

'Hard graft' saves apple for posterity

AN ANCIENT Devon apple, which could have been lost forever, has been saved for posterity by a specialist nursery at Dulford, near Cullompton.

The early apple, Kirton Fair, was thought to be extinct until apple expert Kevin Croucher, of Thornhayes Nursery, discovered a tree growing in Lapford and managed to get some wood to

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graft.

"It would have died out if we hadn't got hold of it," said Mr Croucher who runs one of the top nurseries in the country for rare and unusual fruit and ornamental trees.

"We have now managed to get it to produce fruit and have been propagating it for two

years by grafting."

Mr Croucher said before discovering it he had been keeping an eye out for the tree as several people had asked him for it.

"Various elderly people had asked if I stocked the tree. There is plenty of local interest in it and it has been selling reasonably well along with lots of our other apple trees.

"I think we have about a

dozen left at the moment."

Mr Croucher said this was not the first time the nursery, which he started up with his wife Pat nine years ago, had 'saved' an old apple tree from extinction.

"We have rescued six to eight old varieties of apples in the last eight or nine years – primarily local apples.

"The Kirton Fair is an early yellow apple which ripens in August and was traditionally sold in the streets at Crediton's Kirton Fair.

"It was a juicy apple and the first of the season. In those days, people got quite excited about it before we had cold store apples from New Zealand."

The tree is sold at 4ft to 5ft tall as a maiden or one-year-old but will eventually grow to more than 20ft. "If people want to renovate an old traditional orchard I think it might be an ideal tree to consider including," said Mr Croucher.

The nursery, which employs seven workers, has an international as well as national reputation with a total of 28,000 trees for sale during the season which started in October.

"We are purely a tree nursery supplying all over the country and into Europe, both wholesale and retail," said Mr Croucher.

"We have the reputation of selling the biggest range of West Country apples in the country."



● Kevin Croucher at his Dulford nursery.