Issue No. 30 January 2024

your Orchard

A periodical newsletter for all those interested in the work of the Bridport Community Orchard



CHAIR'S REPORT

I am delighted to report that it has been another splendidly productive year in the Community Orchard. We didn't think we'd top the bumper crop of 2022 but, despite the vagaries of the weather, the trees fruited their socks off! A few trees decided to have a year off and produced little or no fruit but the rest of them made up for it and I am reliably informed by Paul, our expert statistician, that it was the best we have achieved for bottled juice. We also froze about 30 litres which was used for the delicious mulled juice enjoyed at Wassail 2024.

In 2023, apart from Wassail in January, we also held another successful Mayfest, an afternoon event in the Community Allotments to celebrate National Allotment Week and a series of storytelling evenings in the orchard which attracted a small, select group of creative speakers.

We are, as always, grateful to Bridport Town Council who kindly allocated funds by way of grant monies that enabled us to purchase some replacement tools and other essentials to keep the orchard in tip top condition. They have also provided three new seats and benches for ones that had fallen apart after 10-12 years of use. Many thanks to Daryl, Will and the groundsman team who always respond quickly and efficiently to our requests.

It is hugely gratifying when people enjoying the orchard come and thank us for keeping it looking so good all year – we are always mindful that, as well as being a haven for wildlife, the orchard is also a public amenity space. Thanks must go to all our lovely volunteers who turn out for the monthly work sessions and, in the autumn, to the apple juicing events. It wouldn't look half as good without you!! If any readers feel inspired to come and join in, please contact us via our brand new website or just turn up to one of the sessions (dates on the website too).

Finally, I would like to officially welcome Steve Meek to the committee. Steve has kindly taken on responsibility for the Community Allotments and I wish him all the best with his ideas for their future development.

As many of you may know, I am now stepping down from the Orchard committee after several years of thoroughly enjoyable work. I feel privileged to have been part of such a successful and vital town amenity – the Community Orchard really represents the spirit of Bridport and long may it continue.

Jenn Baker, BCOG Chair

Bridport Community Orchard Group *contacts:*

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Chair

Steve Todd
Treasurer

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Secretary

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EVENTS REPORT

We started the year with a rousing Wassail - the traditional annual blessing of the trees, to give thanks for the previous year's apple crop, and ask for an equally abundant harvest in the coming year. The event was opened by the singing of traditional Wassail hymns led and accompanied by Wyld Morris. Mulled apple juice from the orchard pressing the previous summer, or cider from local producer Dorset Nectar helped loosen the vocal chords.



Storyteller Martin Maudsley entertained us with a tale of friendship and community spirit, and led the blessing of the orchard, where pieces of bread dipped in apple juice or cider are hung from the branches of the trees. It must have worked, because the summer saw our biggest crop of apples yet.



Our Mayfest celebration took place at the end of April. We heralded the coming of spring with time-honoured customs including Maypole dancing, garland making and storytelling. David Squirrell kicked off the event with music and a ceilidh, followed by singing, mask making, seed bombs, a treasure hunt, and a rendering of the defeat of winter ably performed by the Bridport Mummers led by Martin Maudsley, all washed down with tea, cake and cider a-plenty.

Lu Orza





TREASURER'S REPORT

I am happy to be able to repeat the update from previous years that the Bridport Community Orchard continues to be financial viable.

The table below gives the comparative position in our Current and Deposit accounts at the end of 2022 and 2023. Given the increasing difficulty in accessing banking services, we have decided to hold a cash float of £50.00

	End 2022	End 2023
Current Account	960.48	1,397.47
Deposit Account	1,104.95	1,117.82
Cash Float		50.00
Total Funds Available	**2065.43**	**2547.29**

The net result is an increase of £481.86 in the funds available.

Our income comes from a number of sources; events such as Wassail and Mayfest, the sale of our fresh and pasteurised apple juice, grants and donations.

We were successful in a funding bids to the car boot fund for tools and equipment and Bridport Town council for the erection of a weather shelter in the allotment area.

Steve Todd

ALLOTMENT REPORT

When I first joined the group in the summer, I was immediately impressed by how the small band of growers were using almost all available ground, with a wide range of healthy looking crops. What could I add, I thought to myself! At least my arrival would allow Jenn to enjoy her retirement, even if there wasn't much needed from me!

Success stories this year were the Borlotti beans, which many of us ate fresh for the first time, the winter squashes - some of which we are yet to share out - and the amazing brassica bed that Lin masterminded on the left by the main gate. We have had regular harvests of salad leaves, beetroot, climbing beans, leeks, chard and carrots, with few pest problems. We even had some melons!

The time is right for renewal and new members though, and we are very grateful to Daryl's team at the town council for building new planters/raised beds. We were also successful in applying for a grant to cover the cost of building a shelter, something sorely lacking. In addition to making our sessions there more weather proof, it will allow us to schedule weekly 'how to grow food' sessions for beginners.

We have had 4 new people join this autumn and hope to attract more: we have started a Facebook page and will soon have an Instagram account so please go online and follow us!

Steve Meek



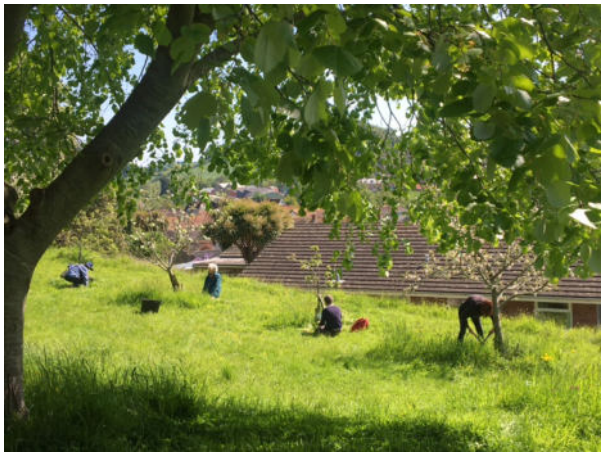



JUBILEE GREEN REPORT

Jubilee Green is a sloping site on the SE side of Allington Hill and comprises a small copse, just seven apple trees, a medlar and a cherry. There is also a grassy bank with wild flowers, which is alive with butterflies and other insects on a sunny summer's day. We generally have four work parties a year, the first in January to perform winter pruning, the last in the autumn to pick the fruit, scythe the bank and clear. Since the grass is cut and removed by Bridport Council, the other work parties are largely to trim around the fruit trees and thin the crop in the summer.

This year there was a much improved crop, thanks to the lack of drought and resulting healthy growth. The apples are taken to St Mary's Field for juicing. There were generally fewer insects around thanks to the poor mid-summer weather - the exception being Gatekeepers which had a good year. Some of the trees, (especially the Warrior and Rosemary Russet) are now quite large making it difficult to harvest the full crop.

Robin Boston




PLASTIC FREE BRIDPORT Printed by Footeprints of Bridport on RECYCLED paper

WILDLIFE REPORT

Following the heatwave during the summer of 2022, and a relatively mild start to 2023, there have been a few wildlife changes to the orchard during 2023!

An elder tree in the centre of the orchard, that had been a centrepiece for many years, had been showing signs of coming towards the end of its life, so it was decided to remove it. They are not a particularly long lived shrub, though this one was probably 40 years old. It was replaced by a Kentish Cobnut tree, which was planted in early March (about eight feet from where the elder had been). This quickly got established, and has already produced some new branches. It should grow quite vigorously in 2024, and within seven years could be as much as fifteen feet tall, and producing delicious cobnuts!

On the spot where the elder had been growing, the soil was raked to a fine tilth, and some wildflower seeds were sown. These were a mix of annual meadow flowers, and included species such as corn marigold, poppy, mayweed and cornflower. By July these had grown and burst into a riot of colour, and this wonderful floral display continued right up to mid September!

To add even more diversity to the range of wildlife trees and shrubs in the orchard, two hops were planted in the hedges. These are cultivated varieties, one is called Prima Donna, which is a dwarf variety, and is in the hedge behind the bee hives. The other is Fuggles, a more famous variety which is widely used in beer making, which has more vigorous growth, and was planted in the southern hedge.

We had a further successful round of scything of the meadow area, a process that we began in early July, and finally completed in early September. Scything is very effective at helping to scatter the seeds of wild flowers, and this is particularly important for yellow rattle, a plant that is semi-parasitic on grass. This year this flower was more prolific, which indicates that the scything in 2022 had done its job of helping to scatter the seeds!



The bees have had a very successful year, with at least five swarms early in the summer! Another hive was added in the Spring, by a group called Dorset Bee.

They say: “We are a group of natural beekeepers that recognise the privilege we possess in our daily contact with honeybees. Our passion is to share this privilege with people of all ages and our desire is to develop access for everyone to the joy, tranquillity, and the fascinatingly complex behaviours of honeybees. They are calming and offer fabulous wellbeing benefits. Social prescribing is a way for health professionals, including link workers based at GP surgeries, to connect people to community activities for practical, social and emotional support. Green social prescribing specifically supports people to connect with nature-based activities”.

Paul Arthur

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