

BRAMLEY – 200 YEARS OF HISTORY AND THE BRAMLEY CAMPAIGN

Adrian Barlow, CEO of EAP Ltd and Chairman of the Bramley Campaign

Bramley – The Early Years

It was in 1809 that the history of Bramley began. In that year, Mary Ann Brailsford who lived at Church Cottage in Southwell, Nottinghamshire planted the apple pip that grew into the first Bramley tree. Little could she have imagined that her planting was to produce an iconic product, unrivalled for cooking quality, still only produced commercially in Britain and the foundation upon which an entire industry has been based.

Several years were to elapse after the planting of that pip before Bramley developed beyond a single tree. In 1846 Church Cottage was bought by Matthew Bramley, a local butcher and keeper of the White Lion Inn in Southwell. In 1856 he was approached by a local nurseryman, Henry Merryweather, who had been impressed by the size and quality of the apples produced by the tree, as he wished to propagate cuttings. Matthew Bramley agreed, the propagation was successful and the variety was named Bramley's Seedling. The first recorded sale of the variety was in 1862. It was exhibited before the Royal Horticultural Society's Fruit Committee in 1876 and was highly commended whilst in 1887 Bramley received a First Class Certificate from the Committee of the Royal Jubilee Exhibition of Apples in Manchester. The variety rapidly became popular and was planted by commercial producers and amateurs throughout the British Isles. Incidentally, the original tree still exists and was one of fifty "Great British Tress" selected by the Tree Council to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee in 2002.

Promotion by the Industry

During the twentieth century great changes occurred in planting systems, rootstocks, tree sizes, cultural techniques and storage systems. In the latter half of the last century much research and promotional activity was organised by the Apple and Pear Development Council. The decision to disband that body and to separate research and development from promotional activities led to the formation of the English Bramley Publicity Group in 1989. Thereafter, annual promotional campaigns were organised, funded by voluntary contributions from English growers and augmented by funding from the EU either through special programmes or through producer organisations' operational programmes. The first chairman was John Breach who was succeeded a year later by Ian Mitchell.

The Campaign recognised the importance of widening the usage of Bramley to encompass savoury dishes and culinary trends as well as puddings. Many new recipes were created and much work was undertaken with food writers and the media generally in order to generate as much coverage as possible. Much work was undertaken with food writers and celebrity chefs to encourage them to specify Bramley in their recipes. Cooking events were organised to demonstrate the versatility of Bramley including the infamous Gordon Ramsey lunch which

provided a massive opportunity to highlight the excellence of Bramley through the subsequent widespread media coverage. In 1994 the Brammy Awards were introduced to recognise those individuals and organisations that had given particular support to Bramley through the introduction of new products, successful sales, marketing initiatives, press articles or publicity through the media. Increasingly, these have become recognised as of real importance and value, with winners keen to publicise their successes.

Four years ago the growing importance of the catering sector was recognised by the Bramley campaign through the introduction of a new competition for students at catering colleges. The competition itself is for the most innovative and best presented new recipe with regional heats and a “cook-off” final in London. The winners receive cash prizes for themselves and their colleges with the overall winner also receiving a work placement at one of London’s leading restaurants. In many ways this can be regarded as an investment in the future. Certainly, this was true of another recent initiative, a programme for Key Stage 2 schoolchildren to encourage them to cook using Bramley. A website, posters and notes for teachers were developed and the programme has been updated recently to include Key Stage 3 children.

A wide range of activities are being planned to celebrate the bicentenary of Bramley throughout 2009 and these will be combined wherever possible with the annual activities which have proved so successful in the past.

The performance of Bramley during the last decade has been remarkable bearing in mind that many changes have been made in consumer behaviour that might have been expected to have eroded demand. New opportunities have been developed and the reputation of Bramley as the finest cooking apple in the world has been maintained. Bramley has a market share of more than 95% of sales of cooking apples in the UK: what other product in any sector can claim a similar share. Of course, we are fortunate to have such an outstanding product but much of the recent success can be attributed to the Bramley Campaign and the outstanding leadership of Ian Mitchell who was Chairman from 1990 to 2007.

Originally published in the NFS Handbook 2008