

## Wassailing the New Community Orchard at Wotton's Community PARC, 19 Jan 2020

For the very first time, on a crisp clear winter's day, around 70 residents from Wotton and surrounding areas wassailed the newly planted orchard at Wotton's Community PARC.



*Wassailing in the orchard (Picture by Tony Evans)*

Last year the Community Orchard Group was created to buy, plant and nurture 12 apple trees and 3 pear trees at the Community PARC. The intention for the orchard is to provide an opportunity for people to connect with the land and nature through fruit trees. We have various activities planned to mark each season and in the winter it's time for the wassail.

The wassailing, or blessing of the fruit trees, involves drinking and singing to the health of the trees. The singing was led by Wotton's Community Choir and traditional dance was performed by the Rag Morris Dancers. Homemade apple cake was brought for sharing and mulled cider was generously provided by the Real Cider Co, a truly local and delicious, craft cider.



*Sharing homemade apple cake and warm mulled cider. (pictures by Matthew Adams)*

Waes-Hael is an Anglo-Saxon word which means 'be in good health'. Traditionally held on the 'old twelvey' (17<sup>th</sup> January), the wassail marks the end of winter as the length of each day begins to increase and plants and animals begin to stir. The Green Man, who leads the ceremony, symbolises the never-ending fertility cycle of nature and ecological awareness.

Finally, according to tradition bread is toasted, dunked in cider and then hung onto the branches to encourage Blue Tits, custodians of the orchard. This is interesting because bugs can damage the

leaves making them 'furl' into a tube-like shape preventing them from photosynthesising. Blue Tit's, with their special shaped beaks, are excellent at unfurling those leaves to find and eat those grubs.



*The Rag Morris Dancers from Bristol University (picture by Matthew Adams)*



*The Green Man and the Apple Queen lead the ceremony to the designated Wassail Tree (pictures by Tony Evans, left and Iris Adams, right)*



*Making toast, dunking in cider and hanging on the trees. (Pictures by Matthew Adams)*

Everyone is welcome to come along to events and join in with being involved with the orchard. If you would like your name added to the group please email [mattcadams@outlook.com](mailto:mattcadams@outlook.com)