

Park Farm Community Cherry Orchard Group, Lynsted.

Lynsted's Orchard Group holds Annual General Meeting.

The 5th AGM of the independent Park Farm Community Cherry Orchard Group was held on 27th February in the Community Room of the Church of St Peter and St Paul, in the presence of a good group of friends and supporters.

In his annual Report, chairman Bob Baxter explained that the year had started with the 4th AGM on 28th February. An amendment to the Constitution was agreed, creating the post of Events Coordinator. Lizzie Spilman was elected to the position, unopposed. Following the formal business, Dr Nikki Gammans of the Bumblebee Conservation Trust presented an illustrated talk on these fascinating creatures.

Our activities for 2013 again centred around the 'big three' events of Blossom Day, Cherry Day and the Halloween Children's Party. This year a start was made in transferring tasks that the chairman had assumed or accumulated, over the nine years of the community Orchard groups's existence, to other members of the Committee.

We were blessed with warm sun for our Blossom Day on 14th April. Fruit expert Gavin Maclellan took a group on an explanatory heritage tour of the bloom-laden orchard. Children enjoyed the art and craft activities laid on by Colin Barnard and Sioux Peto or tried their luck at skittles, wordcraft and roll-a-penny. This year poets Barry Fenteman and Mark Holihan regaled us with verse and Bob Carling sang to his guitar. The Lynsted and Teynham W I provided cakes, tea and delicacies. The bar did brisk business and music was provided by Derek and his Jazz Friends.

Cherry Day, after a reshuffle of dates to suit the slow-ripening fruit, was held on 14th July. Pick-your-own cherries was, as ever, a main attraction, and Kay Wreford was there with her Lynsted honey stall. A new music venture was the first out-door public appearance of the lively Doddington Ukulele Movement. This climaxed in a joint rendition of 'Candy' with resident band Frayed Knot. Delicious food was provided by the WI and the barbecue, and the bar sold out. It was warm enough for families to picnic under the spreading branches and enjoy the craft stalls and the community atmosphere. The children's games were housed in a new marquee, just one of several items of equipment purchased from a grant from the Swale Borough Council Members' Localism Fund. The support of ward councillors Richard Barnicott and Lloyd Bowen in securing this is gratefully acknowledged.

On Bank Holiday Monday we shared a marquee with The Lynsted with Kingsdown Society at the annual Village Fete. This was a useful chance to explain the Community Orchard project to Fete visitors. Pots of Lizzie's special home-made Park Farm cherry jam, sold out within minutes. We heard from cherry expert Pippa Palmar in early October that her bid for funding for an 'Orchards for Everyone' project had been successful – with she herself in position as project officer. This project will involve 13 community orchards across Kent, including us as one of the longer-established projects. We look forward in helping with this bold scheme to raise the banner for traditional orchards in our county.

The now traditional Halloween Children's Party took place on 25th October. The weather was kind, and a good crowd of children and parents enjoyed the usual mixture of spooky costumes, carved pumpkins, games, competitions and a roaring bonfire. Music was provided by 'Dropout' a newly formed local duo. Lynsted and Teynham WI provided hot soup, chocolate and toffee apples. Tasty sausages and burgers were sold from the barbecue, and there was the usual queue at the bar. The final event of the year was a Fungus Foray held between rain showers in Toll Wood.

Mushroom expert Martin Newcombe returned to identify and describe specimens of 41 different species that our party discovered growing in and around the live and decaying timber. Lisa Candy is thanked for allowing our crowd of over thirty into the ancient wood. We all returned to Hillside House, where Lizzie and Paul, aided and abetted by the WI, provided hot soup and home-made bread in their delightful garden.

In concluding his account of yet another busy year, Bob thanked, on behalf of the Committee, all those who have helped to keep this project going: to Pip and Sue Neaves for allowing us into their fantastic Orchard, and for their continued support, to Gavin for his tours, to the Lynsted and Teynham WI for their creative catering, to Julie, Kevin, Doug, Peter, Bridget, Jenny B, Jim, Graham, Jenny S, Clive and all who have acted as site crew; to everyone who has helped on stalls at events and to members of the Mid Kent Downs Countryside Partnership for their support and advice. He offered his personal thanks to his colleagues on the Committee for their support throughout the year, and wished the new committee the best of good fortune for 2014.

Finally, as this concluded his fifth year as chairman of the Committee, the Group's constitution required that he stood down as chairman. He offered his sincere thanks to all who had helped, advised and encouraged him over the last five years, and indeed before that when the Project was run as a committee of the parish council. It had given him great satisfaction to have enjoyed a leading role in turning what had been just a gleam in the eye, into a genuine and sustained community project. 'Long may it thrive' he declared.

Responding to these last comments, Vice-chairman Tom English rose to pay tribute to Bob's efforts in leading the Group in building the Orchard into a popular and robust community asset. He presented to Bob, as a memento of his time in the chair, a fine crystal glass inscribed with his name and the Orchard Project's cherry logo. Also, to ease the pain of stepping down, a supply of 'single malt' to go in it!

The Treasurer, in presenting his audited accounts, reported a bank balance of £3,362. Mr P Taylor FCA was thanked for his services as Internal Examiner, and re-appointed for the coming year. A new Executive Committee was elected, having the following composition:

Chairman: Tom English	Vice-chairman: Lizzie Spilman
Hon. Secretary: Anne Dawes	Hon. Treasurer: Brian Pond
Website manager: Paul Cross	Events coordinator: Lizzie Spilman
General members: Ann Haffenden, Clare Stewart, Marlene Disney, Frank Champion, Emlyn Morgan and Bob Baxter.	

For more information about the Group visit the website www.lynsted-orchard.org.uk or contact the chairman on 01795 522 417. Dates for 2014 are: Blossom Day, Saturday 19th April; Cherry Day, Saturday 19th July and Halloween Party, Saturday October 25th.

After the business meeting, Kay Wreford gave a most informative and entertaining talk on 'The Beekeeping Year'.

Bob Baxter.

