

# the WOLVERCOTE COMMUNITY ORCHARD

**Wolvercote  
Commoners'**  
NEWSLETTER  
September 2020

How often have you walked towards Godstow and, just before the Trout Inn, seen an amazing display of apple trees of different sizes and shapes and, perhaps, wondered what the background to such a display might be – well read on!

'The Wolvercote Community Orchard' was established in 1993, when the first trees were planted. The orchard was created on disused allotments owned by Oxford Preservation Trust. The Wolvercote Tree Group aimed to establish a resource for the village where local heritage apple varieties could be preserved or reintroduced. More than twenty-five years on, the orchard has expanded and matured, now boasting over 40 varieties of apples, some of which will be hard to find anywhere else, with wonderful names like Bampton

Fairing, Peggie's Pride and Annual Sweeting, as well as pears, stone fruits, quince and medlars. The orchard very quickly became a part of village life with the early introduction of an autumn 'Apple Day'. Although it started with just a few small trees and the sale of locally produced apples, it soon grew into an established event on the village calendar. Now, every autumn the community is invited to the orchard and crowds flock in to taste the range of apples, pick their own if they wish and buy pure apple juice pressed during the event from freshly picked fruit. This year, a long-anticipated project to improve access to the orchard was completed, with a reinforced level pathway for wheelchairs users and those with limited mobility. However, the orchard remains closed until the newly-seeded path is well established and quietly blended into its surroundings.

Despite some extreme weather conditions, the trees have fruited well but sadly, with COVID-19 still around, the event cannot be held this year. However don't worry, there's still a chance to buy some of their superb and unique apples. The apples and apple juice are already on sale at the Wolvercote Community Market, held every Sunday morning at the White Hart Community Pub. To find out more see [www.wolvercote.org](http://www.wolvercote.org) or Facebook @wolvercotecommunitymarket.



Photo Nick Malden

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## Why are there so many cows on the Meadow?



As some followers of the Wolvercote & Wytham Facebook page may have noticed, there have been numerous references to the Commons during the lockdown as it became the go-to place. The area was the closest place to retreat to on hot days, to relax, cool down and enjoy the pleasures of the open air. However, some visitors have not been so keen about some of other residents (and we don't mean other people!). There was even one comment that the cows (not to mention the horses) were in fact rather a nuisance! So, why are there so many? To answer that we have to go back a long way in time.

Port Meadow and Wolvercote Common is ancient grazing land which, according to legend, hasn't been ploughed for at least 4,000 years. It is said that in the 9<sup>th</sup> century Alfred the Great granted the Burgesses (now known as the Freeman of Oxford) the right to graze their livestock on the Commons free of charge. This was further affirmed in the Domesday book of 1086 and continues to this day. However, it's not just a case of using those rights for the sake of it – the grazing of livestock is vital to the Commons and without it the area would quickly deteriorate. The Meadow is the product of over 1000 years of being a 'living' landscape. The cows are present from about April till October, whilst many of the horses are out all year. At present there are usually about 300 cattle and 30 to 40 horses at any one time. If that was thought to be a little bit of a nuisance to some visitors, just think what it would be like if the original allocation was continued to this day: originally the numbers allowed were 1,365 horses, 1890 cattle, 6 donkeys, 1192 geese and, last of all, 48 ducks. That makes for a fairly crowded picnic!

**Work Mornings have been suspended until further notice**



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