

APPLE WASSAIL

Sunday 15th January

2pm prompt.

One of the benefits of being a member of the WWA is the opportunity to join in at the various private events that are held throughout the year. The annual Apple Wassail is now firmly fixed in the Association calendar. If you have never experienced a traditional Apple Wassail before, now is your chance! We sing songs to the trees, pour cider onto their roots, hang toast in their branches and make lots of noise (party poppers and dustbin lids feature heavily!) to scare away any bad spirits that might be in the Orchard. This is to help ensure a good crop of apples in the coming year. This is followed with a feast of apple-based snacks, and hot ginger and apple juice (£1 a cup). There is no entrance charge but we do ask people to make a generous donation in exchange for the food and entertainment! There are still some jars of jam, made from fruit from our Orchard that will be available to purchase on the day.



This event is held partly to raise funds for the Association but mainly to have some mid-winter fun. The lovely **Wicket Brood Morris** will start proceedings promptly at 2pm with one of their dances. Master of ceremonies, **Sandy Glover**, will then conduct the Wassail ceremony in the Orchard. This is followed by refreshments and more dance displays in the Allotment.

There will also be a raffle with some great prizes, so don't forget to buy a ticket!

We hope you find it entertaining and enjoyable.....

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

- 2.00pm** Dance display by the Wicket Brood
- 2.30pm** Wassail ceremony
- 3.00pm** Refreshments and dances
- 4pm** Raffle draw



We put up an awning for our visitors, in case of rain, but we still carry on regardless, whatever the weather!

This event is put on by our regular volunteers but if any members would like to help out, either by baking an apple-based snack or helping on the day, just contact the Editor who would be thrilled to hear from you.



A MESSAGE FROM THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

A Happy New Year to all our members and a heartfelt 'Thank you' for your support and encouragement which enables the Association to continue and thrive. Some of you may know this is a special year for us as it marks the 20th anniversary (in September) of the day on which that funny man with the beard declared the site open. No, not me, the other one – Dr. David Bellamy! I think I should have said humorous, not funny!

We have many projects planned for this year, apart from the anniversary celebrations (to be published in later newsletters). These include the planting of another 60 metres of hedging, new fencing and a new security gate for the developing 'social and educational' area and the laying of an overgrown hedge alongside the river Ver to create a thick, dense hedge for wildlife (and privacy from the public footpath on the opposite side of the river). Extensive tree works are going to be carried out by an outside contractor. Three huge conifers need felling and two 'crack' willows are in danger of toppling over and these are to be pollarded. This is a traditional method of prolonging the life of these trees.



These operations are way beyond what our volunteers can cope with, which is why we must employ a professional arborist. The work is planned for the end of January but we have to wait for our application for tree work to be cleared by St. Albans Council Planning Department as the Reserve is within the Conservation Area.

The WWA has been lucky to be offered up to £1000 towards this work through Alan Beechey of the Chiltern Chalk Streams Project. Led by the Chilterns Conservation Board, the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project is a partnership of statutory agencies, local authorities and voluntary bodies committed to conserving the chalk stream environment. The River Ver is one of these precious chalk streams (but that is the subject for a separate article).

We need to 'match fund' this amount. We have the funds to do this but it will leave the coffers somewhat depleted.

This is why our membership subscriptions are so important. Every little helps! So please continue to support us (a Membership form is included). The subscription* is remaining at £10 per household (£5 for concessions) for the time being, but, of course, we will happily accept extra donations if your pockets are deep enough.

Unfortunately, the WWA were unsuccessful in the bid for funding from both the NatWest Community Force Award and the St. Albans Community Fund. We are hopefully going to receive another £250 from the 'Fund for the Future' which was awarded to us last year. This is an award paid for five years.

Any members who joined from September 2011 onwards will automatically have their membership carried through to January 2013. You will still receive a membership renewal form but this is just for you to tick how you would like to receive your newsletter, and also to sign the annual Gift Aid declaration if applicable.

*At the time of writing this is under discussion but a decision has not yet been made.

Howard
Membership Secretary

WORK PARTY NEWS

OCTOBER: A couple of old elder trees were cut down as they were falling into the river. The front half of the 'Tussock Meadow' was cut and raked. This is to lower the fertility of the soil. The back half was left as cover for insects and invertebrates. Next year the process will be reversed.

NOVEMBER: A group of volunteers donned waders and cleared years of overgrown vegetation that was clogging the river. They carefully cut back some of the smaller overhanging branches at the same time. Others cleared all the nettles and brambles from the bank adjacent to the Orchard area. Then a channel was cleared through the boggy area by removing the invasive watercress to create an interesting view. The brambles and nettles were also removed from the Shady Place.



The quince jelly was a hit and has sold out.

Derryn and helpers cleared the entrance area of the remaining nettles and brambles. Derryn also did a wonderful job of marketing our jams and jellies that were on display. Nobody left the Reserve without buying something! She took over £200 in sales! A new career awaits her!

NEW YEAR'S DAY: People actually turned up! And worked hard! It was great to welcome two new volunteers who greatly improved the view from the bird hide by cutting back some rather overgrown brambles. Two huge piles of tree 'brash' were carefully moved to the bonfire site (after checking thoroughly for hedgehogs or other hibernating creatures)

and burnt. This was urgently needed to be done to make space for the Wassail.

A new large compost area has been made just inside the Pyghtle. This is a far more practical location than the current heap and will save our volunteers a lot of effort and distance travelled.

The Butterfly Meadow was harvested – this is just a posh word for cutting down the vegetation!

And then we had lots of lovely cake, mince pies and Derryn's home-made shortbread.

OTHER WORK.....

Chairman Steve is in the process of building a donation box/receptacle just inside the main gate. We have many occasional visitors who would like to make a donation but don't have an easy way of doing so. This will help to bring in extra funds. It's only taken 20 years to think about doing this.



I'm sure the boreholes are here somewhere!

Joe kindly dropped off a lorry load of woodchips at the entrance drive (it was too muddy to take the van down the steep drive) and Howard and Mandy, under the watchful eye of the Editor (someone has to take the photos) ferried them around the Reserve to top up all the paths. Nice work, guys!



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Work party dates 2012

Sunday 29th January 10am to 1pm

Mark out new hedge line and make a start on digging and turning over ground ready for planting in March.

Sunday 26th February 10am to 1pm

Continue preparing ground for new hedge. Landscape fabric to be laid on hedge line. Finish 'laying' the first section of hedge in the Pyghtle.

Sunday 25th March All day event

Hopefully, Donato Cinicolo will be coming to advise/help to lay the old hedge that is growing alongside the river in the old allotment.

Plant new hedge line on the allotment and coppice trees on allotment boundary.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Sunday 11th March.....11am to 1pm

Sub-aqua ClubCottonmill Lane

A full report will appear in the March newsletter.

Officers

SteveChairman

JanetSecretary

Mandy.....Treasurer

HowardReserve Manager and
Membership Secretary

Members

SheilaNewsletter Editor

PatMember

DerrynMember

PennySocial Secretary

SamWebmaster

MargaretManagement Plan Advisor

JackMember

WESTMINSTER VISIT



On Thursday 8 December WWA Chairman Steve and management committee member Penny headed into London for a trip to the Palace of Westminster. St Albans MP Anne Main hosts an annual Christmas reception for volunteers from across the area and this was the first time that the WWA had been invited to attend. In total there were 80 volunteers representing organisations ranging from a local residents association, to the Hertfordshire branch of Hearing Dogs for Deaf People and the local branch of MENCAP. It was an excellent opportunity to meet other local charity volunteers, discuss common issues like funding and also to tell them all about the Nature Reserve. Between us we met people who knew the site well and others who had never even realised that there was a Nature Reserve in the city.

Anne Main thanked all the volunteers present for the work that they do in St Albans and we were also all able to take a guided tour which took in both the House of Lords Chamber and the main Commons Chamber. It was fantastic to be taken around the places that are so familiar from our television screens, but that most of us don't get to visit. We were extremely grateful for the opportunity to represent the WWA at the event and hope that there is another opportunity for the WWA to be represented next year.

Penny

BIRD HIDE CODE

The code to enter the bird hide is xxxxx