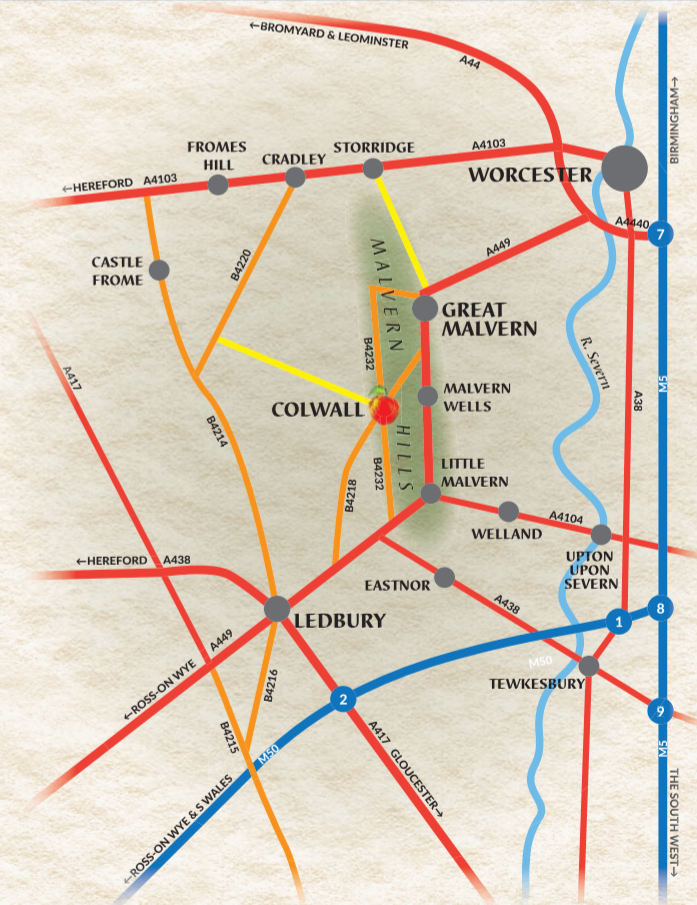




A 2.8 mile circular walk to discover the history and nature of Colwall orchards

Colwall Orchard Heritage Trail



Colwall Village Garden is located in Old Church Road, Colwall, near Malvern. Come and visit again!
How to join Colwall Orchard Group
To support our work, gain new skills and knowledge, to volunteer and make new friends download a membership form from our website www.colwallorchardgroup.org
We are also on and
To contact us use the enquiry form on the website. We'd welcome feedback on the orchard trail!
Sketches by Philly Hunt
*Colwall Orchard Trust Ltd, known as Colwall Orchard Group, is a company limited by guarantee (registration no. 07495461) and a charity (registration no. 1142573)



Colwall Orchards

Walking through Colwall today it is hard to imagine the scale of the orchard industry that once thrived here. For many years the village was a productive centre for the growing, harvesting and processing of fruit. The landscape today provides clues to this history.

The remaining traditional orchards in and around the village are fantastic places where nature thrives. They are great for people too - magical places which delight and lift our spirits throughout the seasons. Our orchard heritage is important for both people and nature.

Colwall Orchard Group has been established to help to look after the remaining orchards as well as to plant new ones.

About the trail

This orchard heritage trail will take you on a journey to tell the story of how orchards became so important to Colwall and why they are still relevant today. The trail is 3 miles (5 km) and is on easy pathways with no stiles. The path surface will vary according to the season and weather - sometimes it is muddy and rutted in places, so sensible footwear is recommended.

The trail starts at Colwall Railway Station where there is usually space to park if you arrive by car. For refreshments there is a café, a pub and a hotel with a restaurant and bar near to the start and end of the trail (see map).



The early history of orchards in Colwall

Small orchards yielding fruit for food and cider and perry, have been important features of the English rural landscape since Roman times and there would have been a scattering of orchards across Colwall from those days.

The first written record of an orchard in Colwall is in the 1577 survey of the Estate of the Bishop of Hereford. This lists an orchard at Cummins Farm (near Barton Court in the south-east of Colwall).

Tithe Maps were produced for each parish in England and Wales. They provided a record of the land use in every field so that an annual tithe (tax) could be calculated and collected from the land owner. The tax was often used to support the priest, a monastery or a college.

The 1840 Tithe Map for Colwall shows 81 orchards covering 389 acres (157 hectares). There were also a further 38 fields which were listed as arable or pasture (i.e. not orchard) but were named orchard e.g. Linch Orchard suggesting that orchards were more numerous or in different locations in the past.



Why not extend your walk to visit our new orchard at Lugg's Mill? Colwall Orchard Group purchased this land in 2017 and we have planted apple and cherry trees.

You will find information about the orchards in Colwall on the other side of this leaflet. The apples with numbers on the map refer to the information points.

The Countryside Code
RESPECT • PROTECT • ENJOY
Respect other people
• Consider the local community and other people enjoying the outdoors
• Leave gates and property as you find them and follow paths unless wider access is available
Protect the natural environment
• Leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home
• Keep dogs under effective control
Enjoy the outdoors
• Plan ahead and be prepared
• Follow advice and local signs



Start the Trail at the Railway Station

1 Railway and markets for orchard produce



It was the arrival of Colwall railway station in 1861 that had the biggest impact on fruit growing in the parish. This provided a rail connection to the Midlands and London. No business is any good without a way to market!



Stephen Ballard (1804-90), the engineer responsible for the railway tunnel beneath the Malvern Hills and this part of the rail network, settled in Colwall and, along with his descendants, set up large fruit enterprises.

The railway brought employment and wealth to the village leading to its expansion and investment in grand houses, lime tree avenues and a range of businesses and services to support this growth. Over a short period the core of the village moved near to the railway station and the village landscape we know today began to emerge.

The main markets for the fruit grown in Colwall were in Birmingham, Cardiff, Manchester and Liverpool. Often trains were held up for 20 minutes in Colwall railway station while the boxes of apples and pears and baskets of cherries and soft fruit were loaded.

Cross the railway foot bridge and follow the path past Charlie Ballard's Nature Reserve (on the right) towards a kissing gate. Enter the field and walk up hill to the next kissing gate. Turn left along a path following the hedge.

2 Growing conditions

Herefordshire is one of the country's best apple growing areas and is especially well known for cider producers such as Bulmers, Westons and nowadays a thriving number of artisan cider and perry makers.

The soil and climate within the county is very favourable for orchard and other soft fruit growing. However, in Colwall there are significant issues with frosts which can destroy fruit blossom and impair fruit production. In the words of one of the main fruit entrepreneurs in Colwall, Stephen Ballard the second: "the fruit grower had to decide whether to be on the fertile land in the valley bottoms and run the risk of spring ground frosts or to be on less fertile higher ground and avoid them but be more susceptible to spring air frosts and cold east winds". Nevertheless fruit growing in Colwall thrived during the first half of the 20th century.

Follow the footpath (muddy in Winter) ensuring you go left of the barn and through a metal kissing gate. Cross the field to a gate onto tarmac road – Broadwood Drive and turn left.

3 Cherry Orchards at Broadwood and Snatford

From here in Broadwood Drive you can see either side of the road the remnants of former commercial cherry orchards: Snatford to your left and Broadwood to your right.

In traditional orchards the trees tend to be very large and are often known as standards. The trees grow tall, take several years to yield fruit, and live for a long time. In modern orchards the trees are typically a lot smaller, and are productive within a few years of planting, but will live for a shorter time. The smaller size of modern commercial cherry trees also makes harvesting much easier. The cherries from trees in the orchards that you see here would have been harvested using very tall ladders sometimes with up to 40 rungs. Modern commercial cherry trees may also be grown under cover to protect the crops from rain and pest damage.

4 The Broadwood and Snatford enterprises

Cultivating fruit in orchards was a labour intensive business and trees required pruning to maintain their shape and productiveness, spraying to protect the crops from pests and diseases, and harvesting once the fruit crop was ready for picking.

The fruit trees in these orchards were tended by the orchard owners, locals from Colwall and the surrounding areas as well as several prisoners of war from Germany and Italy during and after the Second World War, together with students from Nigeria and Malaysia.



At the end of Broadwood Drive cross carefully over Walwyn Road (B4218) and enter through the cast iron gate next to the footpath finger post.

5 The Ballard family



To your right you will catch a view of 'The Winnings', the home of Stephen Ballard who brought the railway to Colwall in the mid 19th century.

He had eight children and his son, Stephen Ballard the second (1866-1963) established the main fruit growing business 'The Grovesend Fruit Farms' which ran successfully in the first half of the 20th century.

The business continued to be run by his son, Stephen Ballard the third (1902-1996).

The Ballard family specialised in fruit for eating and for processing in food and confectionery manufacturing rather than the cider and perry businesses more famous in other parts of Herefordshire.

Between them, the Ballards planted many orchards in Colwall and on farms in the neighbouring parishes which grew apples, pears, cherries, plums and damsons and other soft fruits such as strawberries and blackcurrants.

Follow the footpath along the driveway and then turn left through a kissing gate, signposted just before the big wooden gates. Walk along the track at the back of The Downs Malvern prep school. Follow the track left at the footpath junction and proceed down steps to an unsurfaced road. Turn left and then right along a waymarked footpath with the tennis courts on your right.



Go through a gate and keep straight on (between a fence on your right and a house on your left). Continue through another gate and along a footpath next to sports pitches. When you arrive at the road cross carefully, turn left, and then immediately right along a footpath. At the end of the footpath you enter Stamps Orchard through a kissing gate.

6 Orchard wildlife

Traditional orchards like this are great for wildlife. The older and fallen trees are home to rare insects including the flamboyant Noble Chafer and the Mistletoe Tortrix Moth, both of which live in Stamps orchard. Orchards also provide homes and food for birds and small mammals.



Noble Chafer beetle – seen in Stamps Orchard

Little Owls roost in holes in trees; Fieldfares and Blackbirds eat fallen apples in the autumn. Bullfinches feed off spring apple blossom; Woodpeckers drill holes into trees to find insects to eat. The Mistle Thrush eats mistletoe berries and so gets its name.

Mistletoe is a semi parasitic plant which grows extensively in Colwall. It is a fussy plant which only favours certain types of trees and locations. It grows commonly in apple trees, but rarely on pear trees, and needs careful management so that it does not damage the host tree.

Traditional orchards are very important for nature and are a Priority Habitat in the Government's Biodiversity 2020 Strategy. Significantly, trees in a traditional orchard live and decay for a long time providing a unique and beautiful habitat.

7 The challenge of managing traditional orchards today



The old pear tree in Stamps Orchard

Stamps Field was shown as orchard on the 1840 Tithe Map of Colwall. The orchard was extended eastwards in the early 20th century as part of the Grovesend Fruit Farms enterprise, and became known as Stamps Orchard. It is planted with many traditional varieties of apple, as well as pear trees. The old pear tree you will pass as you proceed along the footpath is possibly 300 years old.

These days it is not possible to finance the management of traditional orchards from the profit raised from the harvest. Many trees have fallen over in Stamps Orchard due to old age, lack of pruning and also the weight of the mistletoe. Whilst many of the remaining trees are still producing fruit every year, it is not economically viable to harvest this so the fruit is left for the wildlife.

Colwall Orchard Group harvest mistletoe each year to sell to decorate homes at Christmas and to raise funds to invest in old orchards. The volunteers have also recently planted new trees in Stamps Orchard.

Keep left then leave the orchard through the kissing gate and walk along the track straight towards the road.

8 Expanding orchards and fruit varieties

As you leave Stamps Orchard along the track you reach Old Church Road. Stephen Ballard the third recalls in an article he wrote for the Parish magazine: "By 1909 all the open fields bordering Old Church Road from the Vinegar Drive (Stone Drive) to Mapleton Farm (near Lugg's Mill) were planted with fruit trees and soft fruit".



Apples were very important with a mix of varieties selected to give a prolonged harvest period, producing a steady flow of fruit to send fresh to market from the early Beauty of Bath harvested in August, through the Worcester, Newtons, Tom Putt and many others until the Bramleys harvested in November. There were also cherries, damsons, plums and pears.



Clues to crops grown in the past remain with us today in the form of house names. Cherry Lodge to your right, Hop Yard Cottage along the track opposite are a couple of examples.

9 The Homestead: centre of the orchard business



Before you move on, The Homestead, the house opposite the end of the track, was once the heart of the Grovesend Fruit Farms business. Stephen Ballard the second lived at The Homestead and his daughter recalls that one of the workforce would do grafting to produce new fruit trees

in the garden room. "I can see now the sort of interesting things he did with splicing and the red sealing wax and yellow raffia, binding it all together. Then I think (the trees) were put in cool damp sand."

From 1909 the lock-up garages opposite Cherry Lodge provided barracks for the female fruit pickers. They were supplied with straw-filled mattresses, blankets, sheets and unlimited firewood. Stephen Ballard the second records in his diary:

"Foreigners from around Dudley and Lye were engaged (as pickers). They were women of all ages... were tough and wore caps and shawls and smoked pipes." The women were paid in Ballard coinage which was exchanged for legal tender on pay day but was sometimes accepted in local shops. Stephen Ballard observed that: "they drank heavily on the evenings and took very little home with them at the end of their six week stay."

Between the wars and at the height of the season the fruit business employed around 150 pickers. Seasonal workers came from Ledbury, Malvern and the Midlands arriving by bus or train, and from surrounding villages collected by motor transport.

Turn right and walk along Old Church Road. When you pass the turning to Old Orchard Lane/Orlin Road on your right, continue a short distance before turning left along a track to Colwall Village Garden – home of Colwall Orchard Group.

10 Romany families working in the orchards

The field to the left as you enter Colwall Village Garden was a Romany camp for many years and several babies were born near the Apple Packing Shed facing you and in the orchard behind. Romany families were a key part of the orchard workforce.

The children got up early to scare the birds off the cherries, whilst the adults came to harvest the fruit. Some of these families eventually settled permanently in the village.



11 Welcome to Colwall Village Garden



The site is owned and managed by Colwall Orchard Group. Take a look around. You will find allotment plots and a community orchard planted with over 200 trees, many of which are old and unusual varieties. More information is provided on a panel near the gate.

We hope you enjoy your visit.

To continue the trail walk away from the Apple Packing Shed alongside the allotments (with the road immediately on your right). Exit through 2 kissing gates onto Old Church Road. Turn left and just beyond Peattys Cottage turn left through a metal kissing gate onto a footpath. Follow the path though 2 more kissing gates, then cross 2 fields, in a diagonal line, back towards Colwall.

When you leave the second field through a kissing gate go straight ahead. Turn right on The Crescent and immediately left into Crescent Road passing the Royal British Legion Club. Turn right at Stone Drive. Pause when you reach Stone Drive near the pharmacy.

12 Fruit Processing and Canning Factory



Bottling fruit in the 1920s

Look back along Stone Drive to see the location of Colwall's fruit processing industry. Stephen Ballard the second began experimenting with fruit bottling around 1914-18 and found this product sold well. He increased production and later introduced canning to his rapidly expanding Grovesend Fruit Farms. He used the vacant vinegar factory site in Stone Drive (now the site of housing and doctor's surgery) after his vinegar business closed in 1914.



Grading cherries in the 1940s

The fruit was sorted, graded, packed and weighed in the Apple Packing Sheds. The best fruit went straight to market by train and the good cherries went to the Cadbury factory in Birmingham and were used in their special chocolate. The second class fruit was canned, using newly installed steam and gas-driven engines fuelled from the village gas works. The remaining fruit was sent to jam, sauce and confectionery manufacturers or was sulphured, pulped and stored in barrels for processing later in the year.

Stephen Ballard recorded in his diary in October 1948, "We sent today 22 tons of Worcester Pearmain dessert apples and Conference pears to the markets. Made 16 tons of plum pulp. Picked 16 tons of apples and made 8 tons of apple pulp."

The by-products were used to feed pigs in a Model Piggery close to Stone Drive and were sent there on a narrow gauge tramway.

The canning factory boasted several prototype innovations including the Grovesend Grader which automatically sorted fruit by size. This was patented in many countries and featured at the centre of the British Trade Fair Stand in Moscow in 1961.

13 From Heyday to End of an Era

By 1918 Stephen Ballard the second had proved that the fruit growing business could be profitable if run with the Cannery, despite the hazards of frosts in the low lying lands of Colwall, flocks of birds ruining crops in minutes and other pests and diseases affecting the success of the harvest. It was a very precarious business.

However by the 1950s the outlook for fruit growing had changed and customer demands were changing. The fruit trees were getting old, big and less productive so the Ballard family decided that it was no longer economic to run the business.

While the Colwall fruit canning factory thrived between the wars, it was closed in January 1961. The businesses associated with the orchards were already beginning to wind down and some of the orchards were grubbed up and returned to pasture.

Cross Walwyn Road (B4218) straight along Station Drive to the end of the walk at the Railway Station.

14 The future for Colwall Orchards

This is not the end of the story! Many orchards have survived against the odds and Colwall Orchard Group (COG), a thriving community organisation, is working to revitalise our orchard heritage.

COG is restoring traditional orchards for people and for wildlife. We have planted two community orchards, restored a traditional apple packing shed and we have helped people to look after orchards through training and practical help. Our volunteers plant trees, do rescue pruning, harvesting and juicing fruit. We also hold some great events to celebrate orchards including the autumn Apple Day and the popular Wassail in January.



The annual January Wassail

Orchard spraying in Colwall