

## Apple Crushing in Thornbury, Devon – a shared endeavour.

Thornbury is a small parish in rural North West Devon which is composed of the 5 discrete and separate hamlets of Brendon, Lashbrook, South Wonford, Thornbury and Woodacott.

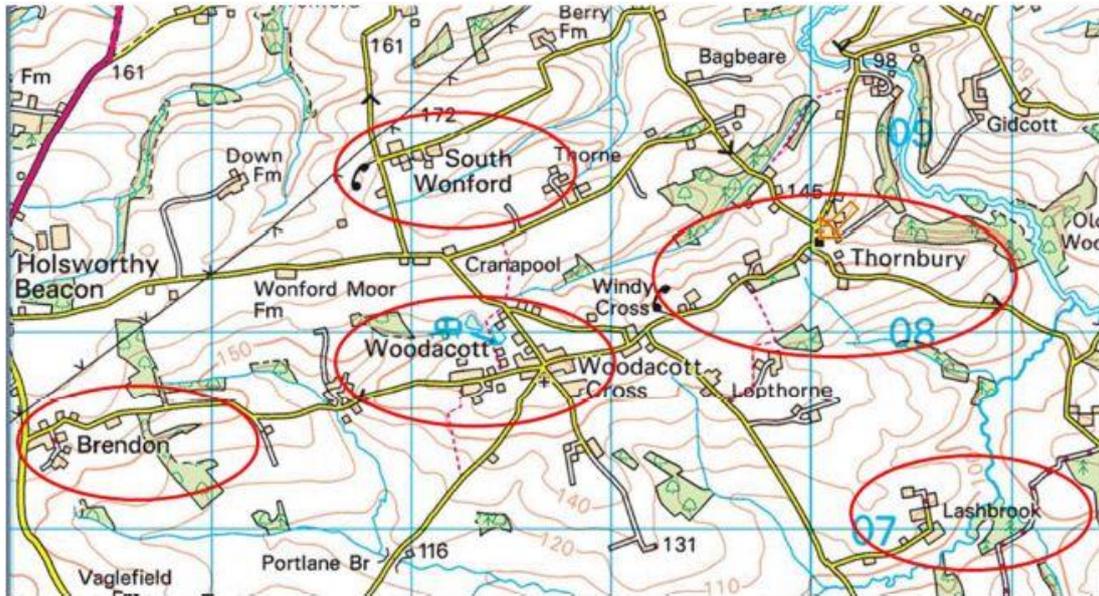


Figure 1: The five hamlets that make up Thornbury

It is a small community – the population of the parish at the 2011 census was 285, living in 120 households. The population has been higher in the past as can be seen in Table 1 below

Date	Population	Date	Population
1801	330	1891	310
1811	383	1901	291
1821	517	1911	322
1831	546	1921	299
1841	551	1931	306
1851	489	1951	268
1861	397	1961	223
1871	393	1971	203
1881	311	2011	285

Table 1: Population of the 5 hamlets comprising Thornbury.

At the time of Domesday, Thornbury, known as Tornberia was held by the Abbot of Tavistock. In rough translation “it was taxed on a hide under King Edward. 10 ploughs can plough it. Radulf holds it of the Abbott. In demesne he has a virgate and 2 ploughs. The villeins have 3 virgates and 4 ploughs. Radulf has 10 villeins, 6 bordars, 4 serfs, 14 head of cattle, 15 swine, 50 sheep, 30 goats, 26 acres of wood, 100 acres of meadow, 120 acres of pasture. It is worth 60 shilling and was worth less when the Abbot received it.”

There is no mention of Woodacott in Domesday Book, however Week, which is now a sub-area of Woodacott is rendered at Wiche, and is mentioned. A rough translation states that 3 ploughs can plough it. The Lord has 1 plough and the villeins have 1 ploughs. It has 3 villeins and 3 serfs, 5 acres of wood, 10 acres of meadow, 15 acres of pasture. It is worth 20 shilling.

The other hamlets are hard to identify in Domesday due to the similarity of names with other, larger villages.

The next readily available survey of the village is that undertaken for the Tithe Apportionment map in 1839. The total farmed acreage of the village was recorded as 1815 acres given over to arable, pasture and meadow as well as many other countryside activities and functions such as gardens, orchards, Mowhays<sup>1</sup>, waste and coppices. This is the first time that we can easily see the evidence of orchards in the village. They are present in all of the hamlets and in total cover about 16.5 acres or nearly 1% of the cultivated land.

By 1941 when the then Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries carried out their survey of agricultural activities, very few orchards remained.

---

<sup>1</sup> The West Country word, *mowhay*, means a stack-yard or other enclosure for hay, corn or other piled up crops.

In 2015 a neighbour, Keith Hutchings (born 1959) who now lives at the Barton, Thornbury, wrote an article about his memories of cider making in his youth. Keith comes from a long line of farmers and farm labourers in Thornbury and his home has a long history as well. The Barton is built on the site of the former Thornbury Manor, the remains of which regularly appear in the garden and farmyard when work is being carried out although nothing remains above ground.

At the time of the Tithe apportionment, Keith's family were elsewhere in the village, but the Barton had 1.6 acres of orchards which can be seen on the Tithe map and are identified as plots 4, 5, 10, 14, 518 and 519. Plot 5 has been partly subsumed by the churchyard, but what remains is still known as the orchard and has recently been replanted.



Figure 2: the area around the Barton in 1839 showing the orchards

Thornbury Barton			
2	Garden	Garden	37
3	Mowhay	Mowhay	29
4	Mowhay Orchard	Orchard	2 3
5	Orchard	Orchard	1 8
6	Pond	waste	7
7	Homestead, House and Road	Homestead	1 1 16
8	Front Garden	Garden	24
9	Garden	Garden	5
10	Oakley Orchard	Orchard	19
11	Homestead	waste	7
12	The Oakley	Pasture	1 3 20
13	Homestead	Waste	10
14	Oakley Orchard	Orchard	23
515	Orchard	Pasture	3 24
515	Bowling Green	arable	3 30
516	Bowling Green Plot	arable	15
517	Pond	waste	19
518	South New Orchard	Orchard	1 1
519	North New Orchard	Orchard	1
520	Oven Park	arable	7 3 1

Figure 3: Extracts from the Tithe Apportionment Document showing the use of land around The Barton farmhouse.

The Pound House, which is a place where apples are pulped and pressed, is one of the three buildings opposite the farmhouse on the right that back onto plot No.2 and which can be seen in this aerial photo taken in the mid-1960s. It is now in a ruinous condition.



Figure 4: Aerial photograph of the Barton from the mid-1960s showing the Pound House on the right.



Figure 5: The screws from the old apple press from the Barton Pound House.

The rest of this article is based on Keith's recollections of cider-making in the village:

I don't know when cider-making first started at The Barton, but I do know when it ended, the mid 1950s. As a small child in the early sixties I can remember the farm being surrounded by small orchards, and that a very young Jeremy Bond (another farmer in the village whose family farmed at Week) and myself once climbed a cider apple tree in the orchard on the opposite side of the lane, to help ourselves to an apple. It wasn't worth the effort as we both spat our mouthfuls out (cider apples aren't known as 'spitters' for nothing). Sadly, by the mid-60s these orchards had been grubbed out and turned into pasture.

The Romans discovered that the locals in Kent already knew how to make cider at the time of the invasion in 55 B.C. Thus, as The Barton was the site of a medieval Manor, it has to be presumed that cider has been made here for a very long time. Let's face it, cider was safe to drink compared to water from a well, and as apples are much lower in sugar content than many fruits used to produce alcohol, it had a reasonably low alcohol content of 4-5%. Thus everyone drank it, including children. I've heard my grandfather (*Frederick Albert Hutchings 1900 – 1987*) say that a quart of cider a day (about a litre for those too young to remember Imperial measures) was a common allowance for a farm labourer, and considered as part of the labourer's wages. This practice was banned by act of Parliament during the 1st World War.

The only person alive who can remember cider making at The Barton is Mike Pett, (*another village resident and relative of Keith*) who can recall his grandad Hutchings (my great grandfather) (*Samuel Walter Hutchings 1874 - 1960*) bringing apples from Woodacott to be made into cider. As he was only 7 or 8 years old at the time, his memory is fairly sketchy, but he can remember the large spanner being used and that his grandad made a sweet and a rough cider. He can

remember the barrels having hoops replaced, taps fitted, and that they were stored in a cold room.

He also remembers one afternoon during the summer months when Richard, his cousin, was staying that they found some cider and helped themselves, well it might have been pop! They were both found fast asleep and worse for wear against the hay barn. This reminds me of a story that my grandfather told me many years ago. A young female reporter came to The Barton to write a piece on farm cider and its production; having sampled the product with enthusiasm my grandmother had to make up the spare room, and the reporter returned to Exeter the next morning. Sadly, I have never been shown a copy of her report or maybe none was written as her memory was too hazy.

I do know that my grandfather made cider here for lots of farmers in the village who brought their apples here to be pressed. This also suggests that this was the only cider press in the parish. *(This is confirmed in the book Dear Quad (2005) by Sonia Roberts who lived in Brendon in the early 1950s and reports on the joint cider pressing at The Barton in Thornbury when there was a bumper crop of apples in 1952)* I also wonder if we had carried on producing cider for another decade whether local cider would have been a viable proposition. I do remember my own father *(Stanley Raymond Hutchings 1927 – 2002)* would buy a flagon of cider at harvest time as everyone came in for supper after a hard evening's labour bringing in the hay. Pasties, cakes, jam and cream, tea and of course cider would always be on offer as everyone sat around the kitchen table to gossip, eat and drink.



Figure 6: Keith with the large spanner used on the cider press and the largest spanner now used on the farm

Despite several acres of cider orchards at Bradford Manor (*Bradford is the next village to Thornbury in an easterly direction*) and at Sheepwash (*another village to the north east*) there is only the Winkleigh Cider company (formally Inches) making any large amounts of local cider. The apples from Bradford and Sheepwash are taken by national brands for processing. Maybe one day we will start to see a few micro presses return to this part of North West Devon.

In the meantime, cheers.

Meg Galley-Taylor and Keith Hutchings

March 2020