

Twelfth Night Revelry at the Orchard.

The weather stayed fine for a very successful bonfire party on the evening of 6th January. The aim was to use the occasion to thank those who had helped over the past three years to convert what was a mere 'gleam in the eye' into the successful community resource that is Park Farm Orchard today.

The traditional start of the orchard year was marked by the enjoyment of hamburgers, drink and animated conversation around the roaring fire, as the branches of the grand old trees were outlined against a moonlit sky. The Orchard Group was pleased to meet again many of those who had contributed to the Community Orchard during its establishment. Although there was no representative from the Heritage Lottery Fund able to be present, our contact on the funding body hoped we had a really good time in 'celebrating our achievement'.

I would like to take this chance to thank all those who were unable to come – and indeed anyone whom we inadvertently omitted to invite!

Bob Baxter.
Project leader



Lynsted – the place for bats!

A good crowd of members gathered at the Methodist Church on April 22nd for a talk given by John Puckett, chairman of the Kent Bat Group. John began by explaining that there were 17 species of bat native to Britain. They are long-lived (a serotine specimen in Kent was known to have lived for 16 years) are social animals, and the only mammals that fly. Bats are warm-blooded, and flying consumes much energy, so bats tend to cluster together to conserve warmth.

Females group together in maternity roosts, where the young are born, naked, around June. They are fed on milk until they are able to fly. All bats in Britain eat insects, and all therefore need to echo-locate. The sound-processing area of a bat's brain is enlarged: the creatures clearly hear a detailed 'sound picture' that we humans cannot even imagine. As winter approaches,, bats build up their fat reserves. There are few insects about in the cold season, so they hibernate. A humid, sheltered location that is not freezing is needed, and several species seek out caves for this. Culverts, ice-houses, bridges, quarries and old air raid shelters are also used. Research has shown that a bat's heart rate can drop from 800 to 15 beats per minute, and the metabolism just 'ticks over' during hibernation. Water loss is a potential problem, so a spot with a suitably high atmospheric humidity is also sought.

Dene holes – vertical shafts with side-galleries once used for extracting chalk – are common in Kent, and favoured by several bat species. Studies at one in Dadmans Shaw in our parish, have shown that the air temperature near the ceiling in the deep galleries remains at 8 degrees C throughout the year: ideal for a winter snooze! This particular dene hole ranks as one of the most important in Kent for several species of bat.

Work in association with the University of Leeds, involving analyses of the DNA from fur, combined with radio-tracking, demonstrates that bats can travel up to 60km per night. Such studies are revealing more about bat behaviour, and may shed light on the serious problem of why numbers are declining. But the reason why some species regularly 'swarm' in the autumn, remains a mystery for now.

John completed a fascinating, well illustrated, talk by describing some of the challenges of studying bats as they roost in inaccessible places, and creating new roosts for them. In a final flourish, he showed members a tiny live pipistrelle that was 'in care' and recovering from a damaged wing.

Bob Baxter

Blossom Day 2009

John Disney tribute highlights Blossom Day

Despite doleful warnings of wet weather, the sun shone brightly on Blossom Day activities in the Community Orchard at Lynsted on Sunday 26th April. Upwards of 170 local people enjoyed picnicking under the magnificent, blossom-clad trees in the traditional orchard, while new-born lambs gambolled closeby. The sylvan tones of the Sittingbourne Wind Ensemble once again echoed through the boughs, and the children of Lynsted and Norton School skilfully wove their magical patterns around the maypole. Gavin Maclennan led groups of interested visitors through the orchard for his popular, fact-packed 'tours'. The provision of Lynsted with Kingsdown Society's own 'Lynsted Blend' of tea reinforced the local flavour of the event.



The memorial bench dedicated to John Disney, being tried out by the Mayor and Mayoress of Swale, Jason Harris, the creator of the bench, and a clearly content Marlene Disney.

A more serious note was struck when a memorial to the late, and greatly missed, John Disney was unveiled. Cllr. Frank Champion, chairman of Lynsted with Kingsdown Parish Council, explained how it was thought appropriate to site the carved oak bench in the Community Orchard, since John had so enjoyed helping to create the facility. He then introduced the Mayor of Swale, Cllr. Alan Willicombe, who paid tribute to the tremendous amount of work that John had put into the Borough, and referred to the high regard and affection in which John had been held. Cllr. Willicombe then formally dedicated the bench, in the presence of Mrs Marlene Disney and her sons, the Mayoress, Cllr Jean Willicombe, ward councillor Trevor Fentiman, Jason Harris who, created the bench, Alison Thompson, representing English Rural Housing, who had donated the bench, and many individuals from Swale Borough Council and the Parish.

The organisers were very pleased that this, the first event arranged by the Park Farm Community Cherry Orchard Group in its new guise of a community organisation now independent of the Parish Council, went off so well. Readers may wish to note that Cherry Day, also in the Orchard, will be held on Sunday 12th July, where a main feature will be 'pick your own' ripe cherries.

As ever, grateful thanks are due to Orchard owners, Pip and Sue Neaves for their continued support. As chairman of the Group's Steering Committee, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who helped to make this event such a success.

Bob Baxter.

Cherry Day 2009

Do cherries grow on trees?

We in Lynsted are used to seeing the cherry blossom in April and the cherries plentiful on the trees in July. Living in the part of England where the first cherry orchards were planted in the sixteenth century, we take our cherry orchards for granted. We might lament the fact that many of the traditional orchards have been grubbed out, but we do not always appreciate the fact that we are living in an unusual and special rural environment.

This was brought home to us on Cherry Day when a convoy of cars from West London arrived and their passengers descended with excitement into Park Farm Cherry Orchard, looking forward to seeing cherries growing on trees for the very first time! They had heard about our Cherry Day and had travelled 50 miles to see cherries growing in their natural setting. It does seem that the attraction of Cherry Day has become more widespread over the last few years and the numbers attending are ever increasing. We estimate that we had nearly 300 visitors.

The weather was perfect with blue skies all afternoon and we were entertained once again by the very talented Frayed Knot playing a variety of music to suit all tastes. The beer tent, cream teas and barbecue did a roaring trade. However, the most popular occupation was picking cherries and families disappeared into the orchard with their punnets, collecting a variety of different cherries and then spreading their picnic out under the trees and relaxing in the sunshine.

The results of our various competitions were:

Children's art competition: Category 1 Benjamin Smith Category 2 Dervla Finlay Category 3 Molly Timcke.

Hanging Basket competition: 1st place Martin Ryan 2nd place Linda Morgan 3rd place Tom English

Skittles: Adults: Peter Brough Under 12s: Toby Price

Our thanks are due to Pip and Sue Neaves for allowing us to use the Orchard for such a memorable occasion.

Julie Barrett Park Farm Community Cherry Orchard Group



Above; Gavin Maclennan, cherry expert and Tour Guide.



Above right; Frank Champion tests the Pond's hamburgers.

Right; Melanie, Petra and the 'Artisan' produce stall.



Community Orchard goes choral

Park Farm Community Cherry Orchard Group held its first choral concert, in Lynsted Church, on 11th July.

The idea was to fanfare the arrival of our annual Cherry Day the next day – in fact to make something of a 'Cherry Weekend' of it. Come the night, a couple of dozen intrigued local people came along. They were not disappointed. The Detling Singers, a mixed four-part choir under the direction of Ian Perry, charmed us with an inspired programme of songs with a rural flavour: 'A Celebration of the Kentish Orchard in Song and Readings'. This included, of course, a fine part-harmony rendition of 'Cherry Ripe', but also selected songs from the shows, serious pieces, folk songs and spirituals. All these were performed with great panache – despite the leading soprano (a vet in real life) having been called away to minister to a sick horse (another rural note).

Readings describing cherry blossom and harvest, and a dazzling keyboard solo by accompanist Kerne Clemence, completed the evening. On light-hearted note, a certain amount of unexpected 'audience participation' involved startled Orchard Group members, a churchwarden and a baton! As usual, Saints Peter and Paul provided a beautiful auditorium setting.

Park Farm cherries sold like hot cakes in the interval, washed down with a glass of wine or cherry cider. In all, it was a most enjoyable evening, and fitting prelude to the following day's festivity.

Bob Baxter

