

## Book Review - A Somerset Pomona by Liz Copas

The Cider Apples of Somerset  
 By Liz Copas  
 Published by The Dovecote Press, Stanbridge, Wimborne, Dorset  
 Price £9.95  
 ISBN 1 874336 87 3

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When you think of the Westcountry you automatically think of cider apples and orchards. Memories of summer holidays long ago, the unexpected discovery of vast cider presses lurking in barns and a motley collection of old oak barrels supervised by an octogenarian proffering a generous half pint sample. A rich part of the landscape which we have often taken for granted. The reality is somewhat different. Sad to say, Devon has lost something like 90% of its orchards since the Second War and Somerset about 60%. The true loss is in the cider apple varieties and the local diversity that each farm and village community once took a pride in. So it is a great pleasure to announce the arrival of a new book which sets out to describe in great detail with copious illustrations, 80 well known varieties of cider which are grown in Somerset today.

The author, Liz Copas is well known as a cider pomologist and works as an advisor and field trail officer for the National Association of Cider Makers. She is also the last link to that august and historic establishment outside Bristol, referred to variously as Long Ashton, LARS, the Cider Research Station, the Institute for Apples & Fruity Queries&hellip; Alas Long Ashton was slowly wound down under the so called &lsquo;cost cutting&rsquo; Thatcherite regime of the 1980&rsquo;s.

The first part of the book deals with the history of cider in Somerset, including delightful pictures of &lsquo;tasting&rsquo; days at Long Ashton in the nineteen thirties when that was the highpoint of the year. Being the Professor of &lsquo;Cider&rsquo; at Bristol was no doubt a much sought after job. The history is fascinating and peppered with such giants as Sir Robert Neville Grenville, Squire of Butleigh near Glastonbury and Fredrick Lloyd the Chemist who sought to improve cidermaking by understanding scientifically what was going on. The cutting edge of microbiology in the 1880&rsquo;s. And then there was Professor Barker who was able to categorise cider apples according to sweetness and tannin content. Thus giving us the now familiar categories of &lsquo;bitter-sweets&rsquo;, &lsquo;bitter-sharps&rsquo;, &lsquo;sweets&rsquo;, &lsquo;sharps&rsquo; and &lsquo;dual purpose&rsquo;. Between 1903 and 1910 they analysed the juice of some 2000 apples. It was from this analysis and related orcharding skills that the cider industry grew into what it is today. Incidentally it was at Long Ashton that they invented Ribena during the war.

The second part of the book is the descriptions and photographs of 80 cider apples still grown today in Somerset, with cross sectional drawings, wonderful bits of local history and a vivid sense of an organic knowledge. The photographs are what make this book. There should be a section in the National Curriculum for orchards, apple identification and tasting. The apple names are wonderful in themselves, with well known favourites such as Kingston Black, Yarlington Mill, Stoke Red, Dabinett and Chisel Jersey, and some lesser ones such as Dove, Shoreditch White, Red Worthy, Neverblight, Cap of Liberty and Bell Apple. The third part of the book is given over to categorisation, identification and synonyms. This book is a must, not just for anyone living in Somerset, but those dedicated to cider and orchards in Devon and Cornwall as well, because many of these apples are found all over the South West. Also it is a bargain at just £9.95. An ideal gift for Christmas and a timely reminder about the richness of our landscape and rural traditions.

Review written by James Crowden.