

Wassailing in Harrold-Odell Country Park



On a dark, cold but clear night on 'Old Twelvy Night' (January 17th), a group of Friends assembled in the park for a special experience - **Wassailing**. This is a very ancient custom that is rarely done today. The word 'Wassailing' comes from the Anglo-Saxon phrase ' waes Gael ' meaning ' good health '. Visiting or orchard wassail refers to the ancient custom of visiting orchards, reciting and singing to the trees to promote a good harvest for the coming year.

Park Ranger Nicky Monsey had suggested the idea at a Friends' Committee meeting and with the help of Janet Munro they organised a good event. It started at the overspill car park with the drawing of lots to find the 'wassail king and queen' who were to be responsible for a special ceremony around a pre-selected apple tree.

We then walked along the path lit with tea candles in jam jars to meet around the tree. As we were walking along we were banging drums and pots and pans and generally making a terrible racket, to awaken the apple trees and to scare away evil spirits to ensure a good harvest of fruit in the autumn. Janet had to warn a party of anglers in case they called the police!



Upon reaching the selected tree, the king and queen woke it up by feeding it with cider we all chanted our good wishes for a productive season using 'The Apple Chant'

Here's to thee, old apple tree
Whence thou may'st bud, and whence they may'st blow
And whence thou may'st bear enow.
Hats full! Caps full!
Bushel - bushel - sacks full
And my pockets full too huzza!

We then hung pieces of toast soaked in apple juice on the tree as a gift to the tree spirits (and to show the fruits created the previous year). No doubt the birds and squirrels had a feast the next day! Having done this we were all treated to warm cider or apple juice, sausage rolls, apple and cider cake and marshmallows around a table lit with tea candles.

Fed and watered we attempted to sing the special HOCP Wassailing Carol that David Taylor had written based on the traditional Wassailing Carol. With a bit more practice we will be really good at it next year!

A big thank you goes to Nicky for suggesting the experience and for the all Park Rangers for setting up this event. An inspiring evening and we are already looking forward to waking up the apple trees next year.

**Article by Jette Randall
Photos by Carole Brown**