

South west regional lunch, Rich's Cider Farm, Somerset

On Thursday 28th February a group of 21 Conservators and guests met for a visit to Rich's Cider Farm in Somerset, organised by Nigel Mattravers. The Farm has produced cider by traditional means at this site for more than 50 years.

After some initial refreshments we stood outside in a cold, but thankfully dry, day to listen to Martin Rich enthuse about cider, cider apples and cider farming. It came as a surprise to learn that there does not seem to be any single cider apple tree grown in one piece; the roots, trunk and branches have different origins each being chosen for a specific purpose. A separate trunk is grafted on to roots and then the main branches are grafted to the top of the trunk with different types of branches for different types of apple. This is all done at a nursery before being delivered to the farm for many years of service.

Having braved the cold we retired into the small but interesting museum where Martin, sitting on top of a tractor, explained traditional pressing, fermenting, blending, bottling and how the locals used to get paid during the apple harvest – in cider. He also talked of scrumpy and other local traditions including wassailing – singing to the trees to ensure a good harvest.

Old apple tree we wassail thee
And hoping thou will bear
For the Lord doth know where we shall be
'Til apples come another year

For to bear well and to bloom well
So merry let us be
Let every man take off his hat
And shout to the old apple tree

Old apple tree we wassail thee
And hoping thou will bear
Hat fulls, cap fulls, three bushel bag fulls
And a little heap under the stairs



The excellent lunch was a challenge for those who decided on the mixed grill when presented with enormous proportions. Those who selected less ambitious proportions were rewarded with delicious mains and everyone enjoyed fantastic afters. Not a day to be counting the calories.

The final stop was to the Farm Shop where many flagons were purchased for later consumption. The label says that the contents have to be consumed within 3 days of opening – not a difficult task. All in all a great day out and thanks go to Nigel for organising it.