

## **The Community Orchard by Richard Dowsett, Park Ranger.**

The Community Orchard is located at the Odell end of the park and was planted in Jan 2010 on ground belonging to but separate from the park. For those who remember, that January was snowy and frosty and the trees had to go in as soon as the ground softened and before it refroze and/or flooded.

The main orchard is planted with varieties of apple, pear and plum which have local associations and were grown locally in the past. These range from Old Warden Pear, a cherry and gage which all have ancestries going back to Tudor times, and more recent varieties developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. An extra triangular area known as Granny's Piece is planted with interesting fruit of species not often seen in this country these days. The most startling crop was a single apricot, which was harvested ceremoniously and presented to the tree's sponsor. Others have fruited and show signs of bounty to come. I have tried to ensure that individual sponsors have first chance at the fruit.

There have been some losses but the saplings are growing into trees and the gaps are not obvious. This has made space for the most recent planting: a greengage to celebrate the birth and naming of the Park's youngest volunteer. This suffered a bit in the summer but regular watering has seen it through.

Most of the trees have information labels giving horticultural and historical details. The idea is to develop this for the website with further details, photographs etc to help people with identification of unknown varieties.

The saplings were nurtured through drought, flood, frost and snow and now we are starting to reap the dividends. On some trees, even after thinning the fruit the branches broke because the fruit got so big. The walnut is struggling but should fruit significantly in 25 years or so.....watch this space for updates

Park Friends and volunteers have helped keep the vegetation under control, with pruning and general maintenance. The last HOCP Friends' Day saw the boundary hedges laid. Interestingly one hedge was found to be wild bullace, separated from a sloe hedge by the main entrance. These were laid slightly differently to the accepted local method to respect the cropping and wild life potential. Other boundaries have other types of wild or feral plum; so it feels as if all available space is being used. Other wild fruit include rose hips, hawthorn, sloes and haws.

Carlton Lower School presented the park with four baby saplings grown from pips brought in by the children. Two still survive and I am waiting with baited breath to see what the fruit is like.

Even the pond, which was dug by Probation Services to help with irrigation has produced a surfeit of water cress (the real one – not fools' as can be found in the park. Fools' water cress is poisonous). The seasonal stream has been colonised by aquatic invertebrates and water boatmen have to take their chance when water is taken for irrigation.

Sparrow hawks, dragon flies, partridge and frogs have all been seen, though thankfully no deer. Grass snakes and hedgehogs use the compost heap. New plant species keep appearing

The creation of the orchard has been a self-funding project. The trees have been donated, paid for by money raised from car parking donations and fire wood sales, sown or grown. The majority of the work is done by Friends, volunteers and Probation Services.

This is an ongoing project that will run and run. The future should show further development and an enriched grassland flora and fauna, helped along by grants from the Friends.

There is still space for people to donate trees - please get in touch with me if you are interested.

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