

Warwickshire pears

A few years ago, I began to notice some old pear trees in local hedgerows and these were particularly concentrated around the village of Whatcote (near Shipston on Stour). They are spectacular when flowering and produce small pears of different shapes, sizes and colours. The area is mentioned in a couple of books, one of which is Richard Mabey's *Flora Britannica*, as being 'known' for its pear trees. In *Flora Britannica* there is a reference: '*In the parish of Whatcote, Warwickshire, there are some 20 mature pear trees, not in an orchard, but spread out over several hundred acres of farmland in hedgerows. Apparently, the village was noted for its perry, made from the fruit*'. In *Unknown Warwickshire* (1. Mary Dormer Harris, 1924) the area is referred to as '*the Warwickshire wild pear country*'.



A favourite pear tree in full blossom

One spring, a friend and I decided to locate as many of the pear trees as we could and we did this during our walks, drives and cycle rides in the area. We also used Google Earth, as the images of the area were helpfully taken at the time the trees were flowering, although there is the possibility of some confusion with blackthorn. We located more than 20 trees and have all their information in a spreadsheet, including their precise locations. There are a few more trees to follow up.

In the following September we visited all the trees to collect samples of fruit and this entailed identifying and contacting the various landowners. All were happy for us to collect the fruit and some helped us! We took the fruit to the Malvern Autumn Show to show to the perry pear expert, Jim Chapman ([National Perry Pear Centre – Conserving a part of our orchard heritage](#)), who had a stand there. Jim inspected all the fruit, identified a couple of samples as being from 'wild' trees and told us that none of the other samples were 'recognised' perry pear varieties. However, he suggested we should taste them all – especially to identify the presence of tannins (needed for perry) – and that, if we wanted to, we could name them as 'varieties'. Before we could name the trees we would have to get their DNA analysed to check they really weren't an existing named variety [fruitID | Apple Identification | Apple Varieties |](#)

[Apple Cultivars](#). We tasted all the samples and recorded the information in the spreadsheet. The various pears do taste very different and a few are really nice.



A selection of our pear samples

Perry pears were/are mainly grown in Gloucestershire/Herefordshire/Worcestershire and part of Monmouthshire and this is where most of the wonderfully-named varieties (see photo below) come from. The National Perry Pear collection in Gloucestershire was primarily established to provide a living botanical collection of perry pear fruit trees and a genetic resource for the nation. There are some good sources of information on perry pears, although they are few in number. Most of them are referred to on the web site hosted by the National Perry Pear Centre and some are available in their entirety, including Charles Martell's excellent book on 'Pears of Gloucestershire and Perry Pears of the Three Counties' [Publications – National Perry Pear Centre](#). I also managed to borrow an excellent earlier study produced by the University of Bristol in 1963 entitled '*Perry Pears*' and published for the National Fruit and Cider Institute.

