

# Alley! Alley!



Arriving at **Wakelyns** is like entering Eden. Rows of dark rich soil are divided by avenues of trees where apple and pear, bowing under the weight of their ripened fruit, interlock branches with alder, beech and quince. Trellises overflow with runner beans and flocks of finches flit from bramble to sunflower.

Spread over fifty-six acres, Wakelyns is one of the finest examples of organic agroforestry farming practices in the country and has been at the forefront of pioneering agricultural studies for nearly thirty years. The story began in 1992, when Martin Wolfe, a scientist at the Plant Breeders Institute at Cambridge, and his wife Ann, purchased this precious slice of land just outside Metfield in order to further their studies on the importance of diversification, and to show how the farming world could benefit from moving away from traditional arable monoculture. Over the years, Martin and Ann mapped

out a planting scheme for the land, buying in 100s of seeds and bareroot saplings to grow in rows alongside alleys of traditional field crops, meticulously plotting the results of each harvest to see what impact it was having on the yields.

Their aim was to prove that agroforestry promoted increased biodiversity, productivity, and the overall health of the soil, and although Martin and Ann have now passed on, Wakelyns is a testament to this ambition, and their ground-breaking research lives on in the verdant soil and amazing variety of mature trees that line



about the land



about the land



the rows of thriving crops. The farm is now under the stewardship of their sons, Toby and David, and David's wife Amanda, who are keen to carry on their important work. Not having entered into farming themselves, they made the decision to open up Wakelyns to others who are interested in a more sustainable way of growing and living. The blueprint laid down by Martin and Ann is still at the heart of farming here, but amongst the trees you can now find rows of squash, vegetables and lentils grown in collaboration with Hodmedods. Fay Jones, the woodland haberdasher, weaves baskets from the coppiced hazel and in one of the farm buildings a bakery is producing around 300 loaves a week.

The bakery is run by Henrietta and Maisie, both qualified cooks and bakers who have

given up jobs at successful London restaurants to pursue a more fulfilling life here on the farm. Everything they bake comes from ingredients grown at Wakelyns, and leaving Maisie to knead the morning's dough, Henrietta takes me on a tour. She explains that they oversee the fruit trees, while Chloe, Holly and Rachel run a vegetable box scheme called RealVeg, a Community Supported Agriculture initiative which invites members to get involved and help with the planting and picking. This season, another grower, Marion, took over one of the rows for her squashes and next year Tilly is arriving with her chickens that will provide the bakery with free-range eggs. The special YQ population wheat, which was developed here by Martin, is still grown in rotation with lentils or buckwheat to ensure the soil is rested and

enriched, and as we wander the alleys, I get a real sense of a community beginning to come together with a shared responsibility for the growing, harvesting and distribution of the produce.

We stop and try a 'Coeur de Boeuf', a dark brown apple with a dry, subtle sweetness that makes it a good cooker, and then track down an Ashmead's Kernel, a delicious Russet-like dessert apple. Back at the bakery, Henrietta shows me a handwritten archive of all the different fruit trees Ann planted here at Wakelyns and I delight in their beautifully evocative names: Summer Gold Pippin, Excalibur, Falstaff, Bloody Ploughman and the fabulous Warwickshire Drooper. More varieties of plum, apple, cherry, quince and pear are added each year, their names being recorded on Ann's

ledger as a reference for future generations, and the team is organising a Community Apple Day at the end of October, alongside an apple photography exhibition by Richard Allenby-Pratt, as a celebration of the amazing variety grown here. I love that everything is shared or swapped or bartered, and that old-fashioned values of working the land together have once again found their place. This method of farming the land is not new, but Wakelyns is proof that agroforestry is indeed a pathway that modern agriculture needs to embrace if we want to protect our land, our environment and quite possibly our souls.

Community Apple Day:  
31st October | 10am-3pm  
[www.wakelyns.co.uk](http://www.wakelyns.co.uk)