * lengthier and far more detailed descriptions can be found in Robert Hogg's *The Fruit Manual* of 1884, which is still in print: ISBN 1-904078-03-6.

So does it matter if we lose these old varieties? None of them are grown commercially and some never were. But I think, yes it does matter: the old saying extinction is forever is true and once that genetic combination is gone it will never be again and we may need a varied gene pool amongst our apples in the future to safeguard against diseases etc.

Worcestershire Apples still in existence

For full descriptions and Photographs see www.worcestershireorchards.co.uk

Betty Geeson
 Captain Tom
 Catshead
 Chatley's Kernel
 Colwall Quoining
 Dewdulip Seedling
 Dick's Favourite
 Doddin
 Edward VII
 Gladstone
 Green Purnell
 Gwendolin
 Haughty's Red
 Herefordshire Russet
 Hope Cottage Seedling
 Jones's Seedling
 King Charles Pearmain
 King Coffee
 Lord Hindlip
 May Queen
 Madresfield Court
 Martin Nonpareil
 Newland Sack
 Pitmaston Nonpareil
 Pitmaston Pineapple
 Queen Alexandra
 Red Blenheim
 Sandlin Duchess
 Tupstones
 Whiting Pippin
 William Crump
 Worcester Pearmain

References

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 Hogg, R. 1884. *The Fruit Manual*, Langford press (reprint)
 Rea, J. 1676. *Flora, Ceres & Pomona*. George Marriott, London
 Woolhope Naturalists Field Club 1878, *The Herefordshire Pomona*, Folio society reprint 2014.
 Reference to picture 06. 1841, *The Pomological Britannica* Vol 2, London

Images

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