



A2.3 Valleyfield Estate Community Orchard

Project Overview: This project restored the Orchard within the kitchen garden of the former Valleyfield House and Estate, held by the Preston family for over 300 years. The garden was one of Humphry Repton's proposed improvements to the Estate and also has linked with David Douglas, the renowned explorer and plant collector. A great many activities took place over the four years of the project. These were carried out directly by volunteers of the West Fife Woodlands group during their Monday workout sessions and some of the heavier work was undertaken by appointed contractors and the trainees taking part in D1.2 Landscape Management Trainees. During the project the group developed their orchard maintenance skills thanks to sessions delivered by Forth Valley Orchards Initiative as part of the B2.7 Fruitful Communities project.

2014/15:

- Scrub clearance and removal of tree roots, including applying herbicide.
- Restoration of site into a meadow (ploughing, rolling, harrowing, sowing with wildflower seeds) and installing fencing with access gates to protect young trees from deer browsing.
- Hedge improvement (new planting and cutting back of existing hedge)
- Re-creation of path structure (laying new paths following lines shown on old maps, installing drainage)

2015/16

- Cutting the meadow
- Planning and undertaking planting of over 150 orchard trees by over 250 pupils of seven local primary schools. Fruit trees and soft fruit trees were planted and a number of heritage cultivars were selected. Additional trees were planted by the WFW group volunteers.

2016/17

- Project manager appointed for community space and schools area, designs agreed and costed, tender document drafted.
- Training on fruit tree pruning provided by Margaret Miller of Forth Valley Orchards Initiative. Meadow cutting and wildflower recording.

2017/18

- Purchase of hay rake machine for meadow cutting and lifting cut material.
- Schools 'Blossom' event held by Forth Valley Orchards Initiative for pupils that took part in orchard planting to encourage them to re-visit the site.
- Soft fruit tree pruning event held by Forth Valley Orchards Initiative for WFW volunteers to develop skills and maintain the trees.
- Contractor build of picnic area and schools area. Unfortunately initial work was not completed to the required standard so a second contractor was appointed to re-do this work in late Spring 2018.

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- Interpretation board (part of IFLI team led project) installed on the site. This details a keyplan of the various fruit trees planted in the orchard and details of primary schools that were involved.

Project lead organisation and other organisations involved:	<i>West Fife Woodland group.</i> <i>Contractors, local schools and other volunteers, Fife Council, Forth Valley Orchards Initiative.</i>
Project Location:	Valleyfield Woodland Park, South West Fife NT 002 874
Project dates	<i>July 2014 to May 2018. (Year 1, quarter 2 to Year 5, quarter 1.)</i>

Project Outputs

Measure	Target	Delivered	Notes
<i>Volunteers trained in fruit tree management</i>	10	36	
<i>Area of scrubland returned to productive use</i>	1.2ha	1.2ha	The orchard site was planted as per the original project plans.
<i>Length of hedgerow restored/improved</i>	228m	228m	
<i>Length of fencing installed</i>	340m	340m	Installed to protect new fruit trees from deer.
<i>Length of paths installed</i>	526m	526m	
<i>Fruit trees planted</i>	100	179	
<i>Designated schools use area</i>	1	1	
<i>Picnic and interpretation area</i>	1	1	
<i>Number of volunteer hours contributed</i>	N/A	1,364	Volunteers delivering the project. This is around 182 days of time.
<i>Exhibitions</i>	N/A	1	
<i>Number of events for schools</i>	N/A	2	2016: Orchard planting. 2017: Blossom day.

What difference has this project made to the built, cultural and natural heritage of the Inner Forth?

The West Fife Woodlands group believe that benefits to the natural heritage will become apparent over a period of many years as the wildflower meadow and trees in the orchard mature and grow. These are likely to include increased and different species of birds, a range of lichens on trees along

with wild flowers and herbs in the meadow. Restored and improved hedgerows on two sides of the garden area has made this area of the Estate more bird friendly, both in regard to nesting and as a source of berries during winter.

Valleyfield Estate played an important part in the history and development of West Fife (formerly part of Perthshire). Therefore it was desirable to reinstate the orchard as depicted in an 1810 map of the estate. Equally important is the interpretation linking people with their cultural heritage, which the orchard project has provided.

What difference has this project made to people?

The Valleyfield Woodland Park is a popular place for recreation at all times of year. The reinstated orchard is sited adjacent to a main path, and is on the snowdrop trail, resulting in many people being aware of the positive changes to this section of ground that was previously covered in scrub. Initially there were some concerned comments regarding the works, relating to loss of cover for deer and the cutting back of the overgrown boundary hedge which appeared severe. Notices were put up around the site and at the car park during the project to raise awareness of the changes taking place. The diversity trees and the wildflower meadow have added variety to the woodland area, and created a changing visual interest for all seasons. The seating and schools area will encourage people of all ages to stop a while in this peaceful place and will be a welcome addition for visiting school groups. Through the orchard planting, local schools have taken part in the success of the project which will hopefully result in families re-visiting the Orchard to watch the trees grow and harvest the fruit.

This project aligned both with the IFLI partnership's desire to support committed local heritage groups to improve their landscape and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the Inner Forth. For the volunteers of the West Fife Woodlands Group, the opportunity to work, learn and just enjoy the outdoors has had substantial benefits to the physical and mental wellbeing of people reconnecting them with nature. The garden will continue to link into history within the woodland park and surrounding area and also the wider flora and fauna and river life.

The project has also made a significant difference to the West Fife Woodland volunteers:

- Skills enhancement in pruning and fruit tree planting,
- Provided an interface between West Fife Woodlands, local people and walking groups when they pass us working in the orchard. We can engage with them and make them aware of our volunteer work, the local path network and points of interest in the surrounding woodlands.

Useful Links

There is a page dedicated to this project on the IFLI website:

<http://www.innerforthlandscape.co.uk/projects/conserving-restoring/valleyfield-estate-community-orchard>

Further details of West Fife Woodlands can be found on the West Fife Villages website:

<http://www.westfifevillages.co.uk/>

Future Plans

- A maintenance plan has been developed. This will enable West Fife Woodlands (WFW) to schedule its grass cutting and other orchard maintenance activities. The plan is reviewed at the monthly WFW meetings.
- The main activity is grass cutting of the orchard which we will probably be undertaking 6 times per year.
- The wild flower meadow will be mainly outside the fenced orchard and seeds from the meadow will be collected for re seeding at the end of the grass cutting season. A small square of meadow exists at the centre of the orchard and this will remain uncut.
- Tree pruning will occur twice a year in winter for seeded fruits and in summer for stoned fruits.
- Regular checks on the orchard trees as they grow and expand to ensure that support ties and posts are not interfering with growth. At the time of writing all trees appear to be thriving.
- Juicing and pressing of fruit will probably be undertaken in future but probably not for 3 or 4 years. Some trees are already producing fruit but others – pears in particular – will take longer.
- Bird and bat boxes will be erected in the surrounding woodlands but funding and locations have still to be arranged.

Lessons Learned

- Overall the project has gone well. Good for our confidence and competence. It was an enjoyable and learning curve for the WFW volunteers involved.
- We have learnt that having a wild flower meadow in an orchard that needs to be managed is challenging. The manual work required to maintain the area proved to be beyond the group's capabilities and the purchase of a hay rake (for the ride on mower) to reduce the manual labour required to rake the cut thatch was in hindsight an error as it proved to be an ineffective and costly piece of kit. As a result we have separated the orchard from the meadow.
- The local community has been supportive of our work and that has been appreciated.

Photographic Evidence

Site of proposed orchard, September 2014.



Orchard tree planting with local schools, February 2016.



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Valleyfield Exhibition at Dunfermline Art Gallery & Museum, February 2018.



Soft fruit tree pruning, July 2017.



Seating area being installed, July 2017.



Interpretation board on site, April 2018.



Orchard June 2018



Photos courtesy of John Le Marie, West Fife Woodlands and IFLI Team.

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