

Chairperson's Report 2016

Thorney Lakes

Around the Fair

Stalls, Catering and Green Crafts

This year we had a record breaking 80 stalls covering a full range of crafts, plants, tools, books, clothes and campaign information. Each year the interest in booking a stall seems to increase but the space to fit everyone in does not. The Fair works hard to ensure all stalls meet our ethical trading policy and importantly to keep stalls local to showcase the best of Somerset and surrounding counties. There is always great anticipation as the stalls arrive early on Sunday morning and very quickly the site fills up creating a melting pot of ideas and inspiring stalls to wander around. This year we had a real diverse range of excellent caterers and very positive feedback about the quality and friendliness of the stallholders. A big thank you goes out to the stall holders who all stayed with us through the 'rainy patch' and add such a lot to making the Fair such a wonderful, interesting and friendly event.

In the Green Crafts area, 25 displays this year included stone masons, thatchers, timber framers, sustainable timber suppliers, blacksmiths, coppersmiths, charcoal makers, willow workers, greenwood workers, leather workers, spinners, yurt makers, quality bric-a-brac, kitchenalia and agricultural salvage stalls.

Music and the Marquee

It was "all change" in the Music Tent this year as Fanny Hatstand stepped in at short notice, our link with the wonderful team at Yeovil College having to be pulled due to sickness. Sarah, founder of Fanny Hatstand, introduced a quality line up of musicians throughout the day, providing great entertainment for all, all powered by the sun.

The lunchtime debate was a stonker! Entitled *Flooding – what is the Future?* it brought together two hardened antagonists to argue their corners: environmental journalist extraordinaire, George Monbiot, and our local cider king, Julian Temperley, together with our local Green MEP, Molly Scott Cato. What a panel! With perfect timing, the heavens opened on the dot of 1pm which helped fill the tent to overflowing – over 250 people counted! With our site being in the epicentre of the 2014 floods, we first heard a personal account of living through it from Richard England's daughter, Jen. Then Julian made the case for dredging which had ceased in 1995, causing the rivers to be 42% blocked – modelling revealed flooding would have been normal if they hadn't been. George responded that dredging just sped the water to the next (often urban) pinch point. Rather, the key was to slow the flow both in the uplands, where most rain falls, and in the upper reaches. Molly emphasised that the problem is only going to get worse with climate change raising sea levels and increasing rain intensity, and with government policies favouring intensive farming over soil quality. It got quite heated at times, but in the end there was some meeting in the middle, that limited dredging has its place in the right place, and that slowing the flow and promoting more sustainable agriculture were important.

Our acoustic stage, open to the elements and powered by our Green Energy Trailer, provided an excellent focal point down by the Green Crafts area, complete with our second bar. It was again managed by Ian & Martine of Camelot Acoustics who delivered a fine variety of excellent and usually more mellow music all day long which was praised by attendees and stall holders alike.

Children's Area

New this year in the Green Kidz area were the 'Storylight' Yurt with Wonderous Tales, puppets and bubbles; Wooden Circus from Polly and team, leading woodwork skills making games of hoops, skittles and playing other circus games using natural materials; and a children's singing workshop with Joy Leingaard and stories from Paul McBeth. Amongst the colourful flowers donated by a local nursery, we welcomed back Professor Paradox with his hilarious clowning and Steve Apelt with his Magic Bike and his graffiti chalkboards which were well covered by the end of the day. The Butterfly Conservation Trust offered butterfly-friendly plant potting, and there was also a willow workshop and a soft stone carving tent, wool crafts, decorating flags with charcoal and of course face painting of fairies and green sprites.

The 'Hay for Play' area is a particular and well loved feature – so many people comment on it – enhanced with the beautiful 'Hay Lady', created out of willow by Serena de la Hey and decorated with hay and flowers with the help of the public. The area descends, or evolves, over the day into a series of dens and 'burrows' in the hay.

Around the site we were entertained by the Avalon Morris dancers, Fuse Performance with Misguided Tours, colourful Green Fairy stiltwalkers and Alice and the White Rabbit walkabouts.

Site Info

The site info point hosted our instant Tombola. The fab prizes included a selection of topical books eg from George Monbiot, a scythe donated from the Scythe Shop, and places on local environmentally friendly courses such as no dig gardening, willow basketry, natural dyes and peg loom weaving, wild foraging.

We collected a selection of lost items but no lost children and recorded one accident of a stallholder's dog biting someone.

Green Info Café

The Green Info Cafe was as busy as ever this year, especially popular providing shelter during the rain! The locally baked nettle cake with dandelion jelly was definitely a firm favourite! The dedicated team provided hot water throughout the storms on our rocket stoves and wood powered urn. Thanks to them and all our cafe volunteers and supporters who provided very popular information boards on seed saving and natural bee keeping.

The Workshop Yurt next door held six informative talks this year with at least 30 people attending most. Workshops ranged from sewing with recycled materials, sustainable eating, growing and climate change.

11th West Country Scythe Championship

The 11th West Country Scythe Championship and associated activities all went fine. There was a brand new champion, Kevin Austin, after a very close competition. The grass was the right amount and the two courses, a three day Masterclass and a one day beginners course, were quite well attended and more or less broke even. We introduced a new PA system which was a great improvement but some problems still need ironing out.

Land Workers Alliance

Last but not least, the biggest innovation this year was provided by the Land Workers Alliance who held a Land Skills Day on the Saturday. This was a closed event and some 80 of their members benefitted from workshops ranging from micro-dairying and working with horses to seed saving and forest gardening. Many camped on-site and stayed over for the Fair, so this brought a whole new atmosphere to the site and gave the Saturday evening (with entertainment in the Music Tent from the returning Gauloise Bros) even more of a festival feel – enjoyed by all, except perhaps those still setting up around the revellers!