

## In Your Garden

By Robert Blake

### Heritage Apple Collection

Chris Bird, a lecturer at Sparsholt College brought along about 30 different varieties of English heritage apples for his informative and amusing talk to the Gardeners' Club on 2 October. The College has cultivars of 65 apples and 25 pears from Hampshire and the Isle of Wight growing in their orchard, which now forms part of the more than 600 National Plant Collections in the UK. Brogdale in Kent is home to the National Fruit Collection and grows 3500 apple cultivars. There is a resurgence in demand for local fruits, which can be sourced through Farmers' Markets, some supermarkets and online vegetable box schemes.

He went on to explain the different natures of varieties. Early season apples ripen in late July/August and should be eaten within a week or two of picking. Mid-season apples, picked in September and early October, will keep for one to two months depending on the variety. Late apples often need to be kept for the full flavour to develop and will usually last over the winter until April. They should be stored with the stalk facing down in a well ventilated, mouse proof space at ideally about 5°C, which is somewhat difficult to achieve consistently on the south coast!

The popularity of the look and texture of apples has changed over time. Before dentistry came into its own softer flesh varieties were preferred, as many people lost their teeth quite early in adulthood, whereas today customers tend to prefer a firmer, crispier apple. Symmetrically shaped apples with a waxy appearance appealed to many Victorians. Chris gave everyone the opportunity to taste a number



*Bramshott Rectory*

of different local varieties such as Ellison's Orange, which is an early cross of Cox's Orange Pippin with a distinctive aniseed undertone; Bramshott Rectory, a dessert apple with a crisp tart flavour and thought to have originated from an existing tree in the rectory at Liphook during the 17<sup>th</sup> century; Pixie, an offspring of Cox with a



*Ellison's Orange*

very similar taste; and Blenheim Orange, primarily an old English cooker with a nutty sweet taste, which can be eaten with cheese and is ideal at Christmas time – it comes from a very large tree and is best grown on a dwarfing rootstock in a small garden.

The benefits of eating apples are encapsulated in the saying “*an apple a day keeps the doctor away*”. It has been shown that apples lower your cholesterol levels by reducing its absorption, due to the combined effects of fibres and phytochemicals (anti-oxidants), most of which are contained within the peel and the immediate flesh below it. Chris ended his talk by mentioning “*The Apple Book*” by Rosie Sanders, which is an RHS reference book on heritage apples. It contains 144 of her beautifully detailed watercolours of each apple with its blossom, twig and leaf, and the varieties are listed in their order of ripening during the year.



*Pixie*



*Blenheim Orange*