**SLOG Chairman’s Report 2023/24**

I am pleased to report that SLOG has had another busy and successful year with membership numbers similar to last year and finances in good shape.

Our budding & summer pruning workshop in August at Growing Well was well attended in good weather. In September about 30 members enjoyed a visit to John Hibbert’s Broughton Bank orchards in fine weather nicely rounded off with cider & perry tasting.

The apple harvest in autumn 2023 was less than the previous year due to spring frosts but nevertheless our apples presses were in strong demand. Happily they all worked well without breakdowns although at the end of the season Mike Gibson had to make repairs to a leakage on the hydropress due to wear and tear. The barrel press was again well used by local schools.

Our three members pressing days at Halecat, Foxfield and Sprint Mill were all fully booked on a time slot basis. We also attended four apple day events run by other groups, offering identification & advice.

November saw us back at Andy Brown’s Mill Field Orchard at Crosthwaite in damp weather where a dozen or so hardy members participated in a planting and formative pruning workshop.

Our winter meeting in November named a few more apple & pear trees which had been declared unique by DNA analysis and we had a review of pests, diseases and other orchard problems.

Tree sales over the winter period were again very strong with over 250 trees sold. In spring we grafted another 400 apples which Kirsten & Paul will grow on at Barber Green for sale in 4Q24.

The winter pruning workshop in January at Grange Community Orchard was very well attended in quite benign weather conditions.

Our bulk rootstock order from Mathews was 1400 rootstocks, down a little from last year, partly because we only held one grafting workshop. This was well attended as usual and members grafted over 100 new apple & pear trees.

The mild spring weather enabled a frost-free blossom period leading to a heavy fruit set which may require thinning. The spring working party at the SLOG orchard planted five new apple trees, replacing some which had been removed as non-authentic by DNA analysis. We also tried top working on a couple of trees, most of which took successfully. The mowing of the SLOG orchard has been contracted to Horticare who are doing a very good job.

In May about thirty members had a private orchard visit to Gresgarth Hall, courtesy of Arabella Lennox-Boyd who is a SLOG member. Head Gardener Emily Quantrill showed us around the vegetable garden with its striking box-shaped pears and espaliered apples, after which we were free to wander around the rest of the extensive grounds surrounding the Artle Beck.

The DNA program this year has been a huge disappointment. NIAB decided to move the analysis from East Malling to Cambridge who have encountered a series of misfortunes culminating in their ABI analyser being declared beyond economic repair so this step of the analysis is being contracted out. They still believe they can eventually provide results from the 2023 samples but nobody knows when. Meanwhile the 2024 sampling program has been cancelled. It is hoped that another DNA program will take place in 2025.

In closing, I want to highlight the voluntary work of so many people who ensure that SLOG continues to provide a valuable service to our members. Hilary Wilson & Phil Rainford who share their expertise in our workshops, Andy Brown for keeping the website colourful and up-to-date, Kirsten & Paul for managing our tree maintenance & sales, Joanna Steven our Membership Secretary, Mike and Christine Gibson who manage the Spiedel Mill & Hydropress kit hire, Dick Palmer who manages the Voran Mill and Rack & Cloth Press plus all who joined SLOG orchard working parties and all Committee members. Particular thanks go to Adam Walker who has retired from the post of Treasurer after ten years, and welcome to Penny Hitchin who kindly volunteered to step into the breach. And thanks to all members for your continued interest in, and membership of SLOG. Finally I must again emphasise that none of us are getting any younger and health and family problems keep cropping up, so anybody who wants to get more actively involved would be made very welcome!

Andy Gilchrist, Chairman SLOG, July 2024