



► Charles Martell  
at his distillery

NEXT WEEK: MARTIN STAYS IN A REMARKABLE GUESTHOUSE IN PENZANCE AND EXPLORES THE TOWN AND ITS SURROUNDINGS



► Tom Oliver, who is  
widely recognised  
as being the doyen  
of perry-making



► Jim Chapman  
at his pear  
orchard centre



baton on to a man called Jim Chapman. Why? Because the original National Pear Collection became too large for its original home at Malvern's Three Counties Agricultural Society showground and Jim, a local solicitor (who is also fascinated by all things Gloucestershire) decided to begin a

new collection in 1999. He had inherited some land in the parish of Hartpury (situated in Pear Country, as the second half of its name suggests) and he donated 25 acres of it to a trust with the idea of keeping the county's ancient pear varieties alive and flourishing.

"By 2015 the perry pear collection here had increased to 105 distinct varieties," said Jim, who took us around the large orchard at the National Perry Pear Centre, which, by the way, is free to visit.

"I have to pay tribute to Charles who set up the collection – he recognised that these old varieties were dying out and so he set about collecting them. To improve bio-security, it was decided, as far as possible, to replicate the collection on each site, and in 2016 the Malvern collection was increased to 75 varieties.

"It's ironic my father, who was a farmer, was pulling out orchards as fast as he could. He was in dairy

production and these trees spoiled the grass. In fact, we even had the local army cadets coming along and putting explosives to blow up the pear trees – it was the only way to shift them. That's as bad as the story ever got."

Again we could fill this newspaper with the stories, facts and figures Jim told us about the Gloucestershire pear world. All fascinating stuff... from legends about pear-hating giants on May Hill to tales about beetroot red pears which make a kind of rosé perry. To find out more about the free-to-visit National Perry Pear Centre see <https://www.nationalperrypearcentre.org.uk/>

But now we must actually get to taste some of the ambrosia which these celebrated pears can produce. To do that James and I travelled north of Much Marcle to meet Tom Oliver, who is widely recognised as being the doyen of perry-making. Each step of his

production process, from selecting the pears to fermentation and bottling, is carried out with precision and care.

He told us how his grandfather had made cider for home consumption but the market had dropped out of the apple selling market, so the family had grubbed out the trees and replanted the area with hops. Indeed, Tom's present perry and cider-making company is based in the old hop barns.

"I funded my existence by working as a road manager for bands like The Proclaimers," says multi-award-winning Tom, describing his life before the perry and cider-making bug took hold.

"Pear trees are much longer-lived than apples – they can go on for 300 years," he said. "So once you've got them in the ground and they're doing well, you're on a winner. The problem, though, starts once they start producing fruit – because it's harder to harvest and perry is much

more awkward to make on an annual basis. It's even more awkward to consistently come up with good perry year after year.

"It can be soul destroying for a cider-maker who has a go at making perry. He can find that the very first time he makes it, it's glorious – maybe also in year two – then year three comes along and... no, something's gone wrong."

"But when faced with a very good cider and then the best perry, most people will pick the perry. It has all the complexity and nuance."

As I stood there sipping a tiny glass of Tom's finest perry, I could only agree – and I told him I thought it surprising that the elixir wasn't better known in Britain.

"That is a thing which baffles me too," smiled this magician of the pear orchards.

■ Check out Tom's website to find out more and perhaps buy some of his amazing Perry <https://www.oliversciderandperry.co.uk/>