

WEARE GIFFARD CIDER

Research shows that there were at least three cider presses in the village (but it is likely that most villagers made cider in their own homes).

1) In the barn now belonging to Mr. Howard Curtis, which was used in the 1930's, the story goes that villagers would take their windfall apples along, press the juice out and then use whisky or brandy vats for the fermentation process. (This added a 'something' to the cider). The process was usually completed by Christmas of the same year.

2) There was a second press found in a thatched barn behind Brookham Farm. This gave rise to the name of the current Public House which was granted a licence in 1970 after the building had been converted from a residence.

3) In outhouses between Ivy Cottage and Riverview (now Tanglewood Thatch), there was a small cider press owned by Jack Beer of Riverview.

The apples would have to be crushed so that the juice could be extracted from the pulp. Following this, the pulp, which was too wet to stay in place, would be put into the press with a binder; and in Devon, the binder was made of oat straw or sacking. Alternate layers of pulp and straw or sacking would be piled up on the press bed and the whole pressed to obtain the juice.

"Cider is treacherous because it smiles in the face and then cuts the throat"

(17th Cent Proverb)

Once this had been done, the liquid would be put into wooden vats to allow the initial fermentation to take place before the result was transferred to casks.

Fermentation could take anything from two weeks to several months depending on the ambient temperature.

The sediment would be thrown away - but not on the farm, as the animals could easily get drunk! This left-over was called 'Cider Cheese', i.e. a mix of straw and squashed apples often fed to pheasants by gamekeepers.

In passing, one wonders if the practice of distilling liquor from cider was carried out? This liquor was called 'EGGERS', but it is uncertain why. However, 'twus genst lor!' According to tithes of 1837, there were 45 orchards here, ranging in size from 1 perch to 3 acres, with 2 roods and 14 perches at Lower Venton.

Source: 'Cidermaking' by Michael Quinion, and villagers.

A story goes that the young men of the village used to gather at the barn press drinking the cider, until the vicar became displeased. He felt that they ought to have been in church so he had the barn closed down.

(Various sources).



Detail of "The Cider Feast", a wood engraving by Devon born Edward Calvert 1828