

### **Chairman's Report for 2011-12**

This has been another busy year for the Group. Derek and his Jazz Friends provided the music for Blossom Day on 24th April. The blossom was early and so provided a carpet rather than a perfect overhead display. But the sun was out, and families were able picnic under the trees, enjoying a drink from the beer tent and sampling the WI cakes. Easter Bonnet and children's competitions provided enjoyable distractions.

On 11th June members of the Group took part in another History Day run by the Lynsted with Kingsdown Society. This allowed local people to bring, for recording, pictures of earlier times in the parish - including the former thriving cherry industry

Cherry Day, on July 9th, went with a swing yet, again. There were new craft stalls, and a broader range of vintage vehicles to examine. The children from Lynsted and Norton School performed their now traditional maypole dance - this time accompanied by musicians from Oyster Morris, who were able to oblige with live accompaniment when there was a 'glitch' with the recorded music. WI cream teas, a well stocked drinks tent, hamburger stand and the now customary chance to 'pick your own' ripe fruit from the cherry laden trees all proved as popular as ever. Local group Frayed Knot provided live popular music favourites.

On August Bank Holiday Monday we again shared a gazebo with the Lynsted with Kingsdown Society at the annual Lynsted Fete. This allowed us to greet many friends and helpers as they circulated around this village event.

We held another one of our bat evenings on 5th August. There are several species of these flying mammals known to be present in the vicinity of Lynsted. Bat expert Shirley Thompson gave an illustrated and most informative talk to an overspill audience in the Community Room. Then she led an exploration of the church and churchyard before moving to the Orchard. Here the pipistrelle bats excelled themselves with repeated displays of aerobatics. They could be clearly seen against the darkening sky, as well as heard on the hand-held audio bat detection boxes.

On 20th August, and despite rain earlier in the day, we staged another 'Opera and Song' evening performed by Cameo Opera. The weather was perfect on the night, and Cameo entertained us with a marvellous programme of West End hits and opera favourites. The fine trees of the Orchard provided a fitting backdrop for the costumed songsters. Emlyn and Linda provided the Pimm's, and extra funds were generated through Clare's excellent Grand Draw.

The final event of the year was the Halloween Party, held on the afternoon of 29th October. Holding it on the Saturday rather than Sunday appeared to pay off, as more families than ever turned up to enjoy the games, competitions, bonfire, food and drink. Music from Frayed Knot and storytelling by June Wells were added attractions.

Our website, managed so effectively by Paul Cross, is a major point of contact for the Orchard. For instance, it resulted in the Orchard being chosen by BBC television as the location for a shoot involving celebrity chef Gary Rhodes as part of the Great British Food

Revival series on BBC 2. Some Orchard Group members were featured in the resulting programme, albeit in a small way! Also on the food theme, the Orchard was, later in July, the venue for a Food Trail Event organised by the parish- and borough councils.

In early December, the writer took the opportunity to join the Stockbury group in planting traditional cherry trees in the gaps in their community orchard. This was a useful first contact with a like-minded group.

On the finance side, you will see that the Group, under the skilful management of Treasurer Brian Pond, has accumulated a comfortable financial cushion against the vagaries of the future. We are grateful for the support of our ward member Cllr Ricky Barnicott in helping to win grants from Swale Borough Council's Community Project Fund for the purchase of equipment items. The aim, as ever, is to cover our running expenses and provide a community project at minimum cost to local people.

As for the future, the Group plans to run our now 'traditional' Big Three events during the year, and also organise a 'fungus foray' - an expert-led identification of the mushrooms and toadstools of the orchard habitat.

Of course, mounting all these community events involves much hard work by many volunteers. On your behalf I thank the numerous volunteers who help us put up (and take down) the gazebos and tents, who run stalls, organise children's games, lend equipment, put posters in windows, park cars, produce maypole dancers etc. Thanks are also due to the Mid Kent Downs Countryside Partnership team for their continued support.

My personal thanks go to the officers and members of the Committee for their hard work over the year. A special thanks must go to Anne Dawes for completing an excellent first year as Hon. Secretary.

And of course our grateful thanks go to Pip and Sue Neaves for allowing us to use their orchard and store our bulky kit on their farm.

In conclusion, I wish the new Committee the best of good fortune in the coming year.

Bob Baxter,  
Chairman.  
February 20th 2012.

*ChairRep.121*