

# SLOG Chairman's Report 2019/20

Unlucky thirteen! This has been SLOG's most frustrating year in the 13yrs of our existence. Our year which commences in July ran smoothly enough for 8½ months until disaster struck in the shape of the Covid-19 pandemic which curtailed all activities from March to our year-end in June.

Starting with what went well: We had a joint orchard visit with NCOG to Dalemain in August where Hilary led a group of twenty around the public gardens and the private walled garden. In September our budding & summer pruning workshop at Growing Well was attended by about twenty members in pleasant sunny weather.

Our mills & presses were busy at six pressing days from late September to early November, in addition to extensive hire use by members. The barrel press & scrapper was again well used by local schools. Our winter meeting in early December was attended by fifteen members and we conjured up names for 9 pear and 5 apple varieties which had been identified as unique by DNA testing. Their pictures and names can be found on the website.

The DNA results of the 74 apple and 21 pear samples we submitted last year were published by FruitID in January revealing the usual mixture of confirmations, duplications and surprises. Following on from previous DNA analyses and characterisations of unique varieties, we had another four local varieties added to the "Register of Local Cultivars" at the November panel meeting. A further DNA study at Aberystwyth University showed that the "Lady's Finger" group of apples have rather confused identities but we have made progress in terms of identifying the correct *Lady's Finger of Lancaster* and differentiating it from the very similar *Grandpa Buxton* and *Wass Apple*.

Entering 2020 without realising what was to come, we had a very busy winter pruning workshop in January attended by about thirty members at Grange Community orchard, followed in February by our ever popular grafting workshop at Growing Well, also with an attendance of thirty. However, March brought the realisation that the virus risk had to be taken very seriously so we cancelled a further two grafting workshops planned for March. Subsequently, Damson Day was cancelled and that was effectively the end of our group activities for the spring/summer period.

One highlight of the year was the award of "National Plant Collection" status by the UK governing body Plant Heritage to the SLOG Orchard's "*Malus domestica*: North West English Apple Cultivars" which resulted in useful publicity on BBC Northwest and Northeast TV and on BBC Radio Cumbria plus local press. This means that SLOG is now acknowledged, as a result of our DNA validations, as the official reference collection of heritage Cumbrian and Lancashire apple varieties.

Our tree sales are now in the capable hands of Kirsten Jones & Paul Atkins, having completed the transition from Adele & Mike's stewardship. So we continue to graft our own trees as before but now they are grown on and sold from Kirsten & Paul's enterprise at High Newton.

Our grant program for community & school orchards continues steadily; during the winter we donated twenty trees to each of Penny Bridge Primary School and Grasmere Primary school to plant up their own orchards.

After more than ten years capably managing the SLOG website, Ros Taylor handed over to Andy Brown who has refreshed the website using a new software package which he also uses for the Kendal Beekeepers website.

As always, 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, Ros Taylor and now Andy Brown for keeping the website relevant and up-to-date, Mike & Adele and now Kirsten & Paul for managing our tree maintenance & sales, Andrew Hockenhull at National Trust Sizergh Castle for managing the Spiedel Mill & Hydropress hirings, Dick Palmer for managing the Voran Mill & rack & cloth press hirings, Adam Walker as Treasurer, Adam Rubenstein as Membership Secretary, plus all who joined SLOG orchard working parties and all Committee members. And thanks to all members for your continued interest in, and membership of SLOG.

Andy Gilchrist, Chairman SLOG, October 2020