



Perry: A Living Heritage of the Three Counties

Herefordshire • Worcestershire • Gloucestershire

The Three Counties are the historic home of the perry pear. For centuries, these remarkable trees have shaped our landscape, traditions and rural life.

At the Three Counties Showground, the National Collection of Perry Pears is helping to safeguard this unique heritage for future generations.



The National Collection of Perry Pears

Visiting the Collection

Members of the public can view parts of the collection at any time from the public footpath, which also passes through our established apple orchard. You are welcome to contact us to arrange a visit to the orchards. Scion wood for propagation may be collected by arrangement.

Perry made from the National Collection fruit can be purchased from 99PINES: nationalperrypearcentre.org.uk/99pines-perry

The National Collection at the Three Counties Showground was founded by Charles Martell and curated by Jim Chapman. It is maintained by the Three Counties Agricultural Society with the help of 99PINES. Alongside the National Collections at Hartpury, we aim to:

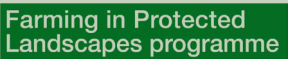
- conserve rare and historic varieties
- support research and DNA identification
- educate visitors about orchard and perry-making skills, heritage and conservation.

How you can help

Support our work preserving this living heritage: threecounties.co.uk/make-a-donation
Try traditional perry from local craft producers: tccpa.co.uk

With thanks to

Funding from Malvern Hills National Landscape: malvernhills-nl.org.uk
Support from Hartpury Heritage Trust: hartpuryheritage.org.uk



Find out more

threecounties.co.uk/national-collection-of-perry-pears
nationalperrypearcentre.org.uk
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What is Perry?

Perry is an alcoholic drink made from the fermented juice of perry pears. Perry pears are specialist pear varieties grown almost exclusively in the Three Counties.

Unlike dessert pears, perry pears are:

- naturally high in tannins and acidity
- usually inedible when raw
- best macerated and pressed soon after falling.

Perry making is one of the great traditional rural crafts of Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire.

For centuries, perry was made on almost every farm and estate in the region. Farm labourers often received it as part of their wages, while it was also enjoyed by the gentry and traded beyond the region. During the Napoleonic Wars, when wine imports were limited, perry from the Three Counties was sent to London and other cities.

Historic cider houses, presses, and millstones remain, and traditional perry is still made and sold by local craft producers.

Did You Know?

- Some perry pear varieties are known for higher acidity, particularly Thorn and Gin, which contribute bright, crisp character, while varieties such as Butt and Rock are noted for both higher tannin and higher acidity, giving greater structure to the juice.
- Perry was traditionally stored in wooden barrels called hogsheads, holding about 245 litres.
- Both the City of Worcester and Worcestershire County Council coats of arms feature black pears.
- The saying 'walnuts and pears, you plant for your heirs' comes from the fact pear trees are slow to mature and produce a good crop of fruit. It means taking action to benefit future generations.
- Babycham is a historically significant British sparkling perry brand introduced in 1953.

The Home of the Perry Pear

The Three Counties offer ideal growing conditions:

- a balance of rainfall and sunshine
- heavy soils well suited to pear trees
- centuries of orchard knowledge.

Whilst perry is made in other countries, many of our local perry pear varieties are found nowhere else in the world, and are sometimes restricted to a single village or parish.

Perry pear trees are exceptionally long-lived, with some surviving for up to 300 years, yet over the past 50 years, over 75% of traditional orchards in the Three Counties have been lost as farming practices have changed and land has been cleared or developed.

Well-managed orchards remain productive, combining fruit growing with grazing animals, pollinating bees and increased biodiversity. Traditional orchards show how land can generate income while sustaining rich biodiversity.

Why Traditional Orchards Matter

Traditional orchards are one of the UK's most biodiverse habitats, yet they are also among the most threatened.

A single mature orchard can support:

- thousands of species of plants, invertebrates, birds and mammals, reflecting the rich mix of trees, grassland, hedgerows and dead wood found in traditional orchards
- rare and specialised wildlife, including nationally rare or scarce beetles associated with dead and decaying wood, such as the Noble chafer (*Gnorimus nobilis*) and the Stag beetle (*Lucanus cervus*)
- rare lichens and fungi, along with veteran fruit trees that develop hollow trunks, rot holes and dead wood, providing vital habitat for saproxylic (dead-wood dependent) invertebrates, as well as bats and nesting birds such as lesser spotted woodpeckers.

For these reasons, traditional orchards are recognised in current UK policy as habitats of national importance for wildlife.

Orchards as Working Landscapes

Historically, perry pear orchards were:

- grazed by sheep or cattle
- managed without chemicals
- maintained through skilled pruning and mowing.

This traditional "vertical farming" system produced fruit while enhancing soil health and biodiversity – a low-intensity model increasingly relevant today.



The Varieties of Perry Pear

The naming of perry pears is remarkably confused. There are well over 100 varieties in the Three Counties known by over 200 names. The names variously reflect their parish, season of ripening, breeder, shape or colour – or perhaps simply their taste or effect.

Historic Varieties

Barland and **Lullam** are two of the oldest known varieties still widely in existence, both dating from the 16th century. Barland was a premier vintage variety by the 17th century, and large trees can still be seen in the perry heartland. Lullam may be the variety mentioned in John Evelyn’s Pomona (perry pear survey) of 1662.

Holme Lacy, introduced in the 18th century, was renowned for its productivity – the original tree yielded 5 to 7 tons annually in 1790!

Names That Tell Stories

Moorcroft, a widespread vintage variety from Colwall, is also known as Malvern Hills or Stinking Bishop – the latter name connecting it to the famous cheese.

Dead Boy, a heavy cropping variety from Ross-on-Wye, was named either for its inedible fruit or the strength of its perry.

Merrylegs, found on the eastern fringe of the Forest of Dean, produces sweet-tasting fruits and a perry notorious for its effects.

Butt comes with memorable advice: “Gather your Butts one year, mill them the next and drink the year after” – a testament to this variety’s resistance to breaking down.

Butter earned its name from its soft texture, said to spread on bread like butter.

Place Names and Local Heritage

Many varieties reflect their origins: **Barlestree Squash**, **Taynton Squash Early** (likely the variety noted by Evelyn in 1660), and **Staunton Squash** are named after villages.

Blakeney Red is the most common perry pear and was also used for stewing and dyeing soldiers’ khaki uniforms during wartime.

The **Beetroot Wick Court** varieties (Alex, Ella, and Eric) are distinctive red-fleshed pears reputedly spread by lightermen, who drove barges along the River Severn.

Unusual and Rare Varieties

Flakey Bark trees have distinctive flaky off-white limbs and intensely astringent fruits.

Potato Pear, found in Monmouthshire and the Forest of Dean, resembles its namesake vegetable.

Nailer, from Gorsley, was named for fruit that’s hard to shake off, lasting into the new year.

Perrymakers’ Favourites

Gin is a perrymakers’ favourite due to ease of harvest, milling and quality of perry.

Hendre Huffcap is valued for its excellent orchard and perry-making qualities.

Yellow Huffcap is widely planted, heavy cropping, and produces excellent perry.

Commercial Heritage

In the late 19th century, commercial producers like **Westons** and **Bulmers** helped establish Herefordshire as a centre for cider and perry production. Herbert Durham of Bulmers introduced varieties **Teegar** and **Brinarl** in the 1920s-30s, possibly from French graft wood.

Further varieties, descriptions and photos can be found at nationalperrypearcentre.org.uk

The Three Counties combine climate, soil and tradition in a way that has long favoured the growing of perry pears.

Heavy clay soils, fertile river valleys and a dense historic orchard landscape helped create – and sustain – a remarkable diversity of locally adapted pear varieties.

This landscape remains the heartland of perry pear heritage today.

1. Three Counties Showground National Collection of Perry Pears

Home to the National Collection, cared for by the Three Counties Agricultural Society. The collection conserves rare and locally significant perry pear varieties, supports research and education, and helps safeguard orchard heritage for future generations. threecounties.co.uk/national-collection-of-perry-pears

2. Malvern Hills National Landscape

The conservation and enhancement of traditional orchards is a key aim in this protected landscape with funding support available for this work. malvernhills-nl.org.uk

3. National Perry Pear Centre

Dedicated to the conservation, study and promotion of perry pears. The Centre at Hartpur works to protect rare varieties, preserve traditional skills and increase understanding of perry’s unique place in the history of the Three Counties. You can explore the orchards and nature reserve at any time. Visit the website to read about varieties and their history, and to find out when taproom events are taking place to sample perry made from the National Collections. nationalperrypearcentre.org.uk

4. May Hill

The hill’s distinctive tree-crowned summit has made it a well-known landmark, featuring in the saying “perry pears only flourish within sight of May Hill.” Legend tells that a god spat out a perry pear on May Hill after mistaking it for edible fruit – scattering the seeds that brought the perry pear into the mortal world.

5. Museum of Cider (Hereford)

The world’s largest cider and perry museum, celebrating over 1,000 years of fruit-growing and drink-making heritage. The Museum preserves historic presses, artefacts and knowledge connected to cider and perry production. cidermuseum.co.uk



The National Collection at the Three Counties Showground

The National Collection maintained at Three Counties Showground aims to preserve the living history of perry pears from across the Three Counties by including examples of all known local heritage varieties, most of which are now extremely rare. The oldest trees in the collection were planted in 1991. DNA profiling allows us to accurately identify varieties, and protect their genetic diversity for the future. The Showground is home to well over 100 varieties and 250 trees and largely mirrors the collection found at the National Perry Pear Centre at Hartpur.

See our website for maps and a list of varieties: threecounties.co.uk/national-collection-of-perry-pears

Apple Orchard

The Showground is also home to a traditional apple orchard – a mixture of young, productive cider apple trees and mature cooking and dessert varieties, such as Crimson Bramley and Lord Derby, nearing the end of their life. The orchard features two rows of the Three Counties cider apple developed by Long Ashton Research Station and named for our three counties, as well as renowned cider varieties including Kingston Black, Yarlington Mill and Harry Masters Jersey.

Visitors can pass through the apple orchard on the public footpath running across the northern end of the Showground site.



A Brief History of Perry in the Three Counties



- Roman period:** Pear trees are believed to have been introduced to Britain by the Romans.
- Medieval period:** Perry making becomes established in the Three Counties, linked to monasteries, farms and estates.
- 17th–18th centuries:** Perry reaches peak popularity. Orchards expand, and many named varieties originate during this period.
- Late 18th–early 19th century:** Perry is widely consumed by farm labourers and gentry alike. Trade flourishes, particularly during the Napoleonic Wars when wine imports are restricted.
- 1880:** Henry Weston founds Westons Cider in Much Marcle, Herefordshire — still owned by the Weston family today.
- 1887:** Bulmers is founded in Herefordshire, becoming the largest cider maker in the world.
- Late 19th century:** Pomonas (surveys) are published, recording and illustrating local pear and apple varieties.
- 20th century:** Decline of traditional orchards due to agricultural change and development.
- 21st century:** Renewed interest in heritage orchards, craft perry, biodiversity and conservation – including the establishment of the National Collections of Perry Pears at the Three Counties Showground, Malvern, and the National Perry Pear Centre.

Wassailing

Wassailing is a traditional winter custom, usually held in January, in which people gather in orchards to encourage a good harvest.

Songs are sung, cider or perry is poured at the base of the trees, and noise is made to wake the orchard and drive away evil spirits.

The tradition reflects the long-standing connection between orchards, seasonal rhythms and rural communities in the Three Counties.



Three Counties Shows

You can sample and buy craft perry by visiting Three Counties perry makers’ stands during RHS Malvern Spring Festival, Royal Three Counties Show and Malvern Autumn Show. Perry and cider competitions, tastings and talks are organised by the Three Counties Cider and Perry Association. The Orchard and Hopyard Pavilion, with its comprehensive displays of perry pears and apples, provides an excellent opportunity to learn directly from experts at Malvern Autumn Show.

- Find out more:
- Malvern National Collection** – threecounties.co.uk/national-collection-of-perry-pears
 - National Perry Pear Centre** – nationalperrypearcentre.org.uk
 - Three Counties Cider and Perry Association** – tccpa.co.uk
 - Malvern Autumn Show** - malvernautumn.co.uk