

MANOR WOOD VALLEY LOCAL NATURE RESERVE BS3 5XX

Shedding some light on the origins of the fruit trees Site visit 13/9/2018

The discovered orchard

The 'orchard' is in a bramble and elder thicket in the north east corner of the reserve. It occupies about ½ acre. Many fruit trees are still being uncovered and cleared of surrounding scrub. In all there are well over 30 bearing apples and about 6 pear trees. They were mostly multi-headed having been coppiced almost to ground level a long time ago then regrown and matured.

The background history suggest that although the whole reserve site may have belonged at one time to the Headey Farm estate, but this is long gone. The whole of the site is clearly excavated land that was once a clay pit for the neighbouring brickworks but this work ceased in the 1960s.

A survey of the fruit trees

Although samples were taken from many of the trees to try to put names to them, it soon became clear that there were no true varieties and that it is not a purpose planted orchard. There were several points that confirm this:

- The trees were 'planted' randomly not in rows as would be expected in an orchard.
- There were no signs of graft unions. This would be a ring on the trunk where an apple variety had been grafted to the rootstock.
- There were batches of neighbouring trees where the apples looked very similar, suggesting they had all grown from the same seed source.
- Many were yellow green, late maturing with an acceptable eating apple flavor. eg. Similar but not identical to Golden Delicious, an imported variety widely sold in the 1960 – 70s
- The pear trees' fruits were clearly similar in size and shape, delicious but not matching up to a known variety.

Overall conclusions

It all adds up to a picture of scrub land regenerating after the commercial use of the site. The fruit trees most likely evolving from discarded apple cores, perhaps from the neighbouring works area.

Sadly no names can be attached to any of the trees since they are clearly all seedlings with unique character.

However, all those apples that I tasted were a good size and with a good flavor, if a bit unripe and sharp. I would suggest that the trees are well worth looking after and the fruit would be excellent for making juice or even cider.

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