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by ASHLEIGH DAVIES

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A History of Gooseberries in Britain

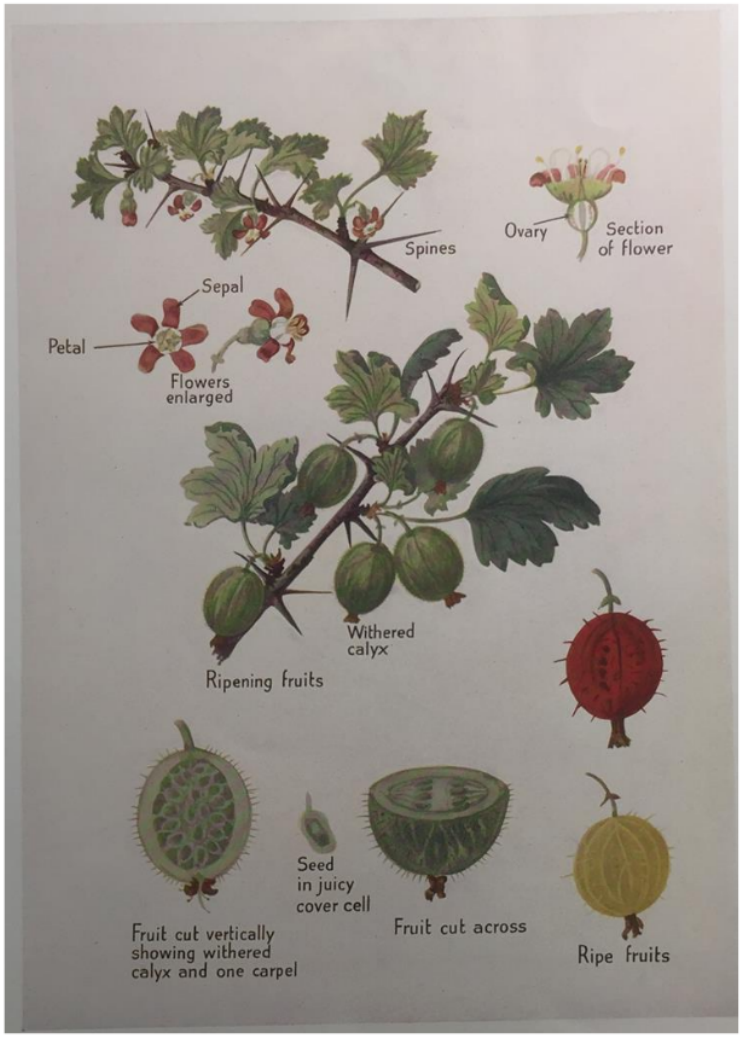

Figure 1. Gooseberries by Hilda Coley, *British Fruits* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1937) Plate 8.

Dissertation for MA in Garden & Landscape History

School of Advanced Study, University of London

Contents

Introduction

Restored kitchen gardens are among the most popular visitor attractions in Britain and gooseberries are likely to be found in each. Both gooseberries and market gardens were once economically important yet have become irrelevant novelties in the modern world. Despite frequent positive coverage in the media, gooseberries remain largely absent from our shops and diets. By investigating the history of the gooseberry this dissertation will discover how gooseberries have been used and perceived in British gardens, how they became commercially successful, why this ended and what broader conclusions may be drawn about productive horticulture in Britain from the journey of the gooseberry.

The histories of several other fruits have been successfully documented, providing academic benefit and entertainment to readers.[1] Gooseberries deserve equal attention as while other fruits are culturally significant in many countries, extensive growth and development of gooseberries only occurred in Britain making them a unique part of our garden heritage.[2]

The historiography provides an overview of gooseberries as they have appeared in print; chapter one sets gooseberries within the context of the history of fruit in Britain, chapter two describes how fruit and gooseberries became fashionable and more skilfully cultivated in the 16th and 17th centuries, chapter three explores the influences and outcomes of the Industrial Revolution upon

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[1] Joan Morgan, *The Book of Pears* (London: Ebury Press, 2015); Pete Brown, *The Apple Orchard: The Story of Our Most English Fruit* (London: Particular Books, 2016); Maggie Andrews, *How the Pershore Plum Won the Great War* (Stroud: The History Press, 2016).

[2] Frederick Roach, *Cultivated Fruits of Britain: Their Origin and History* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1986) p. 317.

gooseberries and their growers. Chapter four focuses on the disease and market forces which instigated gooseberries' decline then how they have been rediscovered and repurposed in the 21st century.

Methodology

This dissertation is based on a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research, as it is concerned mainly with the cultural impact of gooseberries, most technical, botanical information has been omitted. Initial background research was conducted with resources from the RHS Lindley, Wisley and Senate House libraries. It was intended that original material would be gathered by visiting archives in traditional gooseberry growing regions around Manchester, Tamar and Wisbech, research stations engaged in gooseberry development and present-day commercial growers. While some visits were made, most in-person research proved impossible because of the coronavirus pandemic. By necessity the project became a more desk-based study relying on secondary and electronic resources such as The British Newspaper Archive.

Historiography

In English, gooseberries first appear in 16th century herbals and cookery manuals.[3] Their purpose was to describe plants, their medicinal properties and uses. Whether gooseberries were native is not explicitly discussed in these texts, though Turner wrote that he only saw gooseberries in English

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[3] William Turner, *The Names of Herbes* (London: J.Day & W. Seres, 1548); Thomas Tusser, Five *Hundred Pointes of Good Husbandrie* (London: Henrie Denham, 1580); Henry Lyte, *A Niewe Herbal* (London: Gerard Dewes, 1578); Anon., (1545) *A Proper Newe Booke of Cokerye,* Catherine Frere (ed.) (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons Ltd., 1913); Hugh Plat, *Delights for ladies* (London: R.T, 1635); Gervase Markham (1615) *The English Housewife,* Constance Countess De La Warr (ed.) (London: The Grosvener Library, 1907).

gardens, whereas in Germany they grew in the fields.[4]

Seventeenth-century 'curious gardeners' such as Parkinson and Rea took a proto-botanical approach and enumerated the different sorts of gooseberries they grew, their characteristics and virtues.[5] These publications encouraged a connoisseur's mindset regarding fruit which developed among the élite, to have one variety of gooseberry was insufficient, to have a superior selection to one's friends/rivals was ideal.[6] Gardening manuals also became more detailed offering instructions on the propagation, training and planting of gooseberries.[7] An idea first documented in the 17th century is that gooseberries could be profitably planted in the shade of larger trees.[8] Gooseberries appeared in 17th century recipes for meat, preserve, tart, custard, cream and fool.[9] Towards the end of the century they featured prominently in a fashion for homemade fruit wine.[10]

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[4] William Turner, *The Names of Herbes* (London: The English Dialect Society, 1881) p. 88.

[5] John Parkinson, *Theatrum botanicum* (London: Thos. Cotes, 1640) pp. 1560 – 1566; John Rea, *Flora, seu de Florum Cultura, or a Complete florilege* (London: Thomas Clarke, 1665) p. 230.

[6] Ambra Edwards, *The Story of the English Garden* (London: National Trust Books, 2018) p. 63.

[7] T. Langford, *Plain and Full Instructions to raise all sorts of fruit trees that prosper in England* (London: Richard Chiswell, 1696) p. 166; John Evelyn (trans.), *The French Gardiner* (London: J.C, 1658) p. 257; John Reid, *The Scots Gard'ner* (London & Edinburgh: T.N. Foulis, 1907) p. 25, 35, 118.

[8] Reid, *The Scots Gard'ner*, p. 25; Richard Haines, *Aphorisms upon the new way of improving cyder* […] (London: George Larkin, 1684) p. 6.

[9] Hannah Woolley, *The Queen-like Closet* (London: R. Lowndes, 1670); Lord Ruthuen, *The Ladies cabinet opened and expanded* (London: Bedel & Collins, 1667).

[10] Haines, *Aphorisms upon […]*; William Y-worth, *The Britannian Magazine: or a new art of making above twenty sorts of English Wines* (London: W. Onely, 1694); John Worlidge, *Vinetum Brittanicum or a Treatise of Cider* (London: Thomas Dring, 1678).

By the 18th century, publishing and gardening had become more professional industries and titles featuring gooseberries reflect this. Miller's *Gardener's Dictionary* (1731) claimed on its frontispiece to contain, 'the practise of the most experienced gardeners of the present age.'[11] The first discussions of gooseberry pests such as the cankerworm and gooseberry moth appeared (Fig. 2).[12]

Figure 2. Gooseberry moth (*Halia vauaria*) caterpillar (g), chrysalis (h) and moth (i) reproduced from Moses Harris (1766) *The Aurelian* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1840) p. 58.

Gooseberry plants were advertised for sale in nursery catalogues and newspapers, with ever

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[11] James Raven, *Publishing business in 18th century England* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2014) pp. 1-16; John Harvey, *Early nurserymen* (London & Chichester: Phillimore & Co. Ltd., 1974) p. 40; Thomas Hitt, *A Treatise of Fruit Trees* (London: The author, 1757); Philip Miller, *The Gardener's Dictionary* (London: Philip Miller, 1731).

[12] John Laurence, *The Clergyman's recreation* (London: Bernard Lintott, 1717) p. 73.

increasing diversity, largely due to the efforts of amateur growers breeding new types for competition.[13] The first Gooseberry Growers Register, containing lists of all the competitions which took place across Britain and their results, is thought to have been published in 1786 though only later editions survive.[14] Recipes for gooseberry wine, preserves and creams continued to feature in 18th century cookery books while new trends for puddings and decorative confectionary are also evident.[15]

The 19th century saw a proliferation of horticultural publications including magazines and manuals aimed at the middle and working classes and women.[16] Opinion was divided as to whether gooseberries were native, Rogers and Chambers thought so, Loudon thought not.[17] Some authors now advised against planting gooseberries beneath the shade of other trees as it would produce

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[13] Robert Furber, *A catalogue of great variety of the best and choicest fruit-trees: that best thrive in our climate of England* (London: Henry Woodfall, 1727) p. 8; Robert Weston, *The Universal Botanist and Nurseryman* (London: J. Bell, 1772) p. 211; Personal advert for the sale of a gooseberry collection, *Chester Chronicle*, Thursday 1st August, 1776, p. 4.

[14] Charles Darwin, *Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication*, Vol I. (London: John Murray, 1905) p. 444.

[15] Eliza Smith, *The Compleat Housewife* (London: C. Hitch, 1758) p. 121; Elizabeth Moxon, *English Housewifry* (Leeds: J. Lister, 1741) p. 84; Elizabeth Raffald, *The experienced English housekeeper* (London: R. Baldwin, 1786) p. 204.

[16] John Claudius Loudon, *Gardening for Ladies* (London: John Murray, 1843); Samuel Beeton, *The Beeton Book of Garden Management* (London: Ward, Lock and Tyler, 1862); Catherine Buckton, *Town and Window Gardening* (London: Longmans & Co., 1879).

[17] John Rogers, *The Fruit Cultivator* (London: James Ridgway & Sons, 1837) p. 191; William & Robert Chambers, *Chamber's Information for the People: The Fruit Garden* (London: 1857) p. 11; John Claudius Loudon, *An Encyclopaedia of Gardening* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, 1822) p. 821.

poor fruit and sickly plants, though Whitehead still suggests it for market gardeners perhaps with profit rather than quality in mind.[18] Gooseberry sawfly and methods for its control were much discussed, tobacco, hellebore, cow urine and seaweed were all recommended as remedies with little logical evidence.[19] By the late 19th century authors such as Eleanor Ormerod took a more empirical approach, even if the chemicals recommended were no less dangerous.[20] In the second half of the century wheat imports from the United States saw grain prices in Britain plummet, in response several authors penned volumes encouraging farmers to turn to market gardening and soft fruit cultivation, including gooseberries, as an alternative source of income.[21]

In the 20th century government publications regarding gooseberries became common: to increase food production during the First and Second World Wars, to warn of disease and encourage best practise.[22] Radio then television gardening presenters were influential throughout the century from

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[18] Charles McIntosh, *The Orchard and Fruit Garden* (London: Wm Orr & Co., 1839) p. 140; Thomas Haynes, *A Treatise on the Improved Culture of the Strawberry, Raspberry and Gooseberry* (London: B.Crosby & Co., 1812) p. 83; William Forsyth, *A Treatise on the Culture and Management of Fruit Trees* (London: T.N Longman & O. Rees, 1802) p. 149; Charles Whitehead, *Hints of Vegetable and Fruit Farming* (London: Royal Agricultural Society, 1881) p. 19.

[19] P.H, 'Receipts for destroying the gooseberry caterpillar,' *The Farmers' Magazine* (Edinburgh: John Moir for Archibald Constable, 1801) p. 144; John Macmurray, 'On gooseberry caterpillars and maggots that infest onions,' *The Belfast Monthly Magazine*, Vol 13. No. 75 (Oct 1814) pp. 320-322.

[20] Eleanor Ormerod, *A Manual of Injurious Insects with Methods of Prevention and Remedy* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, 1890).

[21] Samuel Wood, *The Forcing Garden* (London: Crosby Lockwood & Co., 1881); R. Lewis Castle, *The Book of Market Gardening* (London: John Lane, 1906); Whitehead, *Hints of vegetable and fruit farming*.

[22] Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, 'Leaflet No. 195: American Gooseberry Mildew' (London, 1907); Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, 'Dig for Victory Leaflet No. 25: How to prune fruit trees and bushes' (London,

C.H. Middleton to Alan Titchmarsh.[23] Much of the cultivation advice they offered for gooseberries differed little from the 19th century though chemical controls for pest and disease moved on. Towards the end of the century *Gardener's World* presenter Geoff Hamilton was one of the first mainstream advocates for organic gardening methods. As the environmental movement gained momentum gooseberries appeared in books on self-sufficiency and forest gardening.[24] In the 1980s an interest arose in kitchen garden history, several titles were published including *Cultivated Fruits of Britain* (1985) which is still, almost forty years later, one of the most detailed, well researched texts on the history of gooseberries.[25]

From the beginning of the 21st century traditional, respected sources of horticultural information, such as the RHS, produced online resources offering advice on the cultivation, varieties and purchase of gooseberries.[26] From the mid-2000s social media and video sharing platforms such as YouTube

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1940); Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, *Bush Fruits* (1st ed.) (London: His Majesty's stationary office, 1930); Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, *Bush Fruits* (8th ed.) (London: Her Majesty's stationary office, 1965).

[23] C.H Middleton, *Your garden in war-time* (London: Aurum Press Ltd., 2010); Percy Thrower, *How to Grow Vegetables and Fruit* (London: Hamlyn, 1977); Alan Titchmarsh, *The Kitchen Gardener* (London: BBC Books, 2008).

[24] Geoff Hamilton, *Successful Organic Gardening*, (London: D. Kindersley, 1987) p. 229; John Seymour, *The complete book of self-sufficiency* (London: Corgi Books, Ltd, 1976) p. 175; Robert Hart, *Forest Gardening: Rediscovering Nature & Community in a Post-Industrial Age* (Dartington: Green Earth Books, 1996) p. 45.

[25] David Stuart, *The Kitchen Garden* (London: Robert Hale Ltd., 1984); Francesca Greenoak, *Forgotten Fruit, The English Orchard and Fruit garden* (London: Andre Deutsch Ltd., 1983); Jennifer Davies, *The Victorian Kitchen Garden* (London: Butler & Tanner Ltd, 1987); Roach, *Cultivated Fruits*, pp. 311-322.

[26] RHS website, 'Gooseberries' <https://www.rhs.org.uk/fruit/gooseberries/grow-your-own> accessed 09.09.21.

allowed private individuals to broadcast their own content directly to audiences, demonstrations of planting and pruning gooseberries are most common, nurseries and conventional media operators do likewise.[27] Books continued to be published claiming the gooseberry was native, not native, that it arrived in the 13th century or has been used in Britain since Saxon times.[28] This is often repetition from earlier texts rather than true disagreement though part of the confusion seems to stem from an archaeological investigation and report on Frewin Hall, Oxford. The building was constructed in the Norman period but the site was in continuous use for several centuries and the remains of a glass bottle containing gooseberries were found among other 17th and 18th century material.[29] These results have then been misinterpreted in other publications placing gooseberries at an earlier incarnation of the site.[30]

Improvements in printing technology allowed gardening books to shift from practical instruction manuals to coffee-table books where gooseberries could be appreciated aesthetically without setting foot in the garden (Fig. 3).

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[27] Simplify Gardening Channel, 'How to prune gooseberries for high yields' (22.01.2017) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fdUmWHQS9q8> accessed 14.08.21; Kitchen Garden Magazine Channel, 'Growing gooseberries' (12.07.19) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apejN3QQy5g> accessed 14.08.21.

[28] Susan Campbell, *A history of kitchen gardening* (London: Frances Lincoln Ltd., 2005) p. 69; Christopher Stocks, *Forgotten Fruits* (London: Windmill Books, 2009) p. 102; Jonathan Roberts, *Cabbages & Kings: the origins of fruit and vegetables* (London: Harper Collins Publishers Ltd, 2001) p. 59.

[29] John Blair, 'Frewin Hall Oxford: a Norman mansion and a monastic college.' *Oxonesia*, XLIII, 1978, p. 76.

[30] 'Discussion of individual taxa' *Internet Archeology* website <https://intarch.ac.uk/journal/issue1/tomlinson/part2.html#S712> accessed 20.02.20; 'Frewin Hall, Oxford,' Internet Archaeology website <https://intarch.ac.uk/journal/issue1/tomlinson/scripts/abcd.cfm?site=71.0000> accessed 20.02.20.

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VARIETIES

- **'Hinomaki Yellow'** – a relatively new dessert gooseberry with very large, aromatic fruit that ripens to a pale gold. It has a rich flavour with a hint of apricot and ripens in July. Mildew resistant.
- **'Invicta'** – a heavy-cropping, traditional, green, thorny variety with well-flavoured fruit which is ready in June. Mildew resistant.
- **'Pax'** – a thornless red dessert gooseberry which is heavy-cropping, tasty and mildew resistant; it has largely taken over from the traditional old favourites.
- **'Whinham's Industry'** – a thorny, red dessert variety.

PRUNING

Cut all the stems of young gooseberry bushes back by half after planting, but do any pruning when they are dormant in winter – from November–February. First, remove any dead or damaged stems and any overcrowded growth in the centre of the bush. Open it up almost to a wineglass shape, then shorten the main stems by half and cut back all the sideshoots to 5–7.5cm (2–3in), cutting just beyond an upward-facing bud. Remove any shoots growing out from the very base of the plants, since gooseberry bushes are traditionally grown on a short trunk or 'leg'. (This makes weeding easier and less painful when you're growing prickly varieties.) Remove any suckers that appear from below ground level. In early July shorten all the sideshoots to about five leaves to encourage the production of the buds that will carry next year's crop.

HARVEST

Start picking green gooseberries as soon as they are big enough to be worth using – you could take enough for a pie as early as May. The smaller the gooseberries, the more sour they taste, so you'll need more sugar when cooking them. Continue picking through June. Dessert gooseberries are not completely ripe until July.

STORAGE

Gooseberries are one of the few soft fruits that I reckon are worth freezing. Put whole topped and tailed fruits into bags and freeze without any more preparation.

PROBLEMS

American gooseberry mildew forms a white talcum-powder-like 'bloom' over the tips of young shoots, leaves and fruit. Wipe the 'powder' off fruits (they are still perfectly edible), and prune out the affected tips of shoots after the fruit has been picked. Prevent mildew by pruning to improve air circulation around the plants, and feed with 28g (1oz) of sulphate of potash per plant in spring instead of general-purpose fertiliser. (Excessive nitrogen is thought to encourage mildew by promoting soft, easily infected growth.) Best of all, grow resistant varieties.

Magpie moth appears as very conspicuous black, white and orange-spotted 'looper' caterpillars that can quickly strip the bushes of leaves in May and June. These need to be removed by hand on sight.

Gooseberry sawfly can be seen as dull khaki caterpillars up to 2.5cm (1in) long, usually on the undersides of the leaves from early May to late summer. A bad infestation can quickly defoliate the bushes, so remove them by hand as they appear.

Green 'cooking' gooseberries are not normally loved by birds, but if you are growing dessert varieties – particularly the red kinds – some netting may be needed to protect the crop.

Figure 3. Images of gooseberries reproduced from Alan Titchmarsh, *The Kitchen Gardener* (London: BBC Books, 2008) pp 216-217.

From the mid-2000s gooseberries were recommended by celebrity chef-come-gardeners promoting seasonal eating and home-grown produce.[31] As gooseberries were rarely seen in stores by then, they developed an exclusive air and began to appear in stylish, aspirational lifestyle posts on social media (Fig. 4).

[31] Monty Don, 'Feeling Fruity,' *Gardener's World Magazine* (April 2004) p. 43; Jamie Oliver, 'Jamie Oliver's Kitchen Garden' *Gardener's World Magazine* (December 2007) pp. 73-77; Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, *River Cottage: Fruit Every Day* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) p. 13.

Figure 4. Photograph of gooseberries by Helena @damsonsandlavendar Instagram account, reproduced from <https://www.instagram.com/p/CRTAqoBL8tu/> accessed 16.08.21.

Finally, there have been many scientific papers published concerning gooseberries in the 20th and 21st centuries covering research into their genetics, pathology and nutritional properties but are of such a technical nature so as not be comprehensible to anyone not involved in biological science at a professional or academic level.[32]

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[32] John Warren & Penri James, 'The ecological effects of exotic disease resistance genes introgressed into British Gooseberries,' *Oecologia*, Vol. 147, No. 1 (Feb 2006) pp. 69-75; Joelle Chiche et al, 'Genome size, heterochromatin organisation and ribosomal gene mapping in four species of Ribes,' *Canadian Journal of Botany*, No. 87 (Nov 2003) pp. 1049-1057; Jana Orsavova et al, 'Contribution of phenolic compounds, ascorbic acid and vitamin E to antioxidant activity of Currant (*Ribes* L.) and Gooseberry (*Ribes uva-crispa* L.) fruits,' *Food Chemistry*, Vol. 284 (June 2019) pp. 323-333.

Prehistory – 13th century: The arrival of the gooseberry in Britain

Gooseberries were once considered native but although they were present before the last Ice Age (12,900-11,700 years BP) they did not return independently afterwards therefore are not native. In fact, Britain began this Holocene with only six indigenous fruits: the wood strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*), blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus*), raspberry (*Rubus idaeus*), sloe (*Prunus spinosa*) wild cherry (*Prunus avium*) and crab apple (*Malus sylvestris*).[33] Archaeological finds show these species were collected for food at Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age sites across the country although there is no evidence they were brought into cultivation. Over time new species appeared either as a result of trading or natural agency; sour cherry (*Prunus cerasus*) remains being found at Neolithic sites and plum seeds (*Prunus domestica*) at an Iron Age site in Dorset.[34]

Archaeological evidence suggests Romans were the first to intentionally cultivate fruit in Britain. During their occupation from 43 – 410 CE they brought mulberries, figs, medlars, sweet cherries and improved varieties of apples, pears and plums. Gooseberries were apparently unknown to Greek and Roman writers and no evidence of them has been found at Roman sites in Britain.[35] The fruits brought by the Romans originated in the Transcaucasian forests, over generations they travelled through the Fertile Crescent and Persia, into Europe.[36] As an island on the edge of Europe, far from the birthplace of agriculture and the trade routes along which fruit spread, Britain was among the last in line to receive improved fruits and knowledge of their cultivation. It is thought some of the

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[33] Roach, *Cultivated Fruits,* p. 1.

[34] *Ibid*, p. 10; Joan Thirsk (ed.) *The agrarian history of England and Wales*, Vol I., Part I. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) p. 52.

[35] Roach, *Cultivated Fruits*, p. 14.

[36] *Ibid*, p. 2.

hardier varieties of Roman apple, pear and plum may have survived and naturalised after the occupation ended but more tender species such as peach, mulberry and fig likely died out and were reintroduced later.[37] After the Roman occupation ended, Britain was turbulent with waves of invasion from Saxons, Jutes and later Danes. Either organised life broke down during this time or the evidence for it has been lost.

The next significant cultivators of fruit in Britain were monasteries. From St Augustine's first monastery built at Canterbury in 602 CE, they were influential instigators of fruit cultivation in Britain as they strove to be self-sufficient, improve production and employed local laypeople so that knowledge became disseminated into the general population. They were also in correspondence with their colleagues on the continent helping knowledge and plants to enter Britain.[38] Herbs, grapevines, pears, apples and mulberries are all known to have been grown in monasteries, gooseberries however still seem absent from records. This is curious as *Ribes* species are native throughout Europe, Asia, Northwest Africa and North and South America, so it seems highly unlikely that members of the church would not have encountered them.[39] Admittedly wild gooseberries were small and sour when unripe so perhaps not the most appealing prospect, but many cultivated fruits were less palatable in their early forms and this did not deter the monks; some early pears were grown for their keeping qualities alone which sustained the monks through the winter months.[40] It therefore seems strange that gooseberries remained apparently unused for so long.

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[37] John Harvey, *Mediaeval Gardens* (London: B.T Batsford Ltd, 1981) p. 23.

[38] Roach, *Cultivated Fruits*, p. 16.

[39] Rex Brennan, *Currants and Gooseberries* (Published online: Scottish Crop Research Institute, 2013) < http://archive.northsearegion.eu/files/repository/20131121174401_UK-Enclosure44.pdf> accessed 20.01.21.

[40] Joan Morgan, *The Book of Pears*, p. 52.

Despite a slower start than other parts of Europe, agriculture was well established in Britain by the time William the Conqueror arrived in 1066. The *Domesday Book* shows that 80% of the land cultivated in 1914 was already used for farming by 1086.[41] William installed his supporters into positions of power within the church, who controlled much of the land. They planted more orchards for cider and vineyards for wine but still apparently no gooseberries for anything.[42] It has been argued the 'open field' system of farming used in Britain at this time did not encourage the growing and improvement of fruit as the annual rotation of cultivated strips between villagers meant there was no incentive to plant fruit trees or bushes which took several years to mature. From the 12th century onwards, land began to be enclosed and taken out of communal ownership. Proponents of enclosure state that once the more skilled, dedicated farmers took possession of land on a permanent basis they were able to farm more efficiently, innovate and invest in orchards.[43] Others argue this began the process of separating workers from their means of production which in the end forced them from the land, dispossessed, to seek work in the towns.[44] The ethics and effects of enclosure aside, it seems fruit was not considered a staple food crop in the early medieval period, cultivated fruit was used to make drinks and wild fruit was collected as a seasonal bonus.[45]

In the 13th century, a more positive attitude towards fruit, its cultivation and consumption was

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[41] The Domesday Book Online, *Life in the 11th Century* (Published online: National Archives, 1999) <http://www.domesdaybook.co.uk/life.html#7> accessed 26.01.20.

[42] Roach, *Cultivated fruits,* p. 20.

[43] *Ibid*, p. 32.

[44] Edwin Gay, 'The Enclosure Movement in England' *American Economic Association*, 3rd Series, Vol. 6, No. 2 (May 1905) pp. 146-159.

[45] Joan Thirsk, *Food in Early Modern England* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007) p. 297.

encouraged in Britain by the influence of European Queens.[46] Henry III (R. 1216 – 1272) married Eleanor of Provence in 1236, then Edward I (R. 1272 - 1307) married Eleanor of Castille, who brought her own gardeners to England. Her gardeners were from Aragon which was still an integrated country of Muslims, Christians and Jews and so had knowledge drawn from Eastern and Western cultures as well as a tradition of advanced horticulture centred on Valencia.[47] It is under Edward I, in 1275 that we find the first record of gooseberries in Britain in an order for various fruit bushes from France to be planted at the Tower of London.[48] It is possible gooseberries had been grown in Britain before but not recorded. The order is not accompanied by a helpful contextual letter from Edward expressing how keen he is to try these previously untasted fruits, or that he hopes they will be much better than the gooseberries he already has; the gooseberry plants are however listed as costing 3d each. In terms of affordability to the average person of the time, this equates to £147.78 suggesting gooseberries were not commonplace.[49] Unfortunately there is virtually no evidence of how gooseberries were grown or used at this time: they do not appear in *The Feat of Gardening* (c. 1350), they are mentioned in a list of plants known in Britain by the Dominican Friar Henry Daniel c.1380 but he does not expand upon their edible properties or garden uses.[50] In some form though, the cultivation of gooseberries in Britain had begun.

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[46] *Ibid*, p. 7.

[47] Harvey, *Mediaeval Gardens*, p. 78.

[48] Roach, *Cultivated Fruits,* p. 52.

[49] Peter Reed, *How much is that worth today?* (Published Online: Epsom & Ewell History Explorer, 2009) <https://eehe.org.uk/?p=31230> accessed 27.01.21.

[50] John Harvey, 'The First English Garden Book: Mayster Jon Gardener's Treatise and Its Background', *Garden History*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Autumn, 1985), pp. 83-101; Harvey, *Medieval gardens*, p. 122.

14th-17th century: Gooseberries gain ground

Gooseberries may have dropped out of cultivation in Britain during the 14th century as it was a difficult and turbulent time; droughts and pestilence caused famine then the plague killed one third of the population.[51] Disruption continued in the 15th century with the Wars of the Roses. Dean of Winchester, William Harrison (1534-1593) wrote in the *Holinshed Chronicles* (1577) that there was a significant loss of horticultural knowledge in England from the late 14th century to the beginning of the 16th. According to Harrison access to cheap imports engendered a disinclination to grow produce at home and so the ability was lost.[52]

From the beginning of the 16th century however, there is evidence the cultivation and consumption of fruit increased with encouragement from Henry VIII. Henry and his courtiers were strongly impressed and influenced by the fashions, manners and culture of the French and Spanish courts which included growing and eating fine fruits.[53] The king spent lavishly on improving his palaces and gardens and imported many new fruit trees.[54] Several 19th century books state that the 'pale gooseberry' was brought to England from Flanders or the Netherlands around 1520.[55] Amherst states gooseberries were not previously grown in British gardens but were planted at Hampton

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[51] Christopher Dyer, *Everyday Life in Medieval England* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1994) pp. 13-14.

[52] Roach, *Cultivated Fruits*, pp. 26-28.

[53] Joan Thirsk, *Alternative Agriculture: A History From the Black Death to Present Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p. 31.

[54] Roach, *Cultivated Fruits,* p. 29.

[55] John Robinson (ed.) *Hume & Smollet's Celebrated History of England* (Hartford: D.F Robinson & Co., 1827) p. 493; Thomas Bartlet, *The New Tablet of Memory or Chronicle of Remarkable Events* (London: Thomas Kelly, 1841) p. 502.

Court in 1516 and were more widely grown after this.[56] Unfortunately none of these texts provide a source to verify their information but it is entirely possible a new type of gooseberry arrived from mainland Europe in the early 16th century. Their horticulture was far more sophisticated than in Britain and in 1533 Henry did send his 'fruiterer' Richard Harris to collect specimens from France and the Low Countries to improve English orchards.[57] From the 1540s Britain also received Protestant refugees, many of whom were skilled market gardeners. Their expertise would come to revolutionise British market gardening.[58]

Tusser (1573) offers the first indication of how gooseberries may have been grown in British gardens:

> The Barbery, Respis and Goosebery too
> Looke now to be planted as other things doo,
> The Goosebery, Respis and Roses al three
> With Strawberies under them trimly agree.[59]

He directs planting should take place in September which would still be considered appropriate in modern horticultural practise. As for what was meant by 'trimly agree,' gooseberries may have been underplanted with strawberries to make the area as productive as possible, to suppress weeds or for aesthetic reasons.

Hill (1577) described how gooseberries were used to create a mixed hedge: collect the seed of

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[56] Alicia Amherst, *A History of Gardening in England* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1896) pp. 96-97.

[57] Miles Hadfield, *A History of British Gardening* (London: John Murray Ltd, 1979) p. 44.

[58] Roach, *Cultivated Fruits*, p. 30.

[59] Thomas Tusser (1573) *Five hundred pointes of good husbandrie,* W. Payne & Sidney Herrtage (ed.) (London: Trubner & Co., 1878) p. 41.

gooseberries, briers, white thorn, barberry and brambles, mix them in, 'the binding meale of tares,' (a type of vetch, some of which have mucilaginous sap) and embed the mixture into old rope. The fibres of the rope protected the seeds until spring when it could be buried wherever the new hedge was required.[60] Their use as a hedging plant suggests they had become quotidian, according to Lyte (1578) 'the gooseberry is planted commonly in every garden in the country along the hedges and borders of the same'.[61] Hill also instructed how hedges could be made from suckers of, 'Gooseberries, Currans, Privet or Haythorn,' planted in January or February at the increase of the moon.[62] Classical writings and translated Arabic sources nurtured the belief among people in the middle ages that celestial bodies such as the moon had influence over their activities and life on earth, planting the hedge at the increase of the moon must have been considered beneficial.[63] A map of Wilton, Wiltshire c. 1565, shows village gardens with vegetable plots surrounded by hedges, it seems likely these were the type of hedges to which Hill referred and where gooseberries may have grown (Fig 5).

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[60] Thomas Hill (1577) *The Gardener's Labyrinth,* Richard Mabey (ed.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1987) p. 37.

[61] Lyte, *A niewe herbal,* p. 681.

[62] Hill, *The Gardener's Labyrinth,* p. 97.

[63] Clarck Drieshen, 'The future is in the moon' (Published online: The British Library, 2017) <https://blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2017/07/the-future-is-in-the-moon.html> accessed 07.07.21.

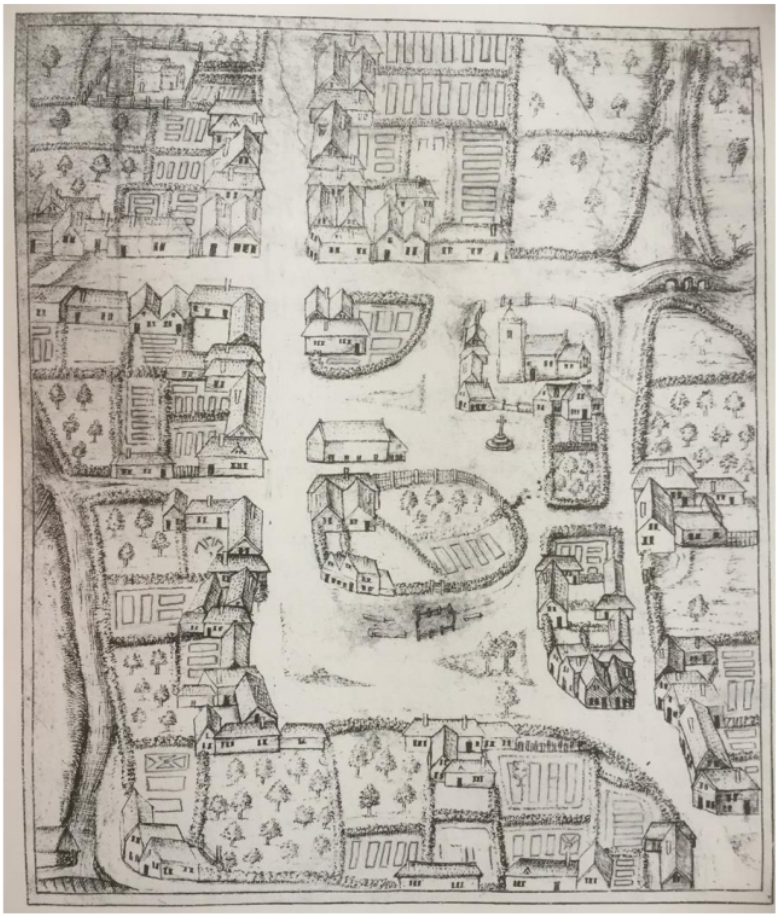

Figure 5. Map of Wilton, Wiltshire, c. 1565 showing hedges, reproduced from Sylvia Landsberg, *The Medieval Garden* (London: British Museum Press, 1995) p. 47.

In 16th century recipes gooseberries were used as an acidic ingredient with meat in savoury dishes, in sweet tarts or pies and recipes which to modern tastes are more difficult to define. For example, physician and naturalist Thomas Muffet (1553 – 1604) recorded a pie-filling recipe consisting of boiled artichoke leaves with sweet bone marrow, verjuice, pepper, sugar and gooseberries.[64] In one, 'summer dish,' cucumbers were filled with shredded liver, grated bread, sugar, spices and grapes or

[64] Kate Colquhoun, *Taste: The Story of Britain Through its Cooking* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2007) p. 94.

gooseberries.[65] In the Elizabethan period great quantities of artificial Claret were reportedly sold made from sage, cider, raisins, old wine-lees, the juice of mulberries, blackberries or gooseberries and water.[66] These recipes may not have been designed for taste alone: in the mindset of 16th and 17th century people, food and medicine were intrinsically linked. Each ingredient was supposed to possess properties relating to the elements (earth, air, fire and water) which would affect the 'humours' of their body. Good health was achieved by balancing the four humours: blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile.[67] Gooseberries were believed to be most useful when they were unripe and had cold, dry properties which would help cool a hot stomach or liver and provoke appetite when eaten with meat.[68] For women they were said to suppress menstruation and the libido when pregnant.[69] The Young leaves eaten raw were said to provoke urine so were good for kidney stones.[70] Parkinson also described a gooseberry which was less tart and so was eaten raw for pleasure when ripe, though its sweetness and ripeness made it useless medicinally.[71] Physicians actually warned against eating raw fruit; in 1620 one wrote that most fruits, 'fill the body with crude and waterish humours that dispose the bloud into putrefaction.'[72] Records suggest people ignored

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[65] C. Anne Wilson, *Food and Drink in Britain From the Stone Age to the 19th century* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1991) p. 315.

[66] *Ibid*, p. 394.

[67] Alixe Bovey, 'Medicine in the middle ages' (Published online: The British Library, 2015) <https://www.bl.uk/the-middle-ages/articles/medicine-diagnosis-and-treatment-in-the-middle-ages> accessed 21.07.21.

[68] Lyte, *A Niewe Herbal,* p. 681.

[69] *Ibid*; John Parkinson, *Paradisi in sole paradisus terrestris* (London: Methuen & Co., 1904) pp. 560-561.

[70] Lyte, A Niewe Herbal, p. 681.

[71] Parkinson, *Paradisi in sole*, pp. 560-561.

[72] Tobias Venner, *Via Recta ad Vitam Longam* (London: Edward Griffin, 1620) p. 111.

them and injunctions against fresh fruit may have added to the appeal by making it seem decadent.[73] Either way with royal encouragement, fruit eating became more fashionable and popular during this period.[74]

In 1625 Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626) recommended different treatments for areas in the garden to produce, 'curiosity and beauty.'[75] Gooseberries were used in the heath section which was meant to convey a sense of, 'natural wildness,' but had very specific instructions. There should be no trees but thickets of sweet brier, honeysuckle and, 'little heaps in the nature of molehills,' set with violets, strawberries, primroses and other small flowering plants. Some of the heaps should be topped with small standards of roses, juniper, gooseberries and other shrubs, kept with cutting from growing too large.[76] Bacon's design seems reminiscent of how Tusser described planting gooseberries almost eighty years earlier, perhaps intentionally.

Bacon does not specify a particular gooseberry, however collecting rare or unusual plants was of great interest to 'curious gardeners.' To be curious meant you pursued new knowledge in a logical way and was a mark of social and intellectual distinction.[77] Curious gardeners were often in correspondence with each other across Europe to share information and specimens.[78] The elder John Tradescant (1570-1638) for example was gardener to the gentry, had travelled to new

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[73] Paul Lloyd, 'Dietary advice and fruit eating in Late Tudor and early Stewart England', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, Vol. 67, No. 4 (October 2012) p. 557.

[74] *Ibid.*

[75] Francis Bacon, *Of Gardens* (London: Hacon & Ricketts, 1902) p. 18.

[76] *Ibid*, pp. 19-21.

[77] Tom Turner, *British Gardens: History, Philosophy and Design* (London & New York: Routledge, 2013) p. 123.

[78] Jennifer Potter, *Strange Blooms* (London: Atlantic Books, 2006) p. xxiv.

territories and collected plant specimens and curiosities for his 'ark' or museum of wonders. His 1634 plant list contained seven types of gooseberry: *Grossularia maxima, G. maxima longa, G. caerulea, G. rubra maior rotunda, G. media species longa, G. rubra minor and G. spinosa*.[79] They appear on his list of plants rather than his catalogue of fruits suggesting he grew them as botanical rather than edible specimens. Before the binomial naming system was adopted in the 18th century plant names were descriptive and often lengthy. Under modern botanical nomenclature these species would all be varieties of *Ribes uva-crispa*.

For Parkinson (1629) gooseberries were to be planted in the orchard section of a garden, the other areas being the kitchen and flower gardens.[80] They formed a low hedge with roses, cornelian cherry and currants between the paths and orchard trees.[81] Fruit gardens were seen as ornamental as well as productive in this period and were often situated within view of the house, unlike the utilitarian kitchen garden which was hidden if possible.[82] So planting gooseberries in the orchard was not necessarily a banishment. By 1663 gooseberries must still have been considered suitably ornamental to appear as hedges in London's fashionable pleasure gardens; parts of Vauxhall gardens were planted as squares, 'enclosed with hedges of gooseberries, within which are roses, beans and asparagus.'[83]

After the Restoration Britain's economy became increasingly cash based through its role in the slave

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[79] Prudence Leith Ross, *The John Tradescants* (London: Peter Owen, 2006) p. 227.

[80] Parkinson, *Paradisi in sole*, p. 537.

[81] *Ibid.*

[82] David Jacques, *Gardens of Court and Country, English Design 1630 – 1730* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017) p. 62.

[83] Edward Walford, *Old and New London*, Vol. 6 (London, 1878) pp. 447-467.

trade: finished goods were sold to Africa, slaves brought to the New World and forced to work in terrible conditions to produce commodities like tea, coffee and sugar for sale back in Britain.[84] This trade generated non-agricultural wealth which changed the nature of the British countryside. Feudal manors were broken up and manor houses became country houses whose owners were not involved in farming the surrounding land. Much of this new wealth was spent on developing palatial homes and gardens in which fruit featured prominently. The selection, production and consumption of choice fruit became *de rigueur* and no gentleman wanted to be left behind.[85] *The Scots Gard'ner* (1683) illustrates the elements of such a garden (Fig. 6).[86]

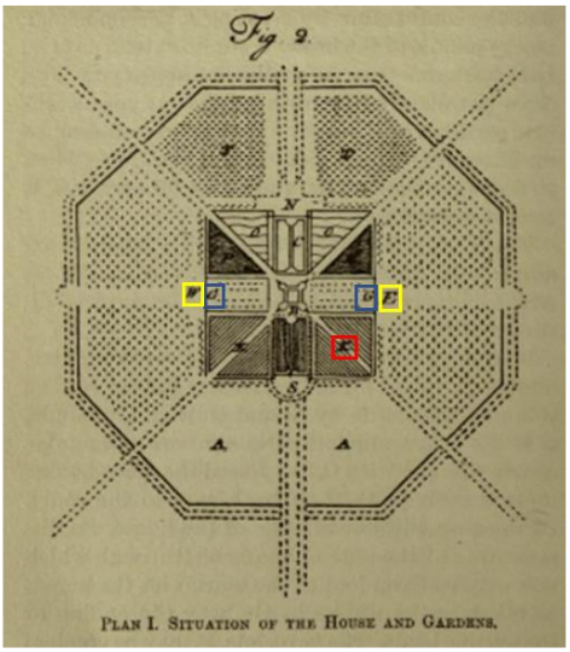

Figure 6. Diagram of garden layout where gooseberries were used in the Cherrie gardens - G, Kitchen garden -K and orchards – E&W. Reproduced from John Reid, *The Scots gard'ner* (London & Edinburgh: T.N. Foulis, 1907) p. 6.

[84] Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power* (New York & London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1986) p. 43.

[85] Turner, *British Gardens*, pp. 121-123.

[86] Reid, *The Scots Gard'ner*, p. 6.

Reid did not specify exactly how the gooseberries should be grown in the 'Cherrie' or fruit garden, except that it was 'a proper place also for raising gooseberries, currants and strawberries,' while in the orchard he explained how gooseberries could be planted beneath larger trees to maximise productivity.[87] Towards the end of the 17th century the introduction of dwarf fruit trees led to a re-combination of the fruit and kitchen gardens with quarters for growing vegetables and borders of dwarf or trained fruit trees.[88] In Reid's kitchen garden he recommended a triple hedge system around the quarters of holly, gooseberries or currants and dwarf fruit trees to protect the plots from cold winds, ensure people kept to the walks and to hide dirt and digging from view.[89] He also described how gooseberries could be trained as standards or planted between young wall trained trees then removed when the main specimens matured into the space.[90] As for propagation he wrote that gooseberries could be grafted but did not require it, did well from suckers and cuttings or could be grown from seed but the latter was not certain to produce good fruit.[91] This shows that while scholars were striving academically to explain sexual reproduction in plants, gardeners like Reid already had a practical understanding of the difference between sexual and vegetative propagation.[92] The variability of seed-grown gooseberries noted by Reid was to develop into a breeding bonanza in the 18th and 19th centuries.

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[87] *Ibid*, p.7; *Ibid* pp. 25-26.

[88] Jacques, *Gardens of Court and Country,* p. 62.

[89] Reid, *The Scots Gard'ner*, p. 35.

[90] *Ibid*, p. 34.

[91] *Ibid*, p. 118.

[92] Nehemiah Grew, *Anatomy of Plants* (Paris: Antoine Dezallier, 1679); John Ray, *New Method of Plants* (London: Faithorne & Kersey, 1682); Rudolf Camerarius, *Du Sexu Plantarum* (Tübingen: Martin Romney, 1694).

18th-19th century: Breeding, competitions and commercial success.

The landscape garden became popular in the 18th century and many formal gardens were swept away.[93] Yet as the élite pursued rolling green vistas, some were still passionate about the careful cultivation of flowers and showing them at competitions called Florists' Feasts. 'Florist' was a term for someone who was knowledgeable and skilled in the art of cultivating flowering plants. It did not mean a cut flower vendor until the 19th century.[94] Floral Feasts and societies are thought to have originated with protestant refugees who arrived from the Low Countries and France from the 16th century onwards and brought advanced kitchen gardening skills to Britain. The first recorded Floral Feast in Britain was in Norwich, 1631.[95] Florists were fanatical about their specimens and keen to display them to their peers. Raising plants from seed and creating new varieties was said to be, 'the glory of the florists,' and prizes were awarded for the best seedling.[96] This would seem to be the culture from which gooseberry breeding and competitions arose.

Carnations were one of the most popular florists' flowers and their shows were held in July.[97] It is possible gooseberries became the focus of breeding and competition simply because their ripening coincided with the blooming period of carnations, first becoming incorporated into existing shows, later appearing alone. Gooseberries had already shown themselves to be genetically variable when

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[93] Jacques, *Gardens of Court and Country*, p. 277.

[94] Ruth Duthie, 'English Florists' societies and feasts in the 17th and first half of the 18th centuries,' *Garden History*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (The Gardens Trust, 1982) pp. 17-35.

[95] *Ibid*.

[96] *Ibid.*

[97] Ruth Duthie, 'Florists' societies and fasts after 1750,' *Garden History*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (The Gardens Trust, 1984) p. 8-38.

grown from seed so were naturally suited to become a florists' fruit.[98] For some years melons also appeared alongside carnations at shows but perhaps were less responsive to breeding so did not take off.[99] Melons also require significant levels of sunshine and protection from frosts whereas the robust gooseberry was suited to the growing conditions workers in the rapidly expanding northern towns were able to provide.

Not all plants were considered worthy of a florists' attention. In 1682 Samuel Gilbert wrote that some plants were, 'trifles adored by countrywomen in their gardens, but of no esteem to a Florist who is taken up with things of more value.'[100] Why some plants were prized and others disparaged is not clear but there was a hierarchy, bias against gooseberries is possibly why their shows and societies remained unacknowledged in contemporary horticultural discourse for so long. The first Gooseberry Growers Register, which listed competitions held that year and their results, was first published in 1786 but it is likely they began several decades earlier.[101] In 1724 Switzer wrote, with slight condescension, 'the gooseberry may seem a fruit below the regard of the curious yet […] it is not without its use, nor does it want its admirers.'[102] He went on to recommend some familiar varieties such as White Dutch but also some 'extraordinary kinds […] which yet are not distinguished by names,' raised by Mr Lowe of Battersea.[103] Miller too, in *The Gardener's Dictionary* (1731) indicated there was gooseberry related activity he did not consider worthy of note; he listed nine types of gooseberry (the common, large manur'd, red hairy, large white dutch, large amber, large

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[98] Parkinson, *Theatrum botanicum*, pp. 1560-1566.

[99] Duthie, 'Florists' societies,' p. 8-38.

[100] *Ibid*.

[101] Charles Darwin, *Variation of Animals and Plants Under Domestication*, p. 444.

[102] Stephen Switzer, *The Practical Fruit Gardener* (London: T. Woodward, 1731) p. 206.

[103] *Ibid*.

green, large red, yellow leav'd and strip'd leav'd) then stated dismissively that other varieties had been obtained from seed in different parts of England but saw no reason to list them as they were only seminal variations so would endlessly increase.[104] Perhaps it was not the gooseberries but the growers who were spurned, the phrase 'different parts of England,' suggests Miller had little time for provincial interests. Horticultural author John Rogers maintained that gooseberries were shown and bred in Cheshire and neighbouring counties from at least 1743 despite Miller's dictionary of that year listing only six or seven types, though Rogers was writing in the 19th century so was not contemporary.[105]

Wider cultural factors may also have contributed to the development of gooseberry breeding societies. The 18th century saw the population of Britain grow from around five million in 1700 to nearly nine million by 1801. Agricultural reforms caused people to move to the increasingly crowded towns where they lost the social standing and connections previously afforded them in their rural communities.[106] Poor relief for example was administered by local parishes and to receive help proof was required of connection to the area such as being born, married, or apprenticed there, making economic migrants ineligible. Although the majority who experienced poverty in the 18th century were victims of circumstance, it was commonly believed to be result of drinking, gambling and laziness. The ruling classes wished to make charity as unappealing as possible so in 1722 passed legislation to build workhouses, described by Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) as prison-like structures

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[104] Philip Miller, *The Gardener's Dictionary* (London: Philip Miller, 1731) p. 251.

[105] Rogers, *The Fruit Cultivator,* p. 191.

[106] Mathew White, 'The rise of cities in the 18th century' (Published online: British Library, 2009) <https://www.bl.uk/georgian-britain/articles/the-rise-of-cities-in-the-18th-century> accessed 20.06.20.

designed to 'grind rogues honest.'[107] Against this backdrop it is clear why workers would wish to pursue an activity which showed them to be skilled, dedicated and forged social bonds. Unable to attain status through wealth or skilled employment, horticultural prowess became one of the only sources of pride open to this group, 'curious gardeners,' had after all, long been held in high esteem. The pastime even received religious approbation with Reverends delivering sermons at growers' meetings on the 'innocence and pleasure of gardening.'[108] When being poor could impugn your moral character, a church approved hobby was a way to build self-worth and perceived virtue.

In the early 18th century there was also a growing interest and understanding of hybridisation. In 1717, London nurseryman Thomas Fairchild created his 'mule' by pollinating a sweet william with pollen from a carnation. This created religious and horticultural furore as people grappled with human power over forces previously thought to be governed by nature or God.[109] The nursery industry was in disrepute over the naming and misrepresentation of plants. In 1724 the Society of Gardeners formed intending to organise the situation. The group included Philip Miller, Thomas Fairchild, Robert Furber and George Singleton, they met once a month to compare and classify plants.[110] Then in 1735 Linnaeus set out his method in *Systema Naturae,* he was largely resisted in Europe and embraced in America, Miller held out until the 1768 edition of his dictionary when he

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[107]Mathew White, 'Poverty in Georgian Britain' (Published online: British Library, 2009) <https://www.bl.uk/georgian-britain/articles/poverty-in-georgian-britain> accessed 20.06.20.

[108] Duthie, 'English Florists' societies,' p. 17.

[109] Edwards, *Story of the English Garden* p. 160.

[110] Margaret Willes, *The Gardens of the British Working Class* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2014) p. 82.

finally converted to the binomial system.[111] In this cultural climate raising new varieties of gooseberries could have felt thrillingly modern and cutting edge, a way for ordinary people to take part in the scientific zeitgeist. Especially when the 18th century also saw plant nurseries begin to publish catalogues, naming your own plant offered the possibility of leaving a legacy for people whose lives often passed, from cradle to grave, without record or recognition. In 1727 Robert Furber's innovative catalogue was illustrated to display the plants available from his nursery month by month, it featured eighteen gooseberries including Hertford Murray: an early example of the naming formula common for gooseberries, commemorating the area it came from and/or the breeder's name. (Fig. 7).

Figure 7. 'June' from *Twelve plates [...] showing fruit from the collection of Robt. Furber, gardiner at Kensington* (London: 1733). Reproduced from the Meisterdruke fine arts website < https://www.meisterdrucke.uk/fine-art-prints/Pieter-Casteels/81444/June,-from-Twelve-Months-of-Fruits,-by-Robert-Furber-(c.1674-1756)-engraved-by-Henry-Fletcher,-1732-(colour-engraving).html> accessed 07.04.21.

[111] Carl Linneaus, *Systema Naturae* (Stockholm: Gottfr. Kiesewetter, 1740); Penelope Hobhouse, *Plants in Garden History* (London: Pavilion, 1994) p. 206.

By 1772 Weston published eighty-three gooseberry varieties raised by the, 'gentlemen of Lancashire,' and sold by Mr Maddox at Walworth near London.[112] Of the list, twenty four appear to be named after their breeder, four after where the berry was bred and eleven are either a place, a surname or both. Many of the locations are centred around the Manchester area, such as Shepley's Unicorn, the Pendleton's and Malkin Wood. Although Weston attributes the whole list to Lancashire breeders some, such as Lincoln and Stapleton could be from the Midlands and Yorkshire.

Although Darwin states the first growers register was published in 1786, Weston's list would suggest that gooseberry breeding was well under way by 1772. Some of the names are heroic or warlike; 'Champion,' 'Matchless,' 'Admiral,' suggesting they were intended for competing. While the earliest newspaper advert for a gooseberry show currently known is from 1790, Duthie explains that a close knit horticultural society may only have resorted to public adverts to gain new members (Fig. 8).[113] An advert in 1776, for the sale of 'a great variety of new gooseberry trees,' stated, 'one gooseberry weighed last year 45 shillings in gold,' (Fig. 9). Although later gooseberry competitions weighed the berries in penny weights and grains rather than gold shillings it is a suggestive detail nonetheless.

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[112] Weston, *The Universal Botanist and nurseryman*, p. 211.

[113] Duthie, 'English Florists' societies,' p. 33.

Venison and Florists Feast.

CARNATIONS, MELONS & GOOSEBERRIES.

TO Gentlemen curious in the above, &c. NOTICE is HEREBY GIVEN, That there will be a SHEW of Carnations, Melons and Gooseberries on Friday the 6th of August, 1790, at THOMAS SEELEY's, the WHITE-HORSE Inn, SHEFFORD, Bedfordshire; when four fine PRIZES will be given as follow:—

The Person that produces the twelve best whole-blown Carnations, shall be entitled to a Silver Punch-Ladle.

The second Ditto, to a Silver Desert Spoon.

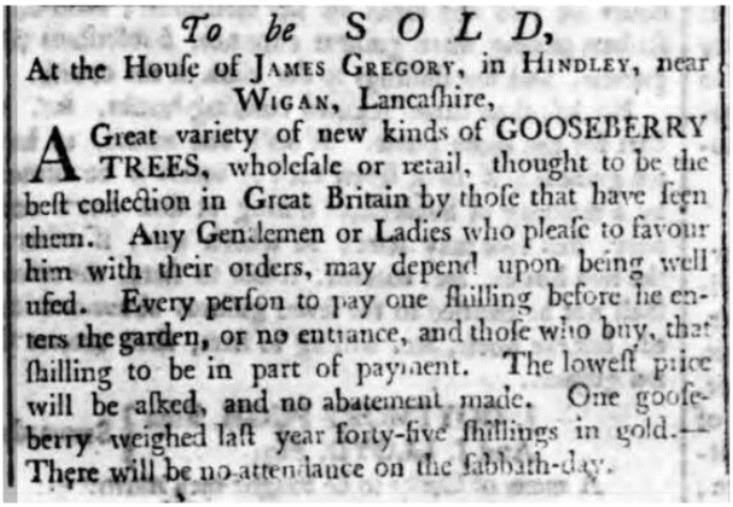
Also a Silver Punch-Ladle for the Person that produces the best flavoured Melon, of any Weight.

And a Silver Desert Spoon, to any Person that will shew three Score of the largest Gooseberries, of their own Produce.

STEWARDS.

Mr. THOMAS, Mr. FIELD, | Mr. COLLISON, Mr. BRICHENO.

Figure 8. Advert for Carnation, melon and gooseberry show, *Northampton Mercury*, Friday 30th July, 1790, p. 3.



To be SOLD,

At the House of JAMES GREGORY, in HINDLEY, near WIGAN, Lancashire,

A Great variety of new kinds of GOOSEBERRY TREES, wholesale or retail, thought to be the best collection in Great Britain by those that have seen them. Any Gentlemen or Ladies who please to favour him with their orders, may depend upon being well used. Every person to pay one shilling before he enters the garden, or no entrance, and those who buy, that shilling to be in part of payment. The lowest price will be asked, and no abatement made. One gooseberry weighed last year forty-five shillings in gold.—There will be no attendance on the sabbath-day.

Figure 9. Advert for the sale of a gooseberry collection, *Chester Chronicle*, Thursday 1st August, 1776, p. 4.

Descriptions of the earlier shows were either not made or have yet to surface and the earliest copy of the Gooseberry Growers Register held by the RHS Lindley Library is from 1819. Some of the earliest details about competitive gooseberry growing were published by Loudon in 1822:

> In Lancashire and some parts of the adjoining counties almost every cottager who has a garden cultivates the gooseberry with a view to prizes given at what are called Gooseberry Prize Meetings […] The prizes vary from £1, £5, £10. […] There are meetings held in spring to 'make up' as the term is, the sorts, the persons and the conditions of the exhibition, and in August to weigh and taste the fruit and determine the prizes.[114]

This shows how popular gooseberry cultivation had become. In 1822, £1 had approximately the purchasing power of £50 so could have been a powerful incentive to growers, although other sources mention more modest prizes such as copper kettles, pieces of china and ham.[115] 'Making-up' day in spring was when individuals paid their subscription fee to enter the competition and was a way of ensuring people were only able to exhibit gooseberries they had grown themselves.[116]

As well as breeding new varieties Lancashire growers were said to use, 'every stimulant […] their ingenuity can suggest,' to increase the size of their berries.[117] Plants were surrounded by trenches of manure, fed with liquid manure and basins of soil were formed around them to retain mulch and water. Plants were shaded from strong sun, fruits thinned to only 3-4 per plant and dishes of water placed beneath berries to cause swelling. Roots were pruned and re-soiled apparently to increase fibrous roots and spongioles (sponge-like expansion of the tip of a rootlet for absorbing water).

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[114] Loudon, *An Encyclopaedia of Gardening*, p. 822.

[115] The National Archives, 'Currency Converter: 1270 – 2017' < https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/#currency-result> accessed 24.05.21; Davies, *The Victorian Kitchen Garden*, p. 116.

[116] R.A Redfern, 'The Cult of the Giant Gooseberry,' *North Herald & Hyde Reporter*, 17th March 1944, pp. 1-3.

[117] McIntosh, *The Orchard and fruit garden*, p. 143.

Four-year-old plants were said to produce the largest fruit, tailing off as they grew older.[118]

Robert Thompson, Superintendent of the RHS fruit garden at Chiswick from 1824 described the pruning and support methods used by the Lancashire growers:

> The Lancashire growers of large fruits begin with young plants, with three shoots only, they incline them nearly to a horizontal position [...] They employ hooked sticks to pull down the shoots that are inclined to grow upwards and forked ones to support those that are inclined to grow too drooping (Fig. 10).[119]

Similar techniques are still used today by Griselda Garner and others of the Goostrey Gooseberry Society, established 1880, though the pins are now metal (Fig 11).

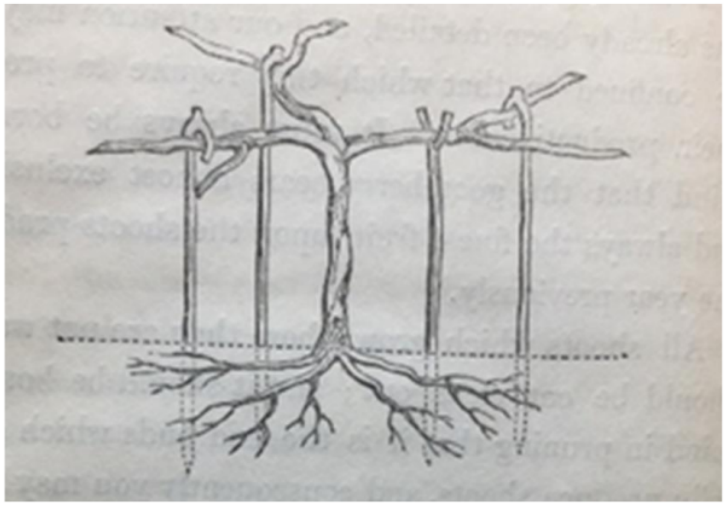

Figure 10. Illustration of a supported and pegged gooseberry plant reproduced from George Johnson, *The Cucumber and the Gooseberry: Their Culture, Uses and History* (London: R. Baldwin, 1847) p. 156.

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[118] *Ibid.*

[119] William Watson (Ed.), *The Gardener's Assistant* (London: The Gresham Publishing Co. Ltd, 1925) p. 188.

Figure 11. Griselda Garner's gooseberry trees with metal pegs, photograph by author, 2019.

Loudon reports from the 1819 register that there were 136 meetings, the largest berry was a red fruit weighing 26dwts (pennyweights) and 17grs (grains, twenty-four grains to one pennyweight). Forty-six red types, thirty-three yellow, forty-seven green and forty-one white were exhibited with fourteen news varieties which had been distinguished at previous meetings 'going out' to propagators.[120] 'Letting out,' was the process by which the gooseberry growers controlled the naming of new varieties. To become recognised a berry needed to win a prize at a show and satisfy the judges it was different from other types. The original plant was then cut into 21 lots which were sold off. After two years the berries were reviewed to ensure they were still of merit and distinct.[121] Exactly how successful this system was or when it came into use is not clear; in 1802 Forsyth wrote the catalogues of Manchester varieties had reached between four to five hundred sorts, 'but some are so near each other as hardly to be

[120] Loudon, *An Encyclopaedia of Gardening*, p. 822.

[121] Davies, *The Victorian Kitchen Garden*, p. 116.

distinguished.'[122] Though Thompson noted that the nomenclature of the gooseberry was far less confused than other fruits thanks to their efforts.[123] The RHS did however rationalise its gooseberry collection from 360 varieties in 1831 to 149 in 1842 after the garden committee resolved to, 'discontinue the cultivation of a large number of inferior varieties.'[124]

The transformation of the gooseberry was of great interest to Charles Darwin. Wild gooseberries weigh around 5dwts, by 1786 berries were exhibited weighing 10dwts, by 1852 a berry of the variety 'London' was shown weighing 37dwts 7grs: between seven to eight times that of wild fruit. Darwin attributed the increase to the cultivation techniques used by the growers but also to the selection of seedlings. By 1875 the 1852 record remained unbroken and Darwin speculated gooseberries had reached their greatest possible size until a new variety arose.[125] The stagnation of results possibly led to declining interest in gooseberry cultivation; in 1845 there had been 171 shows, by 1896 there were 73 and by 1916 only eight.[126] Duthie points to the wealth of other entertainments which became available such as the music hall, football and films.[127] Around ten gooseberry shows continue to the present day and as Darwin predicted new varieties continue to attain heavier weights; in 2013 Kelvin Archer grew a 'Millenium'

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[122] Forsyth, *A treatise on the culture and management of fruit trees*, p. 150.

[123] Darwin, *Variation of animals and plants,* p. 442.

[124] Anon., *A catalogue of fruits cultivated in the garden of the Horticultural Society of London*, Third Edition (London: W. Nicol, 1842) p. iii.

[125] Darwin, *Variation of animals and plants,* p. 445.

[126] Steven Desmond, 'How to grow a giant gooseberry,' *Country Life*, August 2019 <https://www.countrylife.co.uk/gardens/gardening-tips/grow-giant-gooseberry-top-tips-219th-egton-bridge-old-gooseberry-show-201080#:~:text=Such%20shows%20had%20been%20popular,more%20than%20170%20shows%20listed> accessed 28.04.21.

[127] Duthie, 'Florists' societies and fasts after 1750,' *Garden History*, p. 32.

berry which weighed 41dwts, 11 and ¼ grs (Fig. 12). The rate of increase however, has never been so great as in the seven decades between 1786 - 1852.

Figure 12. Photo by John Williams of Kelvin Archer and his prize gooseberry, September 2013. Reproduced from the *Knutsford Guardian* website < https://www.knutsfordguardian.co.uk/news/10636884.kelvin-wins-back-worlds-heaviest-gooseberry-title> accessed 24.05.21.

In the kitchen gardens of the wealthy, gardeners were expected to provide fresh produce throughout the year so needed to utilise all their knowledge and skill to extend the season. The first gooseberries could be forced in March by planting early varieties against south facing walls, fan or cordon trained to allow maximum light penetration and covering them with a glass case (Fig. 13).[128] While late fruiting varieties planted in Northerly aspects, protected with reed matting, could retain

[128] Loudon, *An Encyclopaedia of Gardening,* p. 825.

their berries until Christmas.[129]

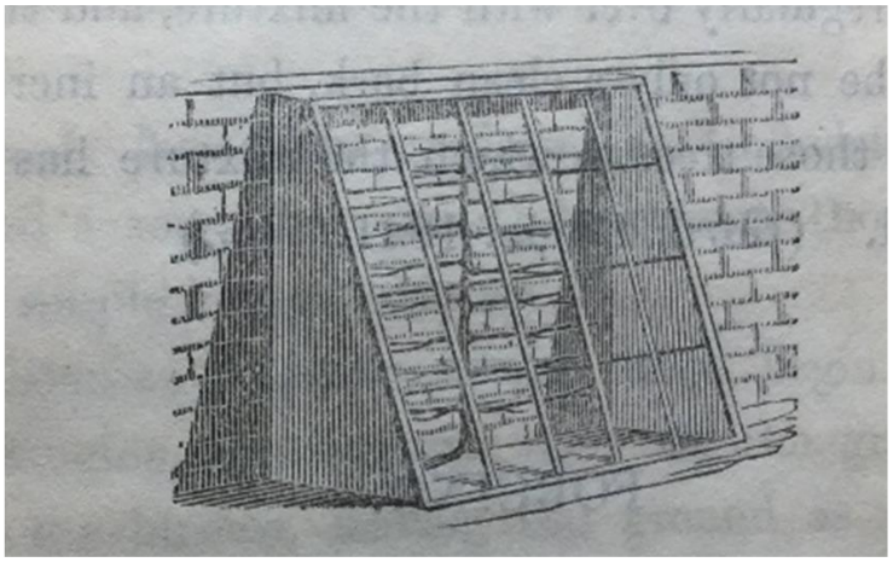

Figure 13. Gooseberry forcing case, George Johnson, *The cucumber and the gooseberry, their culture, uses and history* (London: R. Baldwin, 1847) p. 164.

The production of fruit was not purely a matter of sustenance, there was an element of status and theatre. Wealthy individuals took pride in employing skilled gardeners and wanted to demonstrate this to their guests. To this end gooseberries could be potted in November, brought into the peach house or vinery in January, then should have ripe fruit by the end of April which could be sent to the table on the plant for diners to pluck their own berries.[130] Alternatively entire branches were cut off and presented as bouquets in China vases.[131]

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[129] *Ibid.*

[130] *Ibid.*

[131] Campbell, *A history of kitchen gardening*, p. 259.

As well as being popular with home gardeners, gooseberries were a commercially significant crop. There is little recorded evidence for the growing methods used by early market gardeners specifically relating to gooseberries but by 1802 Forsyth records that market gardeners in London were intercropping their gooseberries with coleworts and spring beans over winter.[132] Market gardens were originally located close to urban centres but as the population grew in the 18th and 19th centuries, land was in high demand so the gardens were pushed further out.[133] Roads were often in such bad condition it was difficult to transport produce to market so in the second half of the 18th century, local authorities resorted to 'turnpike acts' to pay for new roads by taxing passing traffic. From the 1770s canal barges also brought fresh produce from the countryside into towns and manure the opposite way.[134] The Bridgewater Canal brought produce from North Cheshire into Manchester's markets and towns like Warrington became famous for their gooseberries, 'Warrington Reds' were apparently much grown by market gardeners for their fine taste and prolific yields (Fig. 14).[135] By 1815 over 2000 miles of canals were in use in Britain, moving thousands of tonnes of raw materials and manufactured goods by horse drawn barge.[136]

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[132] Forsyth, *A Treatise on the Culture and Management of Fruit Trees,* p. 149.

[133] Ronald Webber, *Early horticulturists* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles Holdings Ltd., 1968) p. 24.

[134] Roger Scola, *Feeding the Victorian city, The food supply of Manchester 1770 – 1780* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992) p. 98.

[135] George Brookshaw, *Pomona Britanica* (London: White, Cochbane & Co., 1812) p. 5.

[136] Mathew White, 'The Industrial Revolution' (Published Online: British Library, 2009) <https://www.bl.uk/georgian-britain/articles/the-industrial-revolution> accessed 20.02.2020.

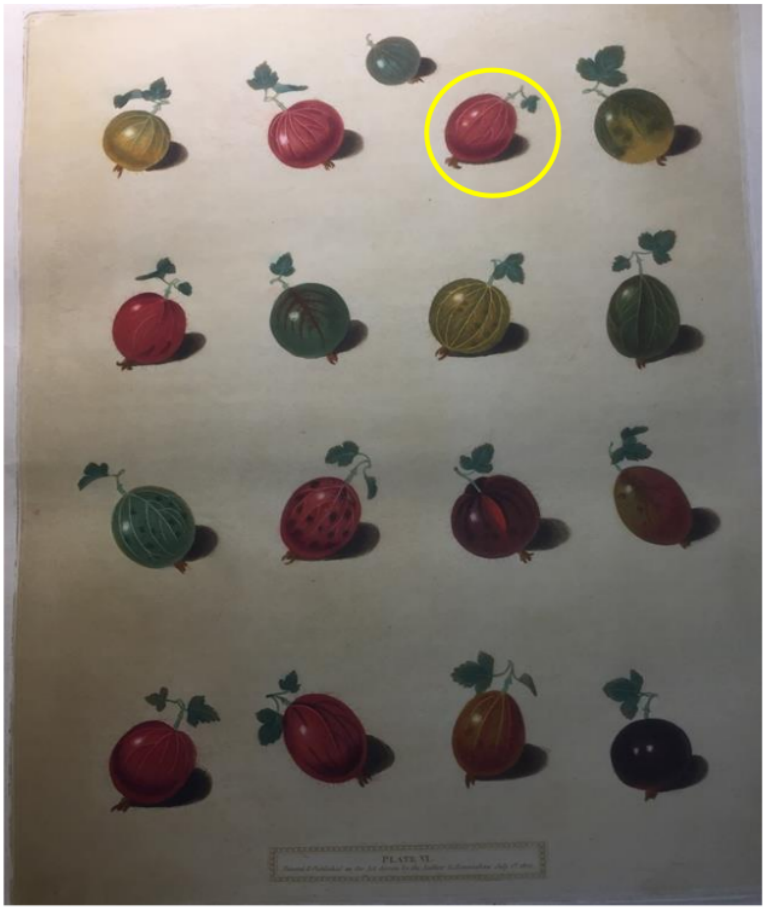

Figure 14. 'Warrington' gooseberry circled, as depicted in George Brookshaw, *Pomona Britanica* (London: White, Cochbane & Co., 1812) Plate VI.

From the 1830s onwards railways began connecting the country and places which were previously too remote from trading centres were able to begin market gardening. The railway arrived in the Tamar Valley in 1859, as mines were closing down and workers needed to find other employment they turned to market gardening.[137] It is reported, perhaps apocryphally, that Mr J Lawry, a tenant farmer from Bohetherick, visited Covent Garden Market in 1862 and saw the high prices paid for

[137] Katherine Johnstone, 'Horticulture in the Tamar Valley,' *Agriculture*, No. 62 (1955) pp. 123-129.

strawberries, he realised that the south facing slopes of the Tamar Valley would ripen fruit earlier than elsewhere and so Tamar growers cornered the market in early strawberries and gooseberries (Fig 15).[138] 'Keepsake' was the favoured variety for early harvesting which usually started by the 12th of May each year when the fruits had reached the size of peas.[139] Early 20th century account books which belonged to Fred Rogers, fruit grower and merchant from Pitt Madow Farm, St. Dominic, show the premium prices which were paid for the earliest berries. One record for May, 1912, shows that on the 8th, he was able to charge 9s8d for one 56lb bag of gooseberries, whereas on the 16th, just over a week later, the price had dropped to 5s (Fig. 16). These particular gooseberries were being sold to Mr George Johnson, Smithfield Market Manchester, but the pattern is repeated in the sales records to other vendors in Bradford, Cardiff, Covent Garden and Newcastle Upon Tyne. Mr Rogers collected produce from the area around St. Dominic and took it to Gunnislake or Calstock rail stations (Fig. 17). In the 19th and 20th centuries fruit from the Tamar Valley was also taken by steamer to Devonport market or by wagon to the train stations at Ben Alston and Saltash to head to markets all over the country.[140] Smaller amounts of ripe dessert gooseberries were sold in July but the extra time and labour involved in raising them to dessert fruit stage, then the difficulty in transporting ripe fruit which is more easily damaged made this a riskier product. 'Early Jinny' a sweet, small yellow variety and 'Red Rough' were said to be popular varieties with growers in the Tamar area for dessert fruit, later 'Whinham's Industry' and 'Careless' were introduced.[141]

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[138] *Ibid*.

[139] *Ibid*.

[140] Fred Rogers, '100 years of Market Gardening in St. Dominic: 1820s-1920s,' Unpublished, handwritten copy of speech delivered to the Women's Institute c. 1975, property of Jo Totterdale, viewing facilitated by Calstock Parish Archive.

[141] Johnstone, 'Horticulture in the Tamar Valley,' p. 126.

Figure 15. Photograph of Tamar Valley fruit growers, late 19th/early 20th century, reproduced with kind permission of Calstock Parish Archive.

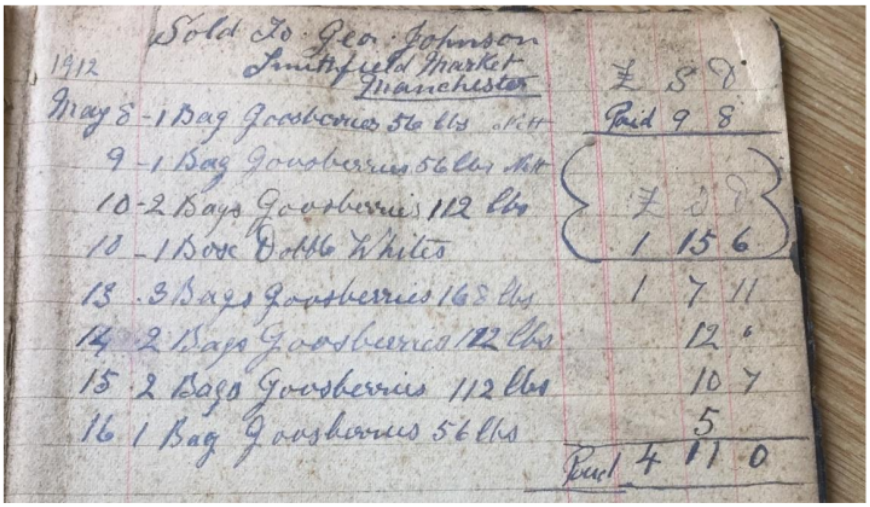
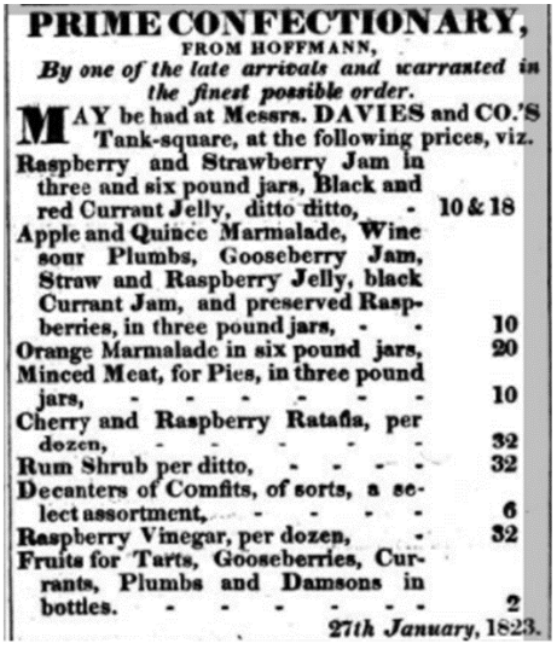


Figure 16. Ledger of fruit merchant Fred Rogers, showing the prices paid for gooseberries in May 1912, reproduced with kind permission of Jo Totterdale, viewing facilitated by Calstock Parish Archive.

Figure 17. Photograph of the Calstock fruit train, late 19th-early 20th century, reproduced with kind permission of Calstock Parish Archive.

Gooseberries were also among some of the earliest products to be bottled on a commercial scale as can be seen in adverts for the jars and finished goods (Fig. 18, Fig. 19). The requirements of the British Navy and traders such as the East India Company encouraged the development of processed, storable foods.[142]

[142] Peter Atkins, 'Vinegar and Sugar: The Early History of Factory-made Jams, Pickles and Sauces in Britain,' *The Food Industries of Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Derek Oddy (ed.) (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013) p. 8.



PRIME CONFECTIONARY,
FROM HOFFMANN,
By one of the late arrivals and warranted in the finest possible order.

MAY be had at Messrs. DAVIES and CO.'S Tank-square, at the following prices, viz.

Raspberry and Strawberry Jam in three and six pound jars, Black and red Currant Jelly, ditto ditto, -	10 & 18
Apple and Quince Marmalade, Wine sour Plumbs, Gooseberry Jam, Straw and Raspberry Jelly, black Currant Jam, and preserved Raspberries, in three pound jars, - -	10
Orange Marmalade in six pound jars,	20
Minced Meat, for Pies, in three pound jars, - - - - - - -	10
Cherry and Raspberry Ratafia, per dozen, - - - - - -	32
Rum Shrub per ditto, - - - - -	32
Decanters of Comfits, of sorts, a select assortment, - - - - -	6
Raspberry Vinegar, per dozen, -	32
Fruits for Tarts, Gooseberries, Currants, Plumbs and Damsons in bottles. - - - - - - -	2

27th January, 1823.

Figure 18. Advert for 'Prime confectionary from Hoffman' including gooseberry jam and bottled gooseberries, *The Government Gazette India*, Thursday 30th January 1823, p. 3.

MANCHESTER GLASS BOTTLE WORKS, PRUSSIA-STREET, OLDHAM-ROAD.

JACKSON, WOOLFALL, and PERCIVAL, Manufacturers of Wine, Spirit, Porter, Soda Water, Castor Oil, and Medicine Bottles, Gooseberry, Mustard, and Pickling Jars, Carboys of all sizes, and every other description of Articles in the Trade, for Home Use and Exportation.

J. W. and P. beg to inform their Friends and the Public in general, that they have appointed Mr. JOHN S. ROYLE the sole Agent in Liverpool, for the Sale of their Manufactures, and request that in future all orders may be addressed to him, when they will be punctually attended to. Patterns of their various Articles may be seen at the Office, 35, Exchange-alley North, Oldhall-street.

Figure 19. Advert for glass bottles and jars for trade and home use, specifically mentioning gooseberries, *The Liverpool Mercury and Lancashire General Advertiser*, Friday August 22nd 1834, p. 1.

Several factors converged in the 19th century which significantly changed British dietary habits,

enabled a boom in commercial jam production and led to the period of greatest economic importance for gooseberries. The repeal of protectionist trade laws, which had arisen under the mercantile system of the 17th century, allowed American wheat to flood the British market and prices collapsed.[143] Arable farmers were encouraged to diversify into dairying, poultry and fruit production to survive, which increased the ready supply of soft fruit.[144] In 1870 the sugar tax was halved then in 1874 repealed altogether, this reduced the cost of manufacturing preserves which opened the market to less wealthy consumers.[145] For centuries the standard drink of the working classes in Britain had been beer, but due to taxation of malt and other economic factors tea became cheaper.[146] By 1744, Scottish theologian Duncan Forbes wrote that even the 'meanest labouring man,' could purchase tea and its 'inseparable companion' sugar.[147] Forbes said there was no cheaper option available to families than consuming tea and bread, they were no longer luxuries but had become, 'the irreducible minimum below which was only starvation.'[148] Industrialisation in the 18th and 19th centuries increased the number of women working outside the home so they had less time to prepare food.[149] Tea and bread could be bought readymade and prepared quickly with little equipment. By the mid-19th century bread was the staple food for the 80-90% of the population which made up the working classes and after the repeal of the sugar tax, jam became a cheaper substitute for butter.[150] From the late 19th into the early 20th century, bread and jam became the

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[143] Thirsk, *Alternative Agriculture*, p. 149.

[144] Whitehead, Hints of Vegetable and Fruit Farming, p. 3.

[145] Nicholas Hartley, *Bittersweet: The story of Hartley's Jam* (Stroud: Amberly, 2011) p. 20.

[146] Roy Moxham, *A brief history of tea* (London: Constable & Robinson Ltd., 2009) p. 29.

[147] Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, p. 114.

[148] *Ibid*, p. 117.

[149] *Ibid*, p. 128.

[150] *Ibid*, p. 130.

chief food of poor children for two out of three meals.[151] Gooseberries were cheaper to produce than strawberries or raspberries, they also contain higher levels of pectin which helped jam set more quickly so that less volume was lost during the cooking process.[152] They became a mainstay of the jam industry both as gooseberry jam and as an additive or bulker to other flavours.

Dozens of preserve manufacturers began trading across the country. Such was the demand the area under small fruit cultivation in Britain almost doubled in ten years from 37,000 acres in 1888 to 72, 000 in 1898.[153] Exactly how many of these acres were occupied by gooseberries is not specified but by 1927 the acreage of gooseberries in England and Wales alone had risen to 19,200.[154] Notebooks kept by William Hartley (1846-1922) show his firm used the varieties Lancashire Lad, Warrington, Crown Bob and Raby Castle among others and bought them from dealers all over the country (Fig. 20).[155] These preserve manufacturers were part of a group called the 'Sunrise Industries,' which through the advances of the industrial revolution and commodities from the Empire, began the era of mass-produced biscuits, chocolate and tea from companies such as Cadbury's and Fry's.[156]

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[151] Atkins, 'Vinegar and Sugar,' p. 8.

[152] Ernest Marriage, 'The adulteration of jams,' *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, Vol. 61, No. 3144 (February 21st, 1913) pp. 371-384.

[153] Alun Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England: 1850-1925* (London: HarperCollins Academic, 1991) p. 147.

[154] Chas Oldham, *The cultivation of berried fruits in Great Britain* (London: Crosby, Lockwood & Son Ltd., 1946) p. 202.

[155] Personal communication with Nicholas Hartley, 27.05.21.

[156] Hartley, *Bittersweet*, p. 23.

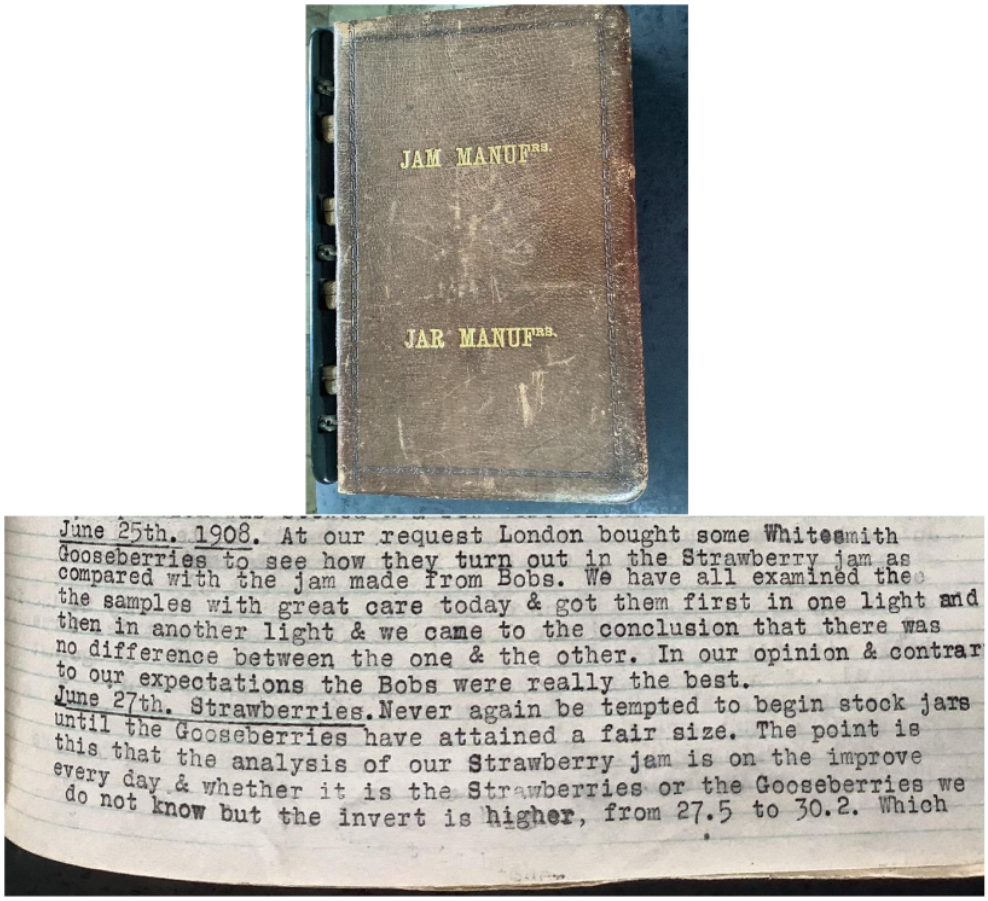

Figure 20. Notes on jam manufacture by William Hartley, June 25th 1908, detailing a test between 'Whitesmith' and 'Crown Bob,' reproduced with kind permission of Nicholas Hartley.

In 1879 Shaw described the practises of commercial fruit growers in Kent: new gooseberry plants were raised by layering or saving 1ft lengths at pruning time and pushing them into well dug and manured ground 12 inches apart, the space between these nursery rows were sometimes

intercropped with spring lettuce.[157] Gooseberries were still often planted beneath orchard trees but if planted alone were set at 6ft apart with 8ft between the rows.[158] This would equate to c. 900 plants per acre. Shaw stated that in all cases the bushes were stripped at one picking, with at least 10, but up to 30 acres covered in a week.[159] There was a great deal of work to be done in a very short amount of time and some growers hired as many as 300 women and children as pickers. The women could pick as much as 30 sieves of gooseberries each per day (c. 900l) for which they received 10s6d.[160] In good seasons some growers managed to harvest more than 3000 bushels of gooseberries (c. 180,000l) but in other years the crop was ruined by wet weather which burst the fruit or hot weather which scalded it.[161]

While the preserve industry was undoubtedly a commercial success going into the 20th century, a mainly starch diet had health implications for the population: when men were recruited for the Boer war between 1897-1902, 40% of volunteers were rejected as physically or medically unfit and in 1916, 66% of First World War conscripts were deemed of 'inferior health.'[162] The new mass plantings of gooseberries, a habitat which had never existed in Britain before, also presented a perfect target for pests and disease as would be seen with the arrival of American gooseberry mildew (*Podosphaera mors-uvae*) at the start of the 20th century.

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[157] C.W Shaw, *The London Market Gardens, or fruits, flowers and vegetables as grown for markets* (London, 1879) p. 133.

[158] *Ibid*; Whitehead, *Hints of Vegetable and fruit farming*, p. 19.

[159] Shaw, *The London Market Gardens,* p. 136.

[160] *Ibid*.

[161] *Ibid*; William Early, *The garden farmer: Profitable market Gardening* (London: L. Upcott Gill, 1882) pp. 95-96.

[162] Atkins, 'Vinegar & Sugar,' p. 9.

20th-21st century: Disease, decline and rebranding.

American Gooseberry Mildew (AGM) reportedly arrived in Ireland in 1900 on infected nursery stock from the US.[163] Professor Ernest Stanley Salmon (1871 – 1959) was a British mycologist and in 1905 wrote an impassioned article about AGM. Salmon expressed his frustration that authorities had not reacted quickly enough and favoured the interests of business over quarantine.[164] At a congress in Paris in 1900, leading scientists in the field of plant pathology recommended an organised international effort be made to control plant disease. Had European governments acted upon this advice, 'we should certainly not have had to stand dismayed and without remedies in the face of an invasion such as the present one,' wrote Salmon.[165] Though not referenced in the article the Irish potato famine of fifty years earlier had shown the devastation plant diseases could cause. This surely contributed to his strength of feeling and sense of urgency on the subject, especially as it was feared the mildew could spread to other crops such as blackcurrants. Despite Salmon's accusations it was not until the following year in 1906 that the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries circulated warnings to:

> All fruit growers, nurserymen, gardeners and other growers of gooseberries […] The disease […] is of a very serious nature and has rendered the culture of gooseberries unprofitable and practically impossible wherever it has appeared.'[166]

Their advice was to buy home grown gooseberry stock from clean nurseries, to segregate new stock from existing plantations and observe it closely, destroy material suspected of infection and spray adjacent plants with Bordeaux mixture. Suspected cases were to be reported to the Board of Agriculture

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[163] H. Wormald, *Diseases of Fruit and Hops* (London: Crosby, Lockwood & Son Ltd, 1945) p. 183.

[164] Ernest Salmon, 'Appearance of American Gooseberry Mildew (*Sphaerotheca mors-uvae*),' *Gardener's Chronicle*, 28th October 1905, pp. 1-3.

[165] *Ibid*.

[166] The Board of Agriculture, 'American Gooseberry Mildew,' *Whitby Gazette*, Friday 14th December 1906, p. 7.

immediately.[167] The following year AGM became a scheduled disease under the Destructive Insects and Pests Act of 1877 and 1907. Growers were obliged to report cases to the Board of Agriculture or face a fine of £10 for neglecting to do so.

Further regulations were issued in subsequent years: the sale of infected fruit was prohibited, gooseberries sent to market were required to be labelled with the name and address of the grower, special attention was called to the cleaning of baskets which might become contaminated at market then returned to previously unaffected farms, Local authority officials were given powers to inspect premises and order the destruction of fruit, plants and baskets.[168] By 1914 the Board of Agriculture stated quick growing varieties such as Keepsake, White Lion and Crown Bob were worst affected whereas slow growing varieties such as Whitesmith, Careless and Long Swan fared better.[169]

Control measures sometimes met with resistance, in 1914 Patrick Kearney of Rathcor was prosecuted for repeatedly disregarding orders to destroy his 180 infected gooseberry bushes. In his defence he stated a neighbour told him there was, 'no need as they would come good again next year.'[170] Although the maximum penalty was £10, Kearney was only fined £1 and £1 expenses, perhaps this was proportionate to his income or shows the court did not have the appetite to

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[167] The Board of Agriculture, 'American Gooseberry Mildew,' *Buchan Observer and East Aberdeenshire Advertiser*, Tuesday 18 December 1906, p. 7.

[168] J. Morland, 'American Gooseberry Mildew (Fruit) Order 1912,' *Windsor & Eton Express*, Saturday 25 May 1912, p. 4; T. Middleton, The American Gooseberry Mildew (Fruit) Order 1915,' *Staffordshire Advertiser*, Saturday 29 May 1915, p. 1.

[169] Board of Agriculture & Fisheries, *Leaflet No. 195 - American Gooseberry Mildew* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1914) p. 1.

[170] Anon, 'Prosecution at Carlingford,' *Belfast Newsletter*, Saturday 17 October 1914, p. 2.

enforce the law. As no compensation was offered to growers for their losses they had little incentive to cooperate with the authorities. Contemporary publications suggest margins were tight and conditions tough in the horticulture/market garden sector. One wrote:

> Enormous proportions of imported fruits [and] increasing numbers of home growers has made competition fierce and reduced prices [...] the number of women and children available is very limited, local villagers are usually unwilling or unable to accommodate the visitors so wooden or corrugated iron sheds can be used divided into cubicles or second-hand army tents are available at moderate rates which with due care and proper storage may last for a considerable time.[171]

He also advises that temporary labour should be paid by piece work.[172] When we yearn for a past age of home-grown fruit, not imported, irradiated and wrapped in single use plastic, the vision does not usually include women and children living in old tents with no financial security.

Whether regulations succeeded in achieving any control, discussion of AGM and the issuing of orders seem to have rumbled on until c.1920. From then it is still frequently covered in Scottish newspapers but less often in England.[173] By 1945 Wormald reported that measures had succeeded in bringing the disease under control with occasional severe outbreaks.[174] It would seem this was not encouragement enough for growers as the acreage of commercial gooseberries in England fell

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[171] Castle, *Book of market gardening*, p. 1, pp. 21-22.

[172] *Ibid*.

[173] Midlothian County Council, 'American Gooseberry Mildew (Scotland) Order of 1920,' *Midlothian Journal*, Friday 25 June 1920, p. 1; Board of Agriculture for Scotland, 'American Gooseberry Mildew,' *Dundee Courier*, Monday 15 June 1925, p.4; Board of Agriculture for Scotland, 'American Gooseberry Mildew,' *The Scotsman*, Wednesday 13 June 1928, p. 4.

[174] Wormald, *Diseases of fruit and hops*, p. 183.

from 19,200 in 1927 to 10, 400 acres in 1936.[175] In Scotland the figures for gooseberries were combined with those for currants, however the acreage for both fell from 1, 110 acres in 1931 to 880 acres in 1937.[176] The prospect of disease and bureaucracy of control orders made gooseberries a less attractive business proposition and triggered the start of their commercial decline in Britain.

Despite AGM gooseberries still provided vital food and income for poorer families. They were often grown in the gardens and allotments of the labouring classes, possibly for their hardiness or because they were seen as particularly nutritious; one 'cookery correspondent,' wrote in 1914 that housewives should serve gooseberries as often as possible for their, 'great medicinal properties.'[177] *How the labourer lives* (1913) was a study of real families and several instances show the role gooseberries played in their narrow economic margins.[178] One Yorkshire family, 'greatly valued the produce of their garden,' and by selling some of their gooseberries and a few potatoes earned nearly £2 (c. £200 in 2021) whereas the husband's weekly earnings as a casual labourer were at most fifteen shillings per week (c. £75 in 2021).[179] Another Leicestershire family made jam from their gooseberries and reportedly sold no produce as any food preserved in a good year would help them to survive a bad one.[180]

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[175] Chas Oldham, *Cultivation of Berried Fruits*, p. 202.

[176] *Ibid*, p. 203.

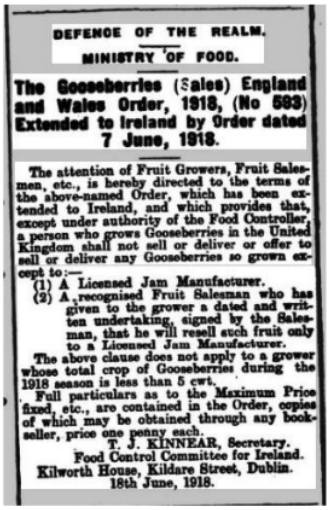
[177] Anon., 'Green Gooseberries,' *Musselburgh News*, Friday 19th June, 1914, p.2.

[178] Benjamin Rowntree and May Kendall, *How the labourer lives* (London, Edinburgh & New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd., 1917).

[179] *Ibid*, p. 99; The Measuring Wealth Foundation Website <https://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/ukcompare/> accessed 11.07.21.

[180] Rowntree & Kendal, *How the Labourer Lives*, p. 234.

Allotments were soon to become government policy as by the time war was declared in July 1914, 80% of Britain's food was imported.[181] As overseas supplies were cut off the government, 'appealed to all who cannot share in the fighting to see that [the] food supply is secured.'[182] On Boxing Day, 1916, the government issued the Cultivation of Lands Act under the Defence of the Realm Act; by the end of 1917 there were estimated to be over a million allotments compared with 450 000 before the war.[183] Under this act the Ministry of Food was able to control the price and supply of products with the aim of producing the maximum amount of food, gooseberries were a sufficiently important crop to justify their own order (Fig 21).



DEFENCE OF THE REALM.
MINISTRY OF FOOD.

The Gooseberries (Sales) England and Wales Order, 1918, (No 583) Extended to Ireland by Order dated 7 June, 1918.

The attention of Fruit Growers, Fruit Salesmen, etc., is hereby directed to the terms of the above-named Order, which has been extended to Ireland, and which provides that, except under authority of the Food Controller, a person who grows Gooseberries in the United Kingdom shall not sell or deliver or offer to sell or deliver any Gooseberries so grown except to:—

(1) A Licensed Jam Manufacturer.
(2) A recognised Fruit Salesman who has given to the grower a dated and written undertaking, signed by the Salesman, that he will resell such fruit only to a Licensed Jam Manufacturer.

The above clause does not apply to a grower whose total crop of Gooseberries during the 1918 season is less than 5 cwt.

Full particulars as to the Maximum Price fixed, etc., are contained in the Order, copies of which may be obtained through any bookseller, price one penny each.

T. J. KINNEAR, Secretary.
Food Control Committee for Ireland.
Kilworth House, Kildare Street, Dublin.
18th June, 1918.

Figure 21. Ministry of Food, Gooseberry sales order, *The Waterford Standard*, Saturday 22nd June 1918, p. 2.

After the war 50,000 acres were taken back out of cultivation, by 1939 60% of Britain's food was again imported cheaply, mostly from the US and Canada, and from a British population of 48 million

[181] Edwards, *Story of the English Garden*, p. 275

[182] Walter Brett, *War-time gardening* (London: The Smallholder Offices, 1915) p. i.

[183] Willes, *Gardens of the British Working Class*, p. 273.

only 1 million were employed in agriculture.[184] In 1914 the government had been slow to react to threat of food shortages so in 1939, determined not to be caught out again, they launched the 'Dig for Victory,' campaign.[185] They issued advice for growers and only the worthiest crops were promoted: gooseberries were considered particularly nutritious so were strongly recommended as opposed to strawberries which were said to be a luxury and took up too much space.[186] 'Dig for Victory' leaflet no. 25 advised gardeners to grow their gooseberries as bushes or cordons, that left unpruned they would give small fruit so it was better to thin badly placed shoots, reduce the new growth and create an open centre (Fig. 22) . Although gardening guru Cecil Middleton and Dig for Victory leaflet no. 18 advised using arsenate of lead on gooseberry sawfly, chemicals were also in short supply during the war so home gardeners usually had to squash them by hand.[187]

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[184] Ursula Buchan, *A Green and Pleasant Land* (London: Windmill Books, 2014) p. 14; Jane Fearnley-Whittingstall, *The Ministry of Food* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd, 2010) p. 16.

[185] Willes, *Gardens of the British Working Class,* p. 281.

[186] *Ibid*, p. 285.

[187] National Trust, 'Life as a female gardener during the war' (Published online: National Trust, 2011) <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/digging-for-victory> accessed 20.07.21; Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, 'Better fruit – disease control in private gardens' *Dig for Victory Leaflet No. 18* (London: MAAF, 1940) <https://dig-for-victory.org.uk/growing-advice/dig-victory-leaflets-ww2/fruit-disease-control/disease-control-plums-currants-berries/> accessed 20.07.21.

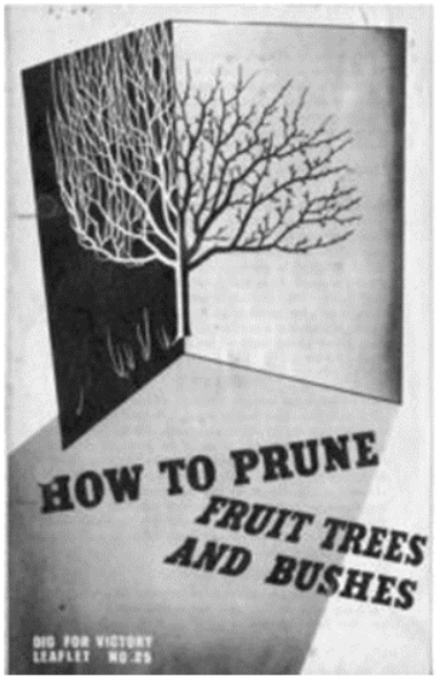

Figure 22. Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, 'How to prune fruit trees and bushes' *Dig for Victory Leaflet No. 25.* (London: MAAF, 1940).

Various fruit research stations were established throughout the 20th century to improve the varieties and methods used in UK horticulture. Despite repeatedly returning to cheap food imports, there was a sense the government should support the industry and that Britain should not fall behind other nations in science, technology and food security. One of the first such operations, the Woburn Experimental Fruit Farm, which ran from 1894-1921 was privately funded by the Duke of Bedford, Herbrand Russell (1858-1940), with Royal Society Chemist Spencer Pickering as its Director. Pickering was interested in testing orthodox horticultural theories and so experimented with rough versus careful planting of fruit trees. He found that untrimmed roots rammed into a small hole actually seemed to benefit most specimens. Gooseberries treated in this manner were said to produce double the amount of fruit as their cosseted

counterparts.[188] They also carried out manuring experiments which showed the productivity of gooseberries was greatly improved by the increased application of dung, in fact they responded dramatically compared to other fruit crops (Fig. 23).[189]

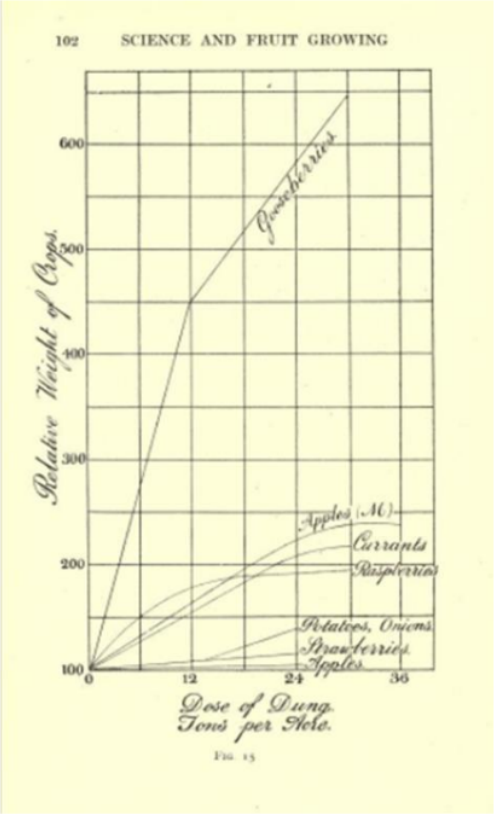

Figure 23. Table showing the response of different fruit crops to the application of dung, reproduced from Duke of Bedford & Spencer Pickering, *Science & fruit growing* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1919) p. 102.

The Wye College Fruit Experiment Station, better known as East Malling, opened in 1913, its mission as stated by the first Director Captain R. Wellington was, 'the study of problems in the culture of fruit trees

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[188] Duke of Bedford & Spencer Pickering, *Science & fruit growing* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1919) pp. 30-33.

[189] Pickering, *Science & fruit growing*, p. 102.

and bushes,' and was intended to address the, 'practical needs of the fruit growing industry.'[190] Interspecific breeding at East Malling resulted in the production of two mildew resistant varieties of gooseberry: Greenfinch and Invicta. They also used gooseberry genes to provide new blackcurrant varieties with resistance to Big bud mite (*Cecidophyopsis ribis*).[191] The James Hutton Institute, the modern incarnation of the Scottish Plant Breeding Station initiated in 1921, has a small ongoing project to breed gooseberries for the home and pick-your-own markets. Their objectives are the reduction of spines, mildew resistance, plant vigour, propagation ability and improving fruit quality in particular shape and sensory characteristics. Two hybrids from an open pollinated seedling population of Leveller x EM 136-2 are currently under assessment at the institute and with RHS Trials (Fig. 24, Fig. 25).[192]

Figure 24. 'Gooseberry 9223-1' from The James Hutton Institute website <https://fruitbreeding.hutton.ac.uk/NewGooseberry9223-1.asp> accessed 29.08.21.

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[190] The James Hutton Institute website, 'History,' <https://www.hutton.ac.uk/about/history> accessed 29.08.21; Dr Mike Solomon, *A century of research at East Malling: 1913-2013* (East Malling: East Malling Research, 2013) p. 2.

[191] Solomon, *A century of research*, p. 39.

[192] The James Hutton Institute website, 'Gooseberry breeding at The James Hutton Institute' <https://fruitbreeding.hutton.ac.uk/GooseberryBreedingAtSCRI.asp> accessed 29.08.21.

Figure 25. 'Gooseberry 9223-2' from The James Hutton Institute website <https://fruitbreeding.hutton.ac.uk/NewGooseberry9223-2.asp> accessed 29.08.21.

Compounds developed as chemical weapons in the first world war were repurposed in the following decades as herbicides and pesticides.[193] Their use reached a peak in the 1950s and 60s before a counterculture began questioning their harmful effects with the publication of books such as Rachel Carter's Silent Spring (1962). The 1970s saw increasing interest in the environment, self-sufficiency

[193] Mathew Wills, *War and Pest Control* (Published online: Jstor Daily, 2018) <https://daily.jstor.org/war-and-pest-control/> accessed 01.08.21.

and concepts such as permaculture and forest gardening.[194] Forest gardening is a system intended to produce food, medicine or fuel, based on trees, shrubs and perennial plants, designed to mimic the structure of a natural forest. Its proponents believe it to be more sustainable and biodiverse than other styles of gardening.[195] As an understorey shrub, capable of growing in the shade of larger trees, gooseberries became an important plant for use in forest gardens. Such integrated systems have been used by self-sufficient, indigenous communities for centuries however forest gardening as a concept arose in Western dialogue in the 1970s; one of its earliest proponents in Britain was Robert Hart (1913-2000).[196] Forest gardens or food forests are based on seven layers of planting: canopy trees, small trees/large shrubs, shrubs, herbaceous perennials, ground cover, climbers and the rhizosphere. Gooseberries feature in the third, or shrub level of planting and red varieties such as Whinham's Industry are reportedly particularly shade tolerant (Fig. 26).[197]

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[194] James Lovelock & Sidney Epton, 'The Quest for Gaia,' *New Scientist*, Vol. 65, No. 935 (6th February 1975) p. 304; Seymour, *The Complete Book of Self-sufficiency*; Bill Mollison & David Holmgren, *Perma-culture One: A Perennial Agriculture for Human Settlements* (Australia: Tagari Publications, 1978).

[195] Agroforestry Research Trust website, Forest gardening <https://www.agroforestry.co.uk/about-agroforestry/forest-gardening/> accessed 28.07.21.

[196] James Sholto Douglas & Robert Hart, *Forest Farming: Towards a Solution to Problems of World Hunger and Conservation* (Pennsylvania: Rodale Press, 1978); Hart, *Forest Gardening,* p. 45.

[197] *Ibid*, p. 166.

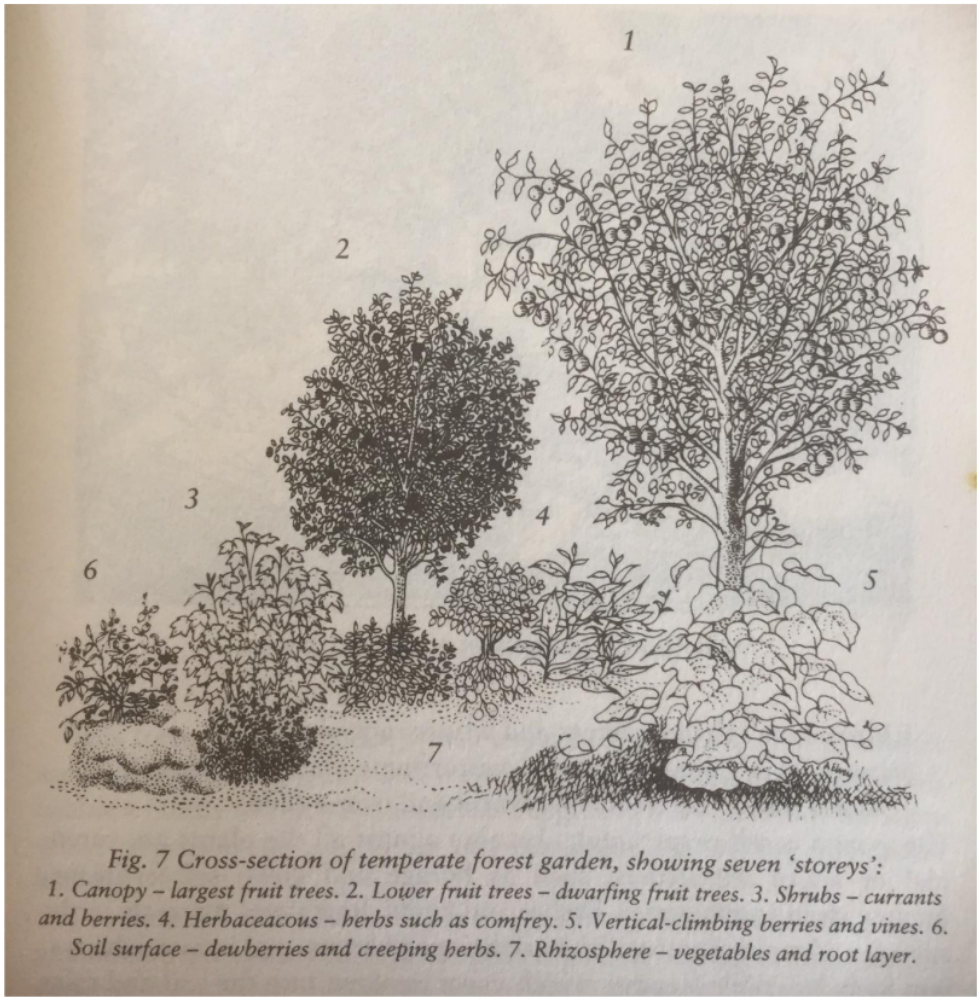

Figure 26. Diagram illustrating the layers of planting in a forest garden, reproduced from Robert Hart, *Forest Gardening: Rediscovering Nature & Community in a Post-Industrial Age* (Dartington: Green Earth Books, 1996) p. 51.

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The subject had a renewed swell of interest the 1990s with publications from Graham Bell, whose food forest garden in the Scottish borders houses 120 fruit plants in only 800 square metres and Martin Crawford, who formed the Agroforestry Research Trust based in Dartington, Devon, in

1992.[198] Agroforestry, growing trees and crops on the same piece of land, is said to deliver produce and protect natural resources by increasing biodiversity whilst preventing soil erosion and nutrient run off.[199] Bell advises gooseberries should be grown as standards in the forest garden as improved air circulation makes them healthier and easier to pick, whereas Crawford suggests stooled bushes so they can be allowed to wander and spread freely.[200] The concept remains popular in the 21st century, with charitable organisations such as The Food Forest Project, who have planted gooseberries in their community food forest at Shepton Mallet. They believe this will be, 'a way for local people to access sustainably farmed food whilst learning about the benefits of permaculture.'[201] Although the theory sounds fantastic: double the crops for the same area of land whilst also benefitting the environment, the results of this method are debateable. By the early 19th century horticultural authors advised against planting gooseberries beneath other trees: Loudon stated their fruits will have poor flavour whilst McIntosh wrote they became susceptible to caterpillars and produced inferior fruit.[202] Even Crawford admits that in shaded situations their yields will be lower and will ripen later.[203] The perceived success of underplanting with gooseberries possibly depends on the intended outcome; founder of The Food Forest Project, Tristan Faith said, 'The wildlife like the berries, especially the birds, which is fine by us as our food forests are as much

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[198] Graham Bell, *The Permaculture Garden* (London: Thorsons, 1994); The Agroforestry Research Trust, About Agroforestry <https://www.agroforestry.co.uk/about-agroforestry/> accessed 28.07.21.

[199] Ibid.

[200] Personal communication with Graham Bell, 11.08.21; Martin Crawford, *Currants and Gooseberries: Production and Culture* (Totnes: Agroforestry Research Trust, 1997) p. 31.

[201] The Food Forest Project website, 'Shepton Mallet Community Food Forest,' <https://www.thefoodforestproject.org/shepton-mallet-plot> accessed 08.09.21.

[202] Loudon, *An encyclopaedia of gardening,* p. 519; McIntosh, *The orchard and fruit garden,* p. 140.

[203] Crawford, *Currants and Gooseberries*, p. 31.

for wildlife as they are for human harvest.'[204] Whereas if the intention is to efficiently feed a large population, forest gardening is arguably not a realistic alternative to current horticultural methods. James Lovelock, author of the Gaia hypothesis and influential thinker in the 1970s environmental movement, envisaged a future in which Britain could be made economically and environmentally viable by division into thirds: one third of the land would be used for cities and industries, airports, roads etc, the second third would be intensively farmed in order to meet all our food requirements, the final third would be allowed to rewild, with no intervention.[205] Forest gardening does not meet the productivity of the second criteria or non-intervention of the third but gooseberries, a nutritionally rich crop which have proved well suited to the native climate may still have a role to play in the future of sustainable food in Britain.

Gooseberries were still being advertised fresh and processed into the 1950s but tastes were changing. In peacetime the shipping of citrus and tropical fruits could resume and gooseberries became less popular.[206] The already dwindling commercial market for gooseberries was wounded further when the UK joined the European Union in 1973. British growers found themselves in free market competition with their European counterparts, prices crashed and almost overnight many businesses became unsustainable.[207] Growers sought economies of scale, consolidating and collaborating to reduce overheads and produce larger yields of fewer crops, for example in 1970

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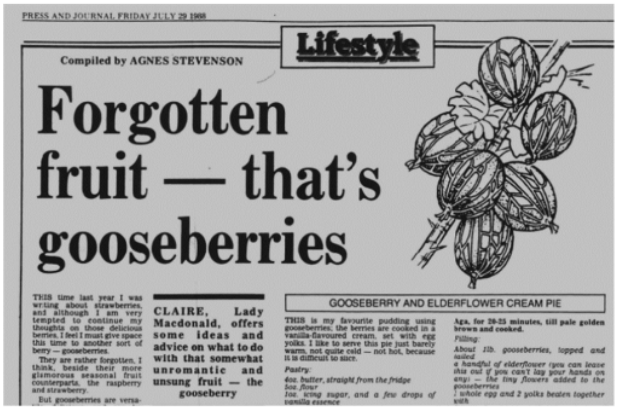
[204] Personal communication with Tristan Faith, 31.07.21.

[205] James Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2007) p. 170.

[206] Anon., 'Bananas return to Britain,' *Yorkshire Post & Leeds Intelligencer*, Wednesday 19th September 1945, p. 3.

[207] Alex Parkinson (Producer) 'Fruit & Veg,' *Mud, Sweat and Tractors* (First broadcast Wednesday 22nd April 2009, BBC4) Lighthouse Productions Ltd.

there were over 700 tomato producers in the UK, by 2005 there were 40.[208] Gooseberries were often dropped in favour of strawberries. With Britain's exit from the EU in 2020, the market for home grown fruit might be expected to recover, growers however have expressed concerns about affordable labour for harvesting and that chemical companies will not want the expense of certifying products for the UK alone, so British growers could be left without access to the same fungicides and pesticides as their competitors.[209] The growth of supermarkets also changed how fruit was marketed, traditionally growers had sold fruit in their local area or sent it to wholesale markets who supplied greengrocers. National supermarket chains had greater purchasing power and initially growers were delighted with the ease of serving one large customer, long-term though this situation proved detrimental. As independent retailers went out of business supermarkets gained a monopoly and were able to negotiate ever lower prices.[210] By the 1980s gooseberries were considered a 'forgotten fruit,' (Fig 27).



PRESS AND JOURNAL FRIDAY JULY 29 1988

Lifestyle

Compiled by AGNES STEVENSON

Forgotten fruit — that's gooseberries

THIS time last year I was writing about strawberries, and although I am very tempted to continue my thoughts on those delicious berries, I feel I must give space this time to another sort of berry — gooseberries.

They are rather forgotten, I think, beside their more glamorous seasonal fruit counterparts, the raspberry and strawberry.

But gooseberries are versa-

CLAIRE, Lady Macdonald, offers some ideas and advice on what to do with that somewhat unromantic and unsung fruit — the gooseberry

GOOSEBERRY AND ELDERFLOWER CREAM PIE

THIS is my favourite pudding using gooseberries; the berries are cooked in a vanilla-flavoured cream, set with egg yolks. I like to serve this pie just barely warm, not quite cold — not hot, because it is difficult to slice.

Pastry:

4oz. butter, straight from the fridge
8oz. flour
1oz. icing sugar, and a few drops of vanilla essence

Aga, for 20-25 minutes, till pale golden brown and cooked.

Filling

About 1lb. gooseberries, topped and tailed
a handful of elderflower (you can leave this out if you can't lay your hands on any) — the tiny flowers added to the gooseberries
1 whole egg and 2 yolks beaten together with

Figure 27. Lifestyle piece by Agnes Stevenson, 'Forgotten fruit – that's gooseberries,' *Aberdeen Press & Journal*, Friday 29 July 1988, p. 5.

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[208] *Ibid.*

[209] Personal communications with Scott Raffle: Horticulture Development Board, Chris Creed: Horticultural advisor for ADAS Consultancy & Steve Taylor: Managing Director of Winterwood Farms Ltd.

[210] Kenneth Cox & Caroline Beaton, *Fruit & Vegetables for Scotland* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2012) p. 16.

Somehow gooseberries managed to remain romantically forgotten, whilst being repeatedly rediscovered by authors of books and articles for the next few decades.[211] In the 18th century pineapples were so ostentatious they were rented out to display at parties, not to eat.[212] In 21st century Britain, when almost any exotic fruit could be commonly purchased year round, foreign fruit had lost its glamour, the only exclusive thing left to do was find obscure traditional fruit, in season and for the highest cachet, grow your own.[213] Under these circumstances the gooseberry was reborn as a heritage fruit, flush with nostalgia. Gone were the 'plebian' associations, of which Bunyard wrote in 1929.[214] Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's *Fruit Every Day* (2013) featured recipes for gooseberry ketchup, relish, salsa, soup, focaccia, gooseberries with roast pork, black pudding and mackerel. Whittingstall offered advice on procuring gooseberries:

> The supermarket is the worst place to buy berries and currants. The range is poor and the quality even poorer. Go instead to a farm shop selling locally grown fruit or order berries and currants from the best box scheme that delivers in your area. Best of all take your family to a PYO farm. Growing your own is of course even more satisfying [...] and I would always rather freeze ripe berries and currants than buy under-ripe, imported ones out of season.[215]

The gooseberry's social elevation was shrewdly observed in a sketch by Catherine Tate where her character 'The Aga-Saga Woman,' Mrs Taylor-Thomas offered each of her children, Chloe, Imogen and

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[211] Francesca Greenoak, *Forgotten Fruit*, p. 42; Charlie Ryrie, 'Fruit of fools, taste of Britain: Gooseberries,' *Gardener's World Magazine*, July 2005, p. 82, Gerry Edwards, 'Gooseberries: A forgotten fruit' *Pomona Fruits Website* <https://www.pomonafruits.co.uk/blog/gooseberries-a-forgotten-fruit/> accessed 30.08.21.

[212] Bethan Bell, 'The rise, fall and rise of the status pineapple,' (Published online: BBC News, 2nd August 2020) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-53432877> accessed 30.08.21.

[213] Jennie Brown (ed.) *Home Grown Fruit* (London: Collins & Brown, 2007) p. 8.

[214] Edward Bunyan, *The Anatomy of Dessert* (New York: Random House Publishing, 2006) p. 33.

[215] Fearnley-Whittingstall, *Fruit Every Day,* pp. 14-15.

Fergus, a 'gooseberry and cinnamon yogurt,' in turn, repeating the flavour each time for emphasis, before realising to her horror and panic that the yogurts were twelve hours out of date.[216]

In his combination garden-guide and cookbook, Nigel Slater portrayed gooseberries in a sensual, poetic manner:

> I like the way the light shines through the tiny leaves of the three Hinno[n]maki gooseberry bushes. Amongst the first to burst in March they smack of freshness and change, the excitement of a new gardening year. I like the way you can see through a gooseberry on the bush, the transparency of it. Despite the angry thorns that have so regularly drawn my blood, I have a soft spot for this small and splendidly sour fruit.[217]

Slater's prose is far from a Dr Hessayon manual, he evokes sensations and imbues the experience with emotion. In a tweet from 2019 he created a feeling of hygge around his gooseberry preparations with the inclusion of atmospheric weather (Fig 28).

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[216] Geoffrey Perkins (Producer) *The Catherine Tate Show*, Series 3, Episode 6, (First broadcast 30th November 2006, BBC 2) Tiger Aspect Productions.

[217] Nigel Slater, *Tender, Volume II: A Cook's Guide to the Fruit Garden* (London: Fourth Estate, 2010) p. 905.

Figure 28. Screenshot of a Tweet about gooseberries by Nigel Slater, 19th June 2019, <https://twitter.com/nigelslater/status/1141374072426848256> accessed 29.08.21.

If any further proof were needed that gooseberries had appreciated, in November 2019, print artist Estelle Whewell won a competition run by the Waitrose Magazine for artists to have their work featured on the cover. Whewell's winning entry was a linocut image of gooseberries, both subject and technique have a vintage aesthetic, as with William Morris reproduction prints gooseberries have become a nostalgic motif popular among the middle classes (Fig. 29).[218]

[218] Sandra Afoldy, 'William Morris: Emotive Links in a Mass-produced World,' *Canadian art Review*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (2000) pp. 102-110.

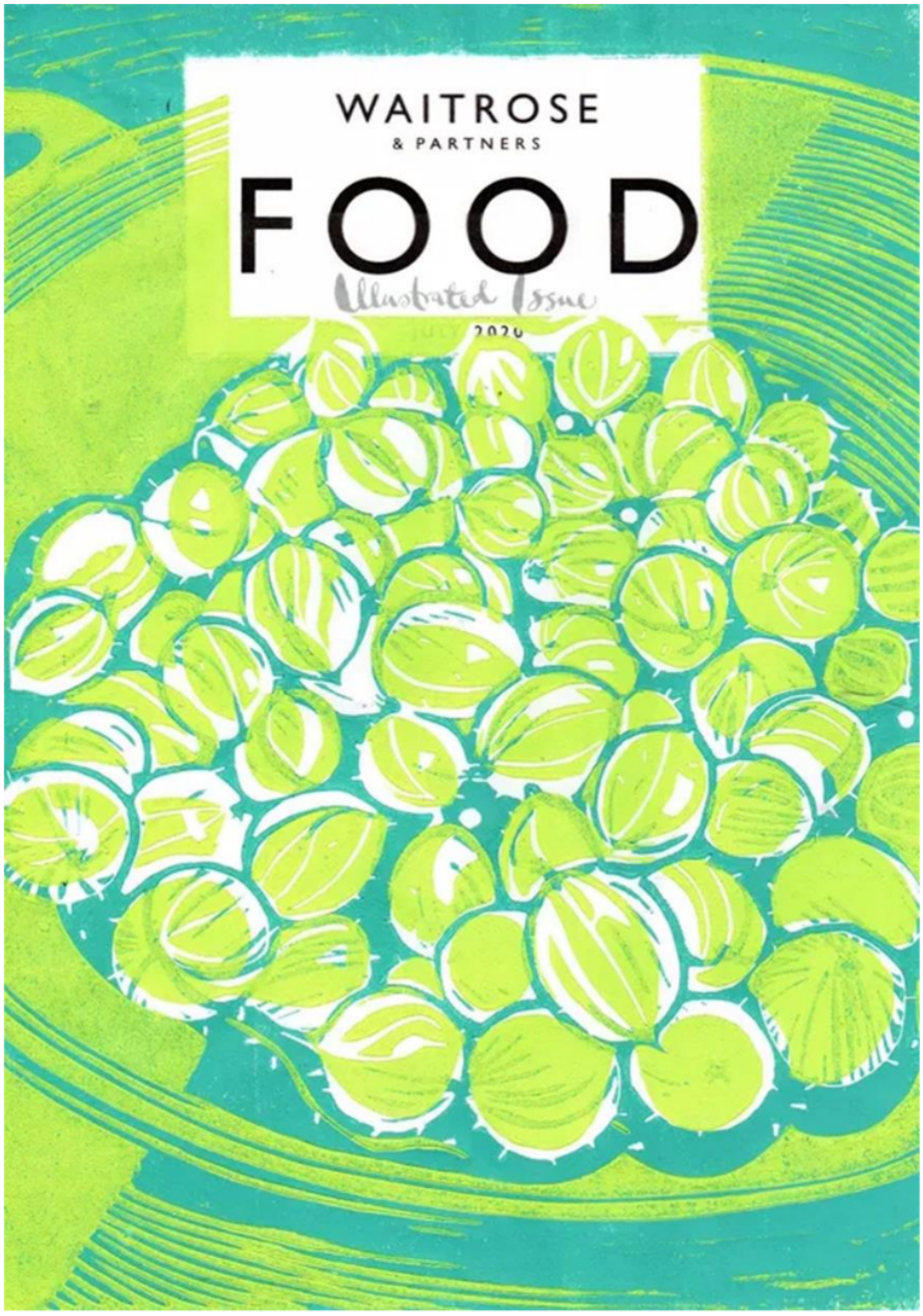

Figure 29. Linocut image of gooseberries by Estelle Whewell, used as the cover illustration for the *Waitrose & Partners Food magazine*, July 2000, reproduced from <https://estellewhewell.com/> accessed 29.08.21.

Gooseberry plants are at present commonly available from garden centres and online retailers, though

usually only the same handful of modern varieties: 'Hinnonmaki' red, yellow and green, which were developed in Finland to be hardy and disease resistant, 'Xenia,' bred in Switzerland and 'Careless,' a British Victorian variety. In the horticultural press they are recommended as an easy to grow, reliable plant which can be used in shady spots in the garden.[219] Commercially, horticultural advisor Chris Creed forecasts a profitable future for gooseberries on PYO farms, yet as part of their allure stems from being niche, expanding production could negatively impact their appeal.

Conclusion

The objectives of this dissertation were to discover how gooseberries have been used and perceived in British gardens, why they became commercially successful then declined and to identify broader conclusions which can be drawn about British horticulture from the history of the gooseberry. According to written records gooseberries first arrived on British shores in 1275 as part of a Royal consignment so began as exclusive and sought after. By the 16th century they had become widespread, were sometimes underplanted with flowering or productive herbaceous species and were used to form hedges. They were believed to have numerous medicinal properties when cooked unripe. Attitudes towards eating raw fruit, including gooseberries, became more positive in the 16th and 17th centuries.

More varieties became available, or at least were documented, in the 17th century. They were used in formal fruit gardens, kitchen gardens and orchards, trained as wall fruit, as hedges for screening vegetable plots and beneath larger trees. While they seem to have been popular and widely used, they were perhaps not seen as a premier fruit. This is suggested by the practise of planting them between young pome or stone fruits which were to be wall trained, then removing the gooseberries when the

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[219] Anon., 'Fresh from the garden: Gooseberries,' *Gardener's World Magazine* (June 2013) p. 126; Anon., 'Grow & Eat: Gooseberries,' *Gardener's World Magazine* (June 2018) p. 133; Carol Klein, 'Big Garden, Small Budget,' *Gardener's World Magazine* (November 2019) p. 35.

seemingly more desirable trees matured.

In the 18th century gooseberries were considered common by professional gardeners such as Switzer and Miller but still championed as excellent, useful plants by others such as Worlidge. They became the chosen plant of specialist hobby growers who went on to breed hundreds of new varieties and perfect cultivation techniques to produce enormous fruits. 19th century authors record competitive gooseberry growers' bushes as being severely pruned, thinned to only a few fruits, much mulched and shaded. Though as yet undocumented, it seems likely competitors had an area of seedling plants they were raising as possible new varieties, pens of mature bushes producing berries for competition and a nursery area for propagating more specimens of strong varieties.

In the 19th century gooseberries continued to be grown for competition and despite their lowly associations were still used extensively in the private kitchen gardens of the wealthy. Head gardeners went to great lengths to extend the fruiting season: early varieties were planted in the sunniest spots, trained to allow maximum light penetration and covered with glass cases to force the fruit on, whereas late varieties were planted in shade and protected with matting to retard them.

In the 20th century, country houses and their kitchen gardens went into decline, gooseberries were still grown as a vital source of food by poorer people and they were promoted as efficient and nutritious by the government during the food shortages of the First and Second World Wars. In these utilitarian situations the form most often recommended was an open centred bush. In peacetime, international shipping of exotic fruits could resume, gooseberries became old-fashioned and in the second half of the 20th century were at their least popular ebb. With the burgeoning environmental movement in the 1970s, the seeds of the gooseberry's redemption were sown. Their ability to grow in shade made them a key species in forest and permaculture gardens which were designed to be environmentally friendly. Gooseberries were once again seen as useful and virtuous if not popular.

In the 21st century no radical new ways of growing gooseberries have arisen, they are promoted in the horticultural press as reliable, suitable for small gardens and shade, work horses rather than superstars. Their public perception however has altered dramatically; they are still seen as old-fashioned but this has become a virtue. To a generation who do not remember life before the internet never mind rationing, they are reminiscent of an imagined more innocent past. Like Victorian buildings, gooseberries passed through an unfashionable period of neglect, then were rediscovered and revived as heritage treasures. Other traditional peasant foods have received the same treatment, bread for example, was for centuries our most basic, staple food in Britain. The mechanisation of its production was perfected so that c. 11 million loaves a day are made in the UK, sold so cheaply they are affordable to even the meanest budget.[220] Yet in the process something is lost: taste, nutrition and traditional skills. Reclaiming these elements turned some bread into an artisan product in the 21st century with specialist loaves often costing eight times more than a basic supermarket loaf.[221] Gooseberries have undergone a similar rebirth, once associated with the poorest in society they are now more exclusive in Britain than imported fruit like grapes or kiwis and laden with nostalgic, cultural associations.

Ease of propagation, cultivation and the earliest usable fruit of the year made gooseberries a popular crop with market gardeners from the 16th century onwards. Their greatest commercial significance came in the last decades of the 19th century when a remarkable convergence of political, economic and technological factors resulted in the jam boom. The government's determination to pursue a policy of free trade caused a crisis for British arable farmers who resorted to soft fruit production to survive. Simultaneously the repeal of the sugar tax made preserve manufacture more

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[220] UK Flour Millers website, 'Flour and Bread consumption' <http://www.ukflourmillers.org/flourbreadconsumption> accessed 16.09.21.

[221] ASDA groceries website, 'White bread £0.49,' <https://groceries.asda.com/product/white-bread/asda-square-cut-medium-white-bread/910002989320> accessed 16.09.21; Hobbs House Bakery website, 'Sourdough £4.65,' <https://www.hobbshousebakery.co.uk/collections/online-store> accessed 16.09.21.

economical and transport technology had reached the point where large quantities of raw materials and finished goods could be transported around the country. The gooseberry was cheap to produce and possessed qualities suited to jam production so became an essential component of the industry. This prominence went into decline when American Gooseberry Mildew appeared at the beginning of the 20th century and reduced the reliability and cost-efficiency of gooseberry production. Their popularity waned further after the Second World War when they seemed austere in comparison to imported fruit. The final blow to the gooseberry industry came in 1973 when the UK joined the European Union and many British growers found they could not compete with those on the continent.

This dissertation has highlighted the underacknowledged role of gooseberries in the horticultural history of Britain. It has gathered evidence to support Rogers' statement that gooseberry clubs were active as early as the 1730s-40s. It has identified contemporary societal influences and contextualised the act of breeding enormous gooseberries. It has demonstrated previously uninterrogated cultural attitudes towards gooseberries and challenged perceptions surrounding importation of food as a modern trend and the surprisingly late adoption of fruit cultivation in Britain.

The breeding and cultivation of gooseberries in the 18th and 19th centuries, carried out by ordinary people, was an enormous achievement which deserves to be more widely recognised and celebrated. Scientific discoveries are often attributed to gentlemen naturalists who had the wealth and leisure to indulge their curiosities, whereas with gooseberries people with minimal resources completely transformed the size and diversity of a species. With no impressive building or physical object to preserve, working-class history is often lost but cultivars raised by these breeders still exist. Planted in public spaces with engaging interpretation, they offer an opportunity to stimulate interest and pride in British horticultural heritage. Further research would be valuable to uncover more first-

hand accounts from these growers as we have little information in their own voices.

The motivation for studying this subject was in part a dissatisfaction with our environmentally unsustainable food system, a belief that things must have previously worked differently and a desire to understand how we arrived at this point. It is easy to imagine things were better in the past yet while researching it emerged repeatedly that Britain experienced frequent food shortages, working conditions were often harsh and poorly paid and from as early as the 15th century resorted to importing cheap food whenever possible. There was no golden age when we were entirely self-sufficient. Our present situation should not be viewed as entirely degenerate as previous concerns have been largely resolved: shortages, shelf-life, safer and more equitable working conditions. Solutions are not simply waiting to be found in the past but the history of the gooseberry perhaps offers hope another convergence of technological, political and economic forces may result in an environmental revolution, as we once experienced the industrial.

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