



THE APPLE OF YOUR EYE

SLOG QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 47 – SPRING 2021

*** FRUIT GROWING ***

CONSERVING LOCAL ORCHARDS

PROMOTING HERITAGE VARIETIES

www.slorchards.com

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Editorial

The dominant current feature casting a dark cloud over every aspect of our lives is the Covid-19 pandemic. SLOG is not immune and we were obliged regrettably to cancel our winter meeting last November and our winter pruning workshop in January. The guidance from government suggests that the eventual exit from lockdown will be too late to hold a grafting workshop so we have put a “Plan B” in place which allows members to still graft their own apple & pear trees this spring. We are offering a “Graft at Home” kit which will contain:

- One or more rootstocks of M25, MM111, MM106, M26 or Quince A
- An equivalent number of pieces of scion wood of varieties of your choice (subject to availability)
- An appropriate amount of grafting tape
- The appropriate number of labels
- Tea-light for wax

- Instruction sheet
- Link to a U-tube “how to” video



The “Graft at Home” kit is priced at only £3 per rootstock or multiples thereof plus p&p or collect from me in Kendal. To order, email: andygilchrist@hotmail.co.uk

As the daylength increases, its time to prepare for the new season. Our orchards will “spring” into growth oblivious of pandemics and regulations. February is a good time to feed your trees by spreading a mulch of garden compost to provide nitrogen and act as a soil conditioner; and wood-ash from a logburner or bonfire to provide potassium. Alternatively a dressing of blood, fish & bone will provide the same nutrients in a slow release form. In case the coming season is early, winter pruning of apples & pears should be completed as soon as possible, and not later than end of March.

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS

For the most up-to-date information look in:
<https://www.slorchards.com/events>

Saturday 13th March - SLOG Orchard Spring Working Party from 10am. (subject to government regulations - see page 3 for more details & directions)

Damson Day at Low Farm, Lyth Valley LA8 8DJ This event, normally held in mid-April looks unlikely to go ahead this year. See <http://www.lythdamsons.org.uk/index.html>
Directions: Take A590 to Gilpin Bridge, then A5074 direction Bowness for 2 miles toward Low Farm. Follow signs to car park in adjacent field.

Tuesday July 27th 7.30pm – SLOG AGM
Let's hope that by summer, indoor events such as this will be possible! Reports from Chairman, Treasurer & Membership Secretary and election of officers. We plan to demonstrate the new website and facebook page and invite members input into their future development. Followed by our fifth annual soft fruit show. Categories include heaviest gooseberry, best strig of black/white/redcurrants, best display of 5 raspberries and 5 of any other berries. Since we were unable to hold the AGM last year, officers reports have been posted on the website at: [Constitution | South Lakes Orchard \(slorchards.com\)](#) where the reports are at the foot of the page. Meanwhile, all Officers & Committee remain in post for 2020/21 and subscription rates are unchanged.

Further information on spring/summer events will be provided by email and posted on the website.

RECENT EVENTS

WINTER PRUNING WORKSHOP
Saturday 23rd January
Grange-over-Sands Community Orchard

The declaration of a National Lockdown prevented us from running this workshop as planned. We initially hoped to postpone it until the lockdown was lifted but had to accept that might not be before March when the orchard had to be pruned on contract so it was finally decided to cancel the event completely. As a substitute for

members who had been hoping to learn about pruning, see the article on page 4.

Judith & Ron Shapland who are the guardians of the Grange Community Orchard have kept cropping records over the last several years which provide useful information on the performance of the different species and varieties in the orchard. The best cropping species are: medlar, mulberry, apple, pear, cherry & Westmorland damson. Less good are other damsons, while plum/gage & quince are poor. Amongst the 30 varieties of apple, the best cropping varieties over the last three years have been: *George Cave*, *Sunset*, *Bramley's Seedling*, *Ashmead's Kernel*, *Golden Noble*, *Grandpa Buxton*, *Howgate Wonder* & *White Melrose*, closely followed by: *Beeley Pippin*, *Blenheim Orange*, *Charles Ross*, *Egremont Russet*, *John Huggett*, *Keswick Codlin*, *Lord Derby*, & *Pixie*. However, these results need to be treated with great caution because there is only one tree of each variety and the soil quality and depth varies considerably around the orchard, which is why some varieties that we know can do better have fared poorly here because they are on a shallow bed of poor soil overlying limestone.

SLOG ORCHARD UPDATE

Our winter working party this year was postponed from the originally planned November date due to the second lockdown. We emerged from lockdown in December and fortunately the first Saturday proved to be sunny with clear blue skies. A select group of five removed two DNA misnomers: *Millyard Red* which turned out to be *Norfolk Royal* and *Roland's Reliable* which was a badly cankered *James Grieve*. We planted 5 new trees: *Lady's Finger of Lancaster*, *Joaneting*, *Longstart*, *Red Nuisance* and *Tarnside Red*, finding the soil in excellent condition despite all the recent rain. We loosened some ties, pruned the roses and attached new Plant Heritage labels to some of the trees. The biggest challenge was the removal of a pussy willow on the northern border which had rapidly grown out of control and was shading and competing with our own trees and possibly being a frost barrier by holding frost in the orchard instead of it rolling away down the slope. The main limbs went as firewood and the rest was removed to be burned on a bonfire. Thanks to Ros, Debbie, Karen and Hugh.

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The orchard lies dormant on a cold and frosty January morning. Over twenty of our apple trees have been attacked by canker in recent years, so an assessment was carried out in mid-winter while the trees were bare, making it easier to see the cankers. The following varieties had been removed because the canker was girdling the trunk: *Winter Banana*, *Orleans Reinette*, *James Grieve* & *Lorton Vale*. Varieties still in situ with aggressive cankers: *Elstar*, *Lady's Finger of Lancaster*, *Cockpit Improved* & *Nancy Crow*. Trees with low level canker: *Saturn*, *Duke of Devonshire*, *Acklam Russet*, *Grandpa Buxton*, *Sykehouse Russet*, *Blenheim Orange*, *Josephine*, *Yorkshire Aromatic* and *King Pear*. Varieties previously cankered but now recovered: *Yorkshire Greening*, *Liddell's Seedling*, *Hunthouse*, *Alderman* & *Lady Sudeley*. It is a curious feature of canker that an aggressive lesion can spread for a while and then go into remission for reasons that are not obvious. The spring working party will be on Saturday 13th March (subject to gov.regs) from 10am when we plan to spread the contents of the compost heap around the trees, apply blood, fish & bonemeal, insert some more long canes, remove suckers and remove a couple of varieties found to be false in the recent round of DNA results. The SLOG orchard is on the Underley Road Allotments, situated between Underley Road & Hallgarth Circle just east of Windermere Road. The south entrance is off Underley Road from where a narrow green lane leads to a gate on your left which opens directly into the orchard.

2020 DNA RESULTS

Last year we submitted a total of 68 apple and 16 pear samples to East Malling Research under the aegis of fruitID. Our results, along with those of all other regional orchard groups can be found on the fruitID website: [fruitID | Apple Identification | Apple Varieties | Apple Cultivars](#)

Amongst the apples, 46 gave a match to the database, meaning they were known varieties. Five gave matches to other varieties which are not in the Brogdale collection but had already been sent in by other groups. 16 gave no match at all meaning they are unique, previously unrecorded varieties. We will attempt to characterise the fruit of these “unique” varieties in order to propose them for acceptance onto the Register of Local Cultivars. One example of this latter category is a Yorkshire apple *Red Balsam* rediscovered by Hilary. Another two Yorkshire varieties *Rymer* & *Sykehouse Russet* are not in the National Collection at Brogdale but have been sent in by us and other regional groups.



Red Balsam



Sykehouse Russet (false)

However there is debate about their identity because their fruit don't match literature descriptions and it is possible that the authentic versions may have been lost. Unfortunately this situation arises quite often amongst lesser known heritage varieties and can take a long time to resolve, if ever. We also tested many of our Lancashire varieties in the SLOG orchard and were successful in validating most of them, but two, *Florence Bennett* & *Lancashire Seedling*, turned out to be false. We will try to obtain authentic scion wood of *Florence Bennett*, but *Lancashire Seedling* is not in any other collection nor even the National Apple Register so may simply be a synonym of *Lancashire Pippin* which it was revealed to be.

Our pear samples gave 9 database matches (ie known varieties), 2 other matches and 5 unique varieties. An interesting result was that CR22 from the Crookfoot orchard turned out to be *Monarch*, a late dessert pear raised in 1830 and named for King William IV. It was popular in Victorian times as one of our best New Year varieties and this may be the first time it has been identified in Cumbria.

The DNA analysis program will be repeated in 2021 at a price of £33.12 per sample – anybody wanting to use this service should advise me by end April.

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REGISTER OF LOCAL CULTIVARS

The Register of Local Cultivars is an internet initiative first published in December 2018 by fruitID as a reference document of previously unrecorded local apple cultivars declared “unique” by DNA analysis and accepted by the Review Panel. The list was again updated in December 2020 and can be found at: [2020 Register of Local Cultivars - Preliminary Issue v3.01.pdf - OneDrive \(live.com\)](#)

There are now ten Cumbrian apple varieties listed along with one Lancashire apple and two Lancashire pears. We plan to continue making submissions in future years, particularly from the varieties growing in the “Cumbrian Seedling” row of the SLOG orchard.

RHS PRUNING GUIDANCE

How much do I prune off?

Aim to take between 10-20% of the overall canopy off in any one winter. Work around the tree evenly and keep an eye on your pruning pile - if it's looking a little big, STOP - you can always go back next year and do some more.

A little word of warning: The more you prune, the stronger the regrowth (if the tree is healthy). If you have pruned too hard, your tree is likely to produce vigorous upright branches called watershoots. This isn't ideal as they crowd the crown. Watershoots growing in a convenient place – e.g. filling a gap – can be pruned by about a third to encourage branching.

Otherwise, remove watershoots from their point of origin. **What am I trying to achieve?**

Your aim is to take out a bit of old wood each winter, to stimulate new. But the majority of the fruiting wood should be quite young - one to four years old, which is the wood that fruits best. Also aim to create an open centre to your tree. This allows more light into the canopy to ripen the shoots and fruit. Improved air movement discourages diseases.

Avoid a 'hair cut'

Try to stagger your pruning cuts throughout the canopy. That way, the regrowth too will be even. If you only prune the top branches, this is where all the new growth will shoot up from, giving you a thicket of young, non-fruiting

shoots that you'll just end up pruning off every year in exasperation. This will also reduce fruiting of tip and partial tip-bearing such as ‘*Bramley*’ and ‘*Discovery*’ as most of the fruiting wood will be removed.

Think of it as a thinning out process, selectively removing or shortening a branch here and there as you move around the tree. Focus on areas where the growth seems more crowded.

Avoid very big and very little pruning cuts

Even with very old trees, resist the temptation to prune off large limbs. These are at risk of decay. As a general rule, think twice before cutting into branches that are more than 10-12cm (4-5in) in diameter. If you must prune that branch, trace it away from the tree to see if there is a narrower section, perhaps where it forks and prune there instead. Avoid leaving a stub.

Equally, this is not about fiddly pruning. Most of your pruning cuts will be to branches that are between 1-5cm (½-2in). A fully pruned tree might only need 10-20 pruning cuts in total.

Should I use a pruning paint?

No, there is no need to use a pruning paint for cuts on apple or pear trees. However, these are sometimes used on plums, cherries and other members of the *Prunus* family as these are particularly susceptible to disease through pruning cuts.



Young tree in early autumn before winter pruning

After pruning the tree should have an open centre with at main branches

Getting started.

Always use sharp secateurs, loppers and a pruning saw; blunt tools lead to strains and tatty pruning cuts. Start by removing crossing, rubbing, weak, dead, diseased, damaged and dying branches. Then shorten the previous year's growth on each main branch (primary) by about one third to a bud facing in the required direction. This will encourage the development

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of new branches and spurs and maintain a good shape. Leave young laterals (side-shoots) unpruned so they can develop fruit buds in the second year. Only remove the young laterals if they are crossing or if the growth is too crowded, i.e. growing closer than 10-15cm (4-6in) at the base. Remove strong shoots (greater than 15cm (6in) long) growing towards the centre of the tree. On older trees, remove or thin out any spur systems that have become congested. Where thinning or removal is required, remove spurs on the underside of the branches, where the developing fruit will not receive enough light, and produces inferior fruit.

If your apple tree is a tip- or partial tip-bearer (e.g. *'Blenheim Orange'*, *'Bramley's Seedling'*, *'Discovery'*, *'Lord Lambourne'*, *'Worcester Pearmain'*), cut back a proportion of older fruited branches to a strong younger shoot positioned closer to the main trunk or higher up the branch. This will reduce congestion and prevent branches becoming too long.

Winter Regulated Pruning: Traditional winter pruning of apples and pears can result in the tree getting a little bigger each year. To prevent this happening and avoid the need for occasional renovation consider winter regulated pruning. Regulated pruning is carried out to control the size of apples and pears trained as free-standing bushes (or standards) that have reached the optimum size for the rootstock that they are grafted on. This pruning technique is suitable for both spur- and tip- (including partial tip-) bearing apples and pears, as sections of the branch framework are removed rather than individual shoots. If you are new to fruit pruning or are not feeling very confident, you may like to continue with traditional winter pruning or try our pruning made easy page instead. For young apple and pear trees start with our guide on initial pruning, followed by winter pruning. Trees that are very overgrown will require renovation.

When to carry out regulated pruning: The ideal time to prune is any time from leaf fall to late winter, typically November to March in the British Isles. The tree is dormant at this time.

How to prune

Once your apple or pear tree reaches the height it should be for the rootstock, carry out regulated pruning as follows:

- Use a pruning saw. There will be little secateur work
- Cut out all dead, diseased and larger crossing branches
- Prune out strong branches in the centre of the bush in order to keep it open, but leave smaller branches - fruiting spurs and weaker laterals. Stop pruning the branch leaders. They will grow less vigorously if left unpruned and often form fruit buds
- However, where branches have become too long, cut these out completely either to the main trunk or, preferably, to a lower, wider angled, outward facing branch. This branch should be one third the diameter of the branch being removed
- When deciding what wood to remove bear in mind that the tips of branch leaders should be at least 40-45cm (16-18in) apart
- Take your time, observing from a distance and evaluating which branches to keep and which to remove
- Make sure no stubs are left; cut to a branch collar or side branch
- If the bush is a spur bearer, check for congested spur systems. Thin out spurs with secateurs so they are spaced 10-15cm (4-6in) apart and remove spurs that are weak or crowded
- Prune out no more than ten to twenty per cent of the canopy in one year.

Watershoots

As sections of the branch framework are removed the pruned tree is likely to produce watershoots - i.e. tall, upright branches, that produce no flowers or fruit. Minimise the risk of numerous watershoots by pruning no more than twenty per cent of the canopy in one year. If watershoots arise, there is no need to remove all of them but they will need thinning out;

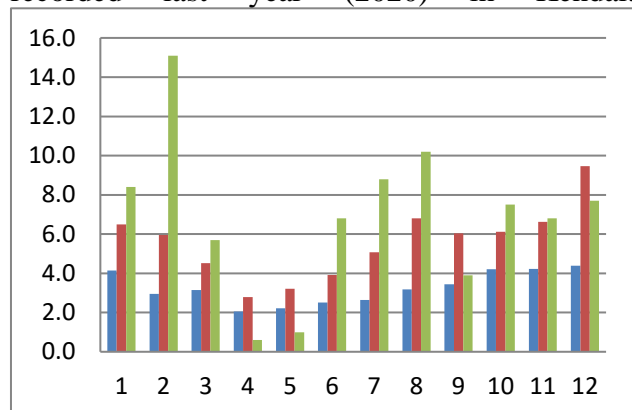
- Consider if any strong, well placed watershoots may be used for as replacement branches in the future and tip prune them by about a quarter to an outward facing bud to encourage branching
- If well placed and not causing congestion of the crown, leave some of the weaker (thinner and less upright) watershoots unpruned. They may produce fruit buds and act as secondary branches
- Remove any remaining water shoots if 23cm (9in) or more in length at the point of origin
- If you spot new watershoots, rub them off during the growing season as they appear

Article courtesy of The Royal Horticultural Society
[RHS - Inspiring everyone to grow / RHS Gardening](#)

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2020 WEATHER REPORT

The chart below shows **total rainfall** in inches (vertical axis) by month (horizontal axis) recorded last year (2020) in Kendal.



Annual rainfall in 2020 (in green above) at 82.5” was 23% above the 10yr average (in brown) and 19% above 2019. It started with the wettest February on record both locally and nationally, followed by the sunniest spring during the first lockdown. However the rain returned with a vengeance during the summer months of June/July/August. Orchards which escaped the April frosts enjoyed a good fruit set during the warm blossom period and the summer rains swelled the fruit to give a good yield at the early harvest.

HERITAGE APPLE VARIETY: *TARNSIDE RED*

Several years ago, Hilary Wilson visited Tarnside Farm at Crosthwaite to attempt the identification of apples in an old orchard. It was here that Hilary rediscovered *Fallbarrow Favourite*, an early season cooker. There was also an old tree, recently cut down, which bore bright red dessert apples, from which she took scion wood and perpetuated it by grafting. Being unable to identify the fruit as any known variety, she called it *Tarnside Red*. She also sent scion wood to Derek Tolman of Bernwode Fruit Trees, a Buckinghamshire nursery specialising in heritage varieties. A few years later when SLOG started planting up the SLOG orchard, we asked Hilary if she still had a *Tarnside Red* to plant there. However it was nowhere to be found so a call was made to Derek Tolman who sent up a piece of scion wood for grafting, which was duly

done and the resulting tree planted in the SLOG orchard. Eventually this tree bore fruit but to our consternation the fruit was relentlessly green with no sign of red whatsoever. By this time the DNA analysis service was available so leaf samples were sent for analysis which revealed that this tree (A679) was an unknown unique variety. However, it was such an ugly tasteless apple, probably a seedling, that the tree was removed from the SLOG orchard. Derek confirmed that it was nothing like his own *Tarnside Red* and kindly sent us a new *Tarnside Red* tree which was planted in the SLOG orchard



this winter.

Tarnside Red apple ©Bernwode Fruit Trees

Meanwhile Mike Gibson, who looks after the hiring of the SLOG Spiedel Mill & Hydropress at Tarnside Farm explained that his Uncle Robert had probably planted the original tree and that several of the trees in the orchard had been raised from seed. So we shall run a DNA analysis on the newly planted tree and find out whether it is unique, meaning it would probably be one of those raised from seed, or whether it turns out to be another old variety such as *Bob's Red* or *Low Farm Pippin* which turn up sporadically around Cumbria. We'll have to wait until January 2022 for the answer!

ROBIN PAGE

It's almost ten years since Robin Page came to give us a talk on the 18th March 2011. Robin continues to be a vocal advocate of environmentally friendly farming, taking issue with perceived narrow interest groups on both sides of the fence ie “industrial farming” and “environmental activism”. As a consequence he has made many enemies (including the BBC, his former employer) but remains characteristically undaunted.

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His most enduring and possibly proudest achievement is the initiation and subsequent growth of The Countryside Restoration Trust. Over a period of 27yrs, this charity which Robin started in his home village of Barton in Cambridgeshire has grown to encompass >2,000 acres of farms, woodlands and small holdings across the UK. Its aims are to demonstrate that a sympathetic mix of traditional and innovative low input farming methods can greatly increase wildlife whilst still producing quality food profitably. See the website for some excellent wildlife photos: [Countryside Restoration Trust](http://www.countryside-restoration-trust.org)

HILARY'S APPLE STORIES

ROSALLY –A KASHMIRI APPLE STORY

In the summer of 1997 Joseph Rosbotham (known as Ros), an arable farmer from Lancashire, made a second journey to Kashmir, the disputed region in the northwest of the Indian subcontinent. He had visited there before and made friends with a family who had a business leasing houseboats for tourists on the lakes in Srinagar. The father of the family had been in poor health and their business had been struggling due to the conflict in Kashmir which had led to a reduction in income from tourism. He wanted to return to see how the family was doing and to visit the more remote region of

Ladakh.

After an eventful trip, Ros travelled back to Srinagar from where he was to take a flight to Delhi and return to the UK and his home in Millthrop near Sedbergh. He bought a bag of apples in the market in Srinagar to provide some fresh food to supplement airline cuisine on the long journey. When he got back to Millthrop a few days later there were still several apples left in the bag. His wife, Sally Jeffery, thought they were the tastiest apples she'd ever eaten and saved some pips to try and propagate them. Perhaps six or eight seeds were planted in two small pots of compost and kept on the windowsill in their kitchen. After two winters sitting in the same pots and getting watered from time to time, with no sign of life, Sally began to berate herself for neglecting them. She was a lifelong gardener and knew very well that seeds such as apple pips need exposure to low temperatures so as to break down the seed coat and allow the embryonic plants to begin to grow. She told herself she should get rid of the pots which were evidence of and a reproach to her neglect. Within a week, she came downstairs one morning to find the stem and two small seed leaves arching lustily through the compost. A couple of mornings later a somewhat daintier seedling emerged in the other pot. Soon, both were planted up into bigger pots and nurtured over several years in their garden in Millthrop. After Ros's father died in 2001, the first and stronger of the little trees was planted at the family farm, Bridge Farm in Rainford, Merseyside, in his memory. The other was planted some years later in the garden of some friends in the Llyn peninsula in north Wales.



The tree at the family farm has had to be moved twice but has always recovered well and grown vigorously, with a rangy habit, and it soon began

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bearing plentiful fruit. Because it is a seedling, the apples are not like the original apples from Srinagar but of an unusual and attractive flavour and they keep well. In early 2020 Ros and Sally cut scions from this tree and Hilary Wilson grafted a dozen or more of them, which have been widely distributed among the apple enthusiasts of Cumbria and maybe beyond!

GRAFTING TO ORDER

The SLOG grafting to order service is still available but only up to early March. If you want a particular variety on a particular rootstock, it can, subject to availability, be grafted for you. Adele Jones is the co-ordinator for this service. Price is unchanged at £15 per tree, buyer collects. Call Adele on 015395 52102 for enquiries & orders.

SLOG SHOP

1. SLOG has a range of container grown maiden apple trees for sale at £15.00 each, comprising traditional varieties suitable for our Northern climate mostly on MM106 rootstocks. Visit <https://www.slorchards.com/trees-for-sale> to see the list and for guidance on purchase and collection.

2. Wells & Winter labels are the most cost-effective permanent solution for recording tree variety identity. They are rigid black plastic labels measuring 2 x 3½" (5x9cm), giving a permanent and very visible result.



They are available at 15p each along with a deposit for the silver pen (if taken away)
3. We again have a stock of spiral rabbit guards for young trees. These have the added advantage that they protect the young tree's trunk from

misdirected hoes or strimmers. Size is 38mm diameter x 18" high, in brown plastic, with holes for air circulation. Priced at 3 for £1 they are a bargain for protecting newly planted trees.

4. Recipe books: 28 full colour pages detailing 45 recipes for a wide range of fruits only £2.50.

5. Apple Notelet cards £2 per pack of 5 different cards each featuring a different apple variety.

6. The Apples & Orchards of Cumbria: Lavishly illustrated with over 100 full colour photos describing the twenty or so Cumbrian apple varieties and the fifteen orchards open to the public. Judged runner-up in the "Landscape & Tradition" category of the Lakeland Book of the Year Awards, 2014. £9

SLOG Discount at Suppliers: Rogers & Beetham Nursery

SLOG has negotiated a 10% discount at Rogers of Pickering for SLOG members. When you place an order for any kind of fruit: trees, bushes, etc., quote your SLOG membership number and Rogers will apply 10% discount to your total bill.

For e-mail orders go to:

<http://www.rvroger.co.uk/?linksource=frontpage>

We also have a 5% discount at Beetham Nursery applicable to Bedding Plants; Bulbs; Composts; Chemicals; Gravels; Garden Sundries; Outdoor Plants; Pots; Seeds and Tools. (but not in the café). Just show your SLOG membership card at the checkout. www.beethamnurseries.co.uk/

TAILPIECE

"The Apple of Your Eye" is a quarterly publication, the next one being the summer issue due mid-May. Contributing articles, preferably in word.doc, are welcome, along with photos where possible, by the end of April 2021 to: andygilchrist@hotmail.co.uk

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