

Patron: Lord Cobbold DL
Ivry, Lady Freyberg

PERRONELLE GUILD – OBITUARY - 2004

March 2019

Perronelle Guild, [1902-2004 #709 on the web family tree] who has died aged 101, was the only woman cyder-maker in eight generations of the Chevallier family at **Aspall Hall** in Suffolk; a successful fruit-farmer before the Second World War, in 1946 she was a founder member of the Soil Association, as a result of which Aspall Cyder became an organic producer - a tradition it maintains to this day.



Perronelle Guild

She was born **Perronelle Mary Chevallier** on July 31st 1902 at Aspall Hall, a moated, red-brick, largely Jacobean house in the Domesday village of Aspall in Suffolk.

Aspall Hall was bought in 1702 by **Temple Chevallier of Jersey** [1674-1722 #11811]; but when he died childless in 1722 the house was left to Perronelle's great-great-great grandfather, **Clement Chevallier** [1698-1762 #1330] of St. Helier.

Once installed at Aspall, Clement Chevallier tried to grow vines; but this venture proved unsuccessful, and he decided, in 1728, to make cider, importing apple trees from Jersey (a quarter of the island was devoted to apple orchards at the time) and a granite crushing-wheel and trough from the Ile de Chaussee in Normandy. It proved a good investment and was in use until 1951.



A Cyder Brand named after her

Clement Chevallier's descendants were farmers, vicars and scholars. They included the **Rev Professor Temple Chevallier** (1794-1873) [#2116], Professor of Mathematics and Astronomy at Durham University, who discovered a mountain on the moon; and the **Rev. John "Barley" Chevallier** (1774-1856) [#729], Perronelle's great grandfather, who in the 1820s developed a high-yield strain of barley that, by the turn of the 20th century, was used for three-quarters of the world's barley crops.



Aspall Hall

Perronelle's father, **John Barrington Chevallier** [1857-1940 #207 who married **Isobel Amy Cobbold** 1869-1931 #208], had a pedigree herd of prizewinning Red Poll cows and introduced the "y" in Aspall cyder to differentiate it from the west country variety. He also sold Aspall apples and cyder by mail order, sending them as far north as Manchester via the local Mid Suffolk Light Railway, and exported cyder to India.

Perronelle's childhood was rural and old-fashioned; there was no electricity, mains water or bathrooms at the Hall until after the war. The household was self-sufficient, boasting a dairy, laundry, carpenters' shop, fish ponds and bread oven.

Perronelle and her sisters were educated at home by a governess. During the First World War, barely in her teens and with the men from the farm away fighting, she would drive herself 15 miles into Ipswich in a pony and trap for French lessons. A keen rider, she also went hunting - even for otters, although they were never caught.

At the age of 16 Perronelle went up to Reading University to read Agriculture, but the following year she was obliged to leave when her father ran out of money; he had felt duty bound to keep on all his farmhands who had returned from the war. The next few years were spent helping her father run Aspall, which then included arable farming as well as fruit. She was a sharp businesswoman; the family said that the only time the farm made a profit was when her father was ill and she took charge.

In the mid-1920s she met **Cyril Guild** [1906-1978 #711] at a fruit-farming conference in Norfolk. They married in 1929 and had three children. Throughout the 1930s Cyril and Perronelle ran the fruit-farm at Aspall, growing plums, strawberries, raspberries and blackcurrants which were transported round Britain.

In 1940 her father died, leaving Aspall to his eldest daughter, who decided to sell it. Perronelle Guild offered to buy it, but even at a generous price it was difficult to raise the money; an exceptionally good fruit crop that year made all the difference, and when the war ended and the Army (which had troops billeted at the house) moved out, the Guilds took over the house and Cyder business.

In 1946, inspired by the example of their Suffolk neighbour, **Lady Eve Balfour**, they became founder members of the **Soil Association**, an organisation which now certifies all organic produce in Britain. Since 1946, all the cyder produced at Aspall has been made from certified organic apples; and in 2002, at the age of 99, Perronelle Guild was a poster girl for Sainsbury's Organics, as one of the Soil Association's last surviving original members.

Until the 1970s, cyder production at Aspall was run by just one man, rising to two during the crushing season. **Harry Sparrow**, who was in charge of the Cyder House from the 1920s to the 1960s, once produced 18,000 gallons in six weeks. Cyder was sold to the public at the Cyder House (situated across the moat from the Hall), as it always had been. **Benjamin Britten** and **Peter Pears** were regular customers, as was the Scottish playwright **James Bridie**, the Suffolk writer **Adrian Bell**, and the artists **Margaret Mellis** and **Francis Davison**.

The Guilds were dedicated to east Suffolk, particularly the coast, where Perronelle used to find cornelians on the beach and pick sea kale to go with her rook pie (cooked in late May, when the rooks were young and tender). She kept chickens and ducks and, at one stage, guineafowl which, though splendid guards, always failed to recognise her in a hat on the way to church. She controlled the moorhen population - who used to drown baby ducklings in the moat - by removing eggs from their nests with a spoon attached to a length of bamboo.

Her elder son **John** took over the cyder business in 1971 and enlarged and modernised it, introducing the commercial production of apple juice and cyder vinegar. After Cyril Guild died in 1978, Perronelle began to travel extensively, and visited India, China, Russia, Egypt, Albania and Eastern Turkey in her eighties. She continued to bake her own bread, make marmalade, garden, paint and entertain into her nineties.

She was a fund of folk lore, such as "always kill a pig during a rising moon". Since 1993 Aspall Cyder has been run by her grandsons, **Barry and Henry Chevallier Guild**, who still blend the cyder from trees planted by their grandmother. Perronelle Guild who died on February 15th, is survived by a son and a daughter. Another son predeceased her.

Daily Telegraph obituary written by Perronelle's granddaughter **Annabel Freyberg** (1961-2013) #2398