



Newsletter January 2014

A Happy New Year to all our members and Newsletter readers! We wish you good health and enjoyable cycling, walking and jogging over the coming year. We got the year off to a great start with the Wassail party on Sunday 6 January to encourage good fruiting on the orchard trees at the Levenshulme quadrants. At least fifty people attended, and our thanks go to all the organisers and contributors to a successful event. The gods must also have been smiling on us, as the rain stopped just as proceedings began and started again just as we had finished clearing up, while the strong wind kept the bonfire roaring. Thanks to Cos Harnasz, the inspiration for the Wassail idea, for providing the following account of the event for the Newsletter.

‘Last year we had our first “Orchard Wassail” at the Levenshulme quadrants. Following on from its surprise reception, it seemed only natural to have another one this year. But would we be able to repeat the wonderful magical experience of that Twelfth Night of 2013? There were many unknowns. Alice, our first ever Wassail Queen, who had performed the role so royally, was going to be away. Then there was the matter of the singing of carols and traditional wassail songs. Last time we also had some excellent three or four part harmonies going on, the professionalism of which took my breath away. Would they be able to make it again? Our stalwart guardian of the land, Angelique, whose house overlooks its borders, as well as organiser of bonfire, drinks and victuals, was away in the run-up to the event.....

But the magic happened again. The call went out for another beautiful woman to take the role of Wassail Queen, and Naomi was found. Not only did the choir from last year say yes, but Mike Beaumont brought with him double the number of voices and twice the number of songs. In addition another group of singers came, Levy Chorus led by Liz Harding, whose harmonies began to fill the air as dusk was rapidly falling, drawing people together. Only moments earlier, willing volunteers had helped to make the bonfire and get it going. On the opposite side of the Loop others helped erect Dick Venes’ gazebo, where the mulled wine, cider, soft drinks and cake would be served. As soon as that was done, a gust of wind promptly caught the structure, and lifted it into the trees, maybe signalling displeasure at their imminent removal by United Utilities later this month. Its framework was damaged, but Brenda from BUD nurseries stepped forward to offer their gazebo for next time, the first of a number of acts of generosity that evening.

Dick then strode towards the orchard and introduced the evening. He spoke about the origins of the orchard, the grant and the work with Sustrans, who own the land. Also about the care and attention as well as the compost and mulch heaped round the base of the apple, pear, cherry, plum, damson and greengage, all of which have survived and flourished for two years now. I then also thanked everyone for coming, and hoped that together we might again be able to keep the bad spirits away, and protect the trees. I said that the tradition of Wassails in other parts of the country was for all to tie a ribbon to the trees and place a piece of toast soaked in cider in their branches – an offering to the winter birds as well. We would do that only if we had a Wassail Queen, whom we would follow in procession along the path through the orchard. If we closed our eyes and wished.....

Then out of the darkness our Queen appeared, and stepped to stand by the first tree. I approached and gave her a goblet. She held it out and I filled it with some special cider I had brought. She then poured the golden liquid round the base of the tree and, that done, handed back the goblet, and we began to follow her into the orchard, accompanied this time by a Wassail Princess Dunya. After every tree had a ribbon and toast attached there was more singing, and the eating and drinking began. There was more magic as people said hello to each other – I was told two people met there who hadn't seen each other for 25 years! People then banged pots and pans to frighten away the bad spirits. Finally, from the orchard itself, came a firework display, with thunderous bangs to complete the job, and lights to help us all look forward to the year ahead.'

Postscript: Two days later on the Tuesday the Archers episode included a story line about an orchard Wassail, so we pipped them there! www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/the_archers/posts/Wassail

New Orchard Planting at Debdale

As mentioned in the last Newsletter, we have a further and final site identified for a community orchard at Debdale, opposite the Debdale entrance to the Loop and next to the allotments. As in previous years we are having two work days to prepare the site and plant the trees, with help from the Sale and Altrincham Conservation Volunteers. The preparation day will be **Sunday 16 February**, and the planting day **Sunday 16 March**, from 10 am onwards. Any help members can give will be much appreciated – stout shoes or boots and garden gloves are recommended. If we complete the work early, we may use the time to finish off November's rolling clean-up, which did not quite reach that end of the Loop.

The orchard trees have all been bought from BUD, and we are most grateful to all of you who responded to our November appeal to sponsor one or more trees at £10 a time. We have not quite reached our target of covering the full cost of the trees, so any further sponsorships would be very welcome. You can pay by cheque, made out to The Friends of the Fallowfield Loop, and sent to the Treasurer, Dick Venes, at 3 Lynton Drive, M19 2LQ; or by bank transfer to the Friends account at the Coop Bank, Kings Valley Stockport branch, code 089299, account number 65075669. If you use the latter method, could you please let Dick know by email.

Stop Press

Monday 20 January: Members' meeting at the Union Chapel, Wellington Road, Fallowfield, at 7.30 pm. All members and supporters are welcome.