



## Newsletter January 2015

A Happy New Year to all our members and supporters. We hope you can continue to enjoy the Loop in the coming year, whether as walkers, joggers or cyclists. We will keep you posted about all our activities and events through this regular bi-monthly newsletter, by email and on our website. You can also contact us through the website or by coming to one of our regular members' meetings. This newsletter starts with our regular item on parks along the Loop.

### **Parks by the Loop 3: Highfield Country Park**

Highfield Country Park borders the Fallowfield Loop, and can most easily be reached at the entrance opposite the renovated lattice bridge in Levenshulme. At the start of the twentieth century the land on which it stands was used as a clay pit and brick works, and also housed a tripe factory, a dye and bleach works and a farm, called High Field Farm. As late as the 1950s Jackson's brick works was still operating on the site, and its craters and ponds formed a regular but dangerous play area for local children, known as 'The Brickie'. The site subsequently became used for landfill.

In the 1970s an area of 70 acres was designated as a country park by Manchester City Council, but was little more than a dreary waste land and site for vandalism. It was only as late as 2004 that the Friends of the Park persuaded some Manchester companies to help finance a transformation of the area, involving young people, voluntary groups and local residents. It was subsequently declared a protected habitat for many animal and plant species. The park offers the opportunity for roaming or cycling in an extensive wild country area in the heart of urban south Manchester, including the use of a family picnic site. Why not try it out for yourselves?

### **The 2015 wassail celebration**

Many of you will have attended this year's wassail celebration, held on Sunday 4 January at the Levenshulme orchard, which has become a regular and popular event in our calendar. For the third year in a row, the sounds of people singing old songs, the banging of pots and pans to drive away evil spirits, the crackling of the bonfire and the exploding of

fireworks went out into the early night sky above the Fallowfield Loop. It was the orchard wassail! Wassailing is a medieval ritual in which people sing songs and drink mulled cider around Twelfth Night to bless the trees and shoo away the banshees to ensure that the following year's fruit harvest will be a good one. It originated in southern England, and was celebrated throughout the country, particularly in apple growing regions. The origins may go back to ancient times, and be associated with fertility rituals. Perhaps that is why a Wassail Queen appeared, conjured up by the participants, as if by magic, as dusk fell.

She took a goblet of cider, and poured the libation around the base of an apple tree. The rest of us then followed her along the paths through the orchard, tying ribbons to the trees, and placing pieces of toast soaked in cider for the robins and other winter birds. We sang and listened to songs, and wished each other 'Was hael' meaning 'good health' – to which the response is 'Drinc hael', the equivalent to 'cheers'. With the last of the bangs fading away, the bogies gone, we gathered round the fire, chatting, eating food and drinking mulled cider. The long dark night was lit up again, and already resolutions were being made to learn more songs for next year's gathering.

Our thanks to Angelique Bueler for the warm drink and to Brenda from BUD garden centre for the loan of the gazebo, replacing the one which blew away last year. Also to Cos Harnasz for this newsletter item.

### **Forthcoming events for your diary**

**Monday 19 January:** Members' meeting, Union Chapel, Wellington Road Fallowfield, 7.30 pm. All welcome to discuss current concerns and plan our spring schedule.

**Sunday 8 February:** Work day at the Sherwood Street entrance to plant a hedge alongside the fence, together with the Sale and Altrincham Conservation Volunteers, starting 10 am. The plants have been donated by John and Wendy Eaden in return for the cutting down of trees overhanging their allotment from the Loop.

### **Events organised by Sustrans Manchester office**

**Wednesday 21 January:** Fallowfield Loop Greener Greenways Get-together, 7-9 pm, at the Union Chapel Fallowfield. The event is to bring together everyone who has an interest in the Loop and how it can be developed for wildlife. Sustrans has produced a Habitat Management Plan which provides an excellent starting point for the Greener Greenways Project, but input is needed from local volunteers, organisations and nature enthusiasts to bring it to life, and make sure that we are all working together. This is a chance for us to network, share knowledge and make plans for the future of this wonderful wildlife corridor. Everyone is welcome. Drinks and snacks will be provided.

**Saturday 24 January:** Woodland Management Training Day on the Fallowfield Loop, 9.30 am to 3.30 pm. This training course will provide a background as to why we manage woodland, and covers a range of techniques for doing so. To find out more information

and to book a place on the course (numbers are limited), contact Abigail Pound on 0161 923 6053 or 07818 523227. Abigail can also provide information about training or volunteering opportunities with Sustrans.