

## "The Currency Of Cider"

Stan was but twelve years old when his father, Henry Procter, asked him to fetch some sugar. Not a quick trip to the corner shop or along to the supermarket for a two-pound bag of Tate and Lyle, you understand, but to take the horse and dray down to the railway station at Pershore to pick up a dozen hundredweight sacks of sugar.

It was the first time the young lad had been allowed out on his own with the dray, and he felt excited and slightly nervous.

On arriving at the railway yard, the stationmaster took one look at the skinny lad, who was only just a tad larger than each sack, before instructing two of his porters to load up the dray. With the sugar secured, Stan headed for home, back down Station Road, picking up the A44 over Allesborough Hill, up Keepers Bank, and skirting past the edge of Drakes Broughton, before heading up the lane to Thorndon Farm. Stan later remarked that he felt like a cherry on top of a cake, somewhat of a decoration, for the horse knew the way home, and gave the lad no trouble at all.

Two sacks of the load were reserved for Winifred, Stan's mother, for the making of jams and preserves, yellow egg plum, damson, and Stan's favourite, greengage, as well as her remarkable rhubarb cordial. The rest went in the apple juice, as it turned into cider. For at this time, and for centuries before, farms produced their own ciders to help attract and retain their workforce. A good cider was expected by all the labourers, as part of their wages, and with over a million people working on the land, the farmers had their work cut out to keep the best. At Thorndon Farm, the apples trees in the orchard produced cider with flavour but no great strength, and so the sugar was added to boost the alcohol content. In addition, Winifred had started to add her rhubarb cordial to some of the cider, and the resulting fruit cider was both popular and profitable, selling well in the local Pershore markets.

The arrival of the second world war was the end of cider as a currency, the replacement of the horse and the manual labouring by the use of diesel-powered tractors led to the grubbing up of many orchards and a reduction in land-workers down to only two hundred and fifty thousand.

So at this time of year, let us remember the importance of apples and of cider, toast the trees, and cry "Wassail!"