

2013 Reports

Wassailing - Saturday 12th January



On a crisp, clear, but otherwise fine day, we gathered at the 'Lyth Valley Hotel' (yes, in the Lyth valley), to wish one another a 'Happy New Year' and to hear news of various Christmas and Hogmanay revelries, within the 'side'.

Some of us had drinks, sandwiches and/or soup (which was excellent), to fortify ourselves for the 'Wassailing Ceremony' and the following events of the day.

This year was our 5th 'Wassailing Day'. The day and the 'Wassailing Ceremony' at the damson orchard of 'The Barn', The Row, was dedicated to the memory of Mr John Walker (the owner of our orchard), who had sadly died of cancer in 2012.

John and his wife Pat have supported and encouraged us in our efforts to revive and re-establish 'wassailing' in the Lyth valley, since we first started. We decided that our collection for the day would be donated to the Cancer charities, in recognition of our thanks to the family and as a mark of respect.

Our Master of Ceremonies for the afternoon was Simon Gillow, more formally known by the title of the 'Lord of Misrule', a term dating back many centuries, to the person overseeing the organising of such festivities.

He did us proud, welcoming, and thanking the Walker family, our guests, family and friends, before guiding and leading us through the intricacies of the 'Wassailing Ceremony' (ably assisted by his marvellous assistant, Bonnie).

We sang wassailing songs and Simon spoke of the significance and importance of the 'Wren' in earlier times, before finally, we made much noise and commotion to awaken and invoke the dormant spirits of the orchard!

Toast soaked in our 'wassail cup' (filled with warm Damson Beer), was placed within the boughs of our damson tree, as a gift to the spirits and to show the fruits created the previous year. We then drank communally from our 'three-handled' wassail cup and shared Judy Malkin's wonderful damson cake, whilst making wishes for a prosperous New Year and a successful crop of damsons in the coming year.

We Morris danced and sang a final wassail song, down in the yard, before adjourning to the 'Hare and Hounds', Bowland Bridge for more merriment!

After quenching our thirst... we danced 'turn-and-turn-about' with our guests, the excellent Appalachian dancers, 'Legs Levens' and their incomparable musicians, 'The Limestone Cowboys', outside the pub.

This was then followed by an outdoor performance of Crook Morris' 'Mummers Play'. Father Christmas, St George, the Turkish Knight and the 'good Doctor' all made their customary appearance, along with topical jokes and ribald comments from the audience.

As the light faded, we moved inside, chatting, and playing board games and cards – the start of a very convivial evening.

The 'Hare and Hounds', once again, came up trumps, with their food. It was hot, beautifully cooked and, believe me, no one went hungry. In fact, there were those amongst us, who struggled to find sufficient lift and energy in the subsequent dancing, such was the generosity of their portions!

As the evening progressed, the rapper dancers within Crook performed both of their rapper dances and Legs Levens and Crook took it in turns to dance. The Mummers repeated their Mumming Play and the singers and musicians entertained us with wonderful songs, tunes, and a fine 'session'.

Celebrations carried on late into the night!! A sizeable group of us 'camped' overnight in our campervans, on the car park of the 'Hare and Hounds'. There was much agreement that it had been a very fine day indeed, and a superb evening!

Here's hoping that Saturday 11th January 2014 will be enjoyable and as much fun!

Simon Weaver