

Park Farm Community Cherry Orchard Group, Lynsted

Chairman's Report for 2010-11.

This, the second year of the Orchard Group's existence in independent form, has been particularly active. The cherry blossom was at its glorious best for many a year for our annual family picnic on Blossom Day on 25th April. Live music from the Sittingbourne Wind Ensemble added to the traditional orchard atmosphere.

Our Cherry Weekend fell on 10th/11th July. On the Saturday evening, and for the second year running, we welcomed the Detling Singers to Lynsted Church. This group again entertained us with a blend of songs from the shows and more classical pieces, impressing us with their talent and professionalism. Sadly, and despite increased publicity, the audience was again very sparse, and raised the question of the future viability of this event. Cherry Day, held the next day, was blessed with warm, sunny weather. We had more entertainment than ever before, with the lively Oyster Morris, a wonderful display of maypole dancing by the children of Lynsted and Norton School and the usual fine performance of popular tunes from our own Lynsted-based band Frayed Knot. This, and cream teas provided by the Lynsted with Teynham WI, a well-stocked drinks tent, craft stalls, guided tours and the usual chance to 'pick-your-own' ripe cherries from a range of varieties, brought in a record 200-plus crowd. A cookery writer, who had dropped in after a visit to Brogdale, commented that our event 'was so clearly rooted in the community' - a satisfying confirmation of our aims!

Later in the year, on 7th August, picnickers again gathered in the grand old Orchard at Park Farm, this time in posh frocks and bow ties. The 'Prom in the Orchard' allowed local people to enjoy the mellow tones of the Medway Band, one of the finest brass bands in the South East, as they presented a wide-ranging programme of music. The efforts of committee member Emlyn Morgan, in the triple role of event organiser, master of ceremonies and super-waiter, and the natural amphitheatre provided by the stately trees ensured that this upmarket evening event was a brilliant success.

A note of concern was struck later in the year, however: was the increased ambition of our programme (and greater amount of site preparation) over-stretching our resources of volunteer help? Happily, a call for assistance brought forth a number of new helpers from the community, reassuring the 'old guard' that we had a larger pool of supporters on whom to call.

There was consequently little problem in staging the ever-popular Halloween Children's Party in the Orchard on 31st October. This year the weather was kind, and a large crowd of children and parents enjoyed the games, competitions, stories, hot food, drink and live music (Frayed Knot again!) - all in the suitably spooky mist of an autumn fruit orchard.

There was, however, something sadly missing. The late David Bage, MBE, was perhaps the Community Orchard's most constant supporter. He came to all of our events. My own lasting memory of David is of his reclining under the fruit-laden trees at Cherry Day, glass in hand, dozing contentedly in the dappled shade.

There were several occasions when the Orchard Group took part in other organisations' events. We had a presence at Lynsted and Norton School's Summer Fete, shared a marquee with the Lynsted with Kingsdown Society at the Lynsted Village Fete on August Late Bank Holiday Monday. We were glad to be offered a 'stall' at the Lynsted with

Kingsdown Society's two highly popular Local History Mornings. This allowed us to put more 'names to faces' in our own heritage photograph collection. The results can be seen on our website, www.lynsted-orchard.org.uk, which, under the skilled management of Paul Cross, is a source of much other information about the Orchard project.

On the history theme, two more personal experience interviews were recorded on the website: Jeff Clayton, one-time fruit farm manager at Brogdale, and Peter Butt, owner of Osiers Farm, Teynham, where the first cherry orchards in England were laid out in Tudor times. Both interviews can be heard on the website.

As for publicity for the Orchard, Julie Barrett appeared on BBC Breakfast television, no less, and I was interviewed for an article in Country Kitchen magazine. We were also invited to give an illustrated story of Orchard Project to a Lynsted with Kingsdown Society public meeting. Numerous articles about our events, many of them illustrated, appeared in the local newspapers.

Orchard wildlife aspects were not forgotten: on 22nd September, Mike Phillips of the Mid Kent Downs Countryside Partnership led a study day in the Orchard for the benefit of the children of Lynsted and Norton School. Brian Pond and I have been engaged in a survey of the status of orchards in the Greenstreet area on behalf of the People's Trust for Endangered Species.

During the year we acquired a set of chairs, tables, a robust marquee, etc. - and safety mirrors for the Orchard approach. These items were purchased with funding from Swale Borough Council's Local Engagement Forum Community Project Grants. We are grateful to our ward members, Cllrs. R Barnicott and T Fentiman, for their support in this. As a result we were able to increase our inventory of necessary equipment without depleting our resources. In fact we finished the year with a slight profit.

I would like to end by thanking, on behalf of the Committee, Mike Phillips and the Mid Kent unit for their continued support, Gavin Maclennan for leading the guided tours, all the numerous helpers who have pitched in in various ways at various times, and to Orchard owners Pip and Sue Neaves for another year of enthusiastic encouragement and support. My personal thanks go to the officers and members of the executive committee for their unstinting efforts in making this another very successful year. In particular I take this opportunity to pay tribute and offer thanks to Julie Barrett, who is now stepping down. Julie was a founder-member of the Orchard Project back in 2004, and over the ensuing years, has not only served us as a most efficient Honorary Secretary, but has been the organising force behind almost all of our events. I am sure all will join me in wishing her, and Kevin, the best of luck in the future.

In concluding, may I wish the new committee the very best of good fortune in the coming Orchard year?

Bob Baxter,
Chairman,
January 27th 2011.

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