

Chairperson's Report 2024

Thorney Lakes

The weather was a bit all over the place as we approached Fair Day, but luckily it all just about cleared up for the weekend and was really pretty good, considering it had been, and then continued to be, a strange weather year.

Ticket sales for the Fair were up overall! And both the ticketing site (with properly integrated Saturday courses) and the gate worked well, with generally smooth flowing traffic. Online sales were 2800 adult day tickets (250 more than last year), 417 cycle tickets (30 more), 65 bus (50 less), 611 children (100 less), on the day and local sales 390, £3,669 carbon tax miles (£1000 less). Total 4300.

Transport

We increased **bus routes** from 3 routes to 4 this year to bring in the Bridport direction, and reduced the runs from 2 return trips to one on each route, as the second runs in 2023 were poorly supported. The somewhat lower numbers this year means we need to increase them – Richard and Anita will look at options for promotion...

Sadly, we had to cancel the wonderful Duchess of Cockemoor/Steel Suffolks boat and horse combo from Langport as Steel Suffolks were a horse down. We also send our best wishes to Ivan who had a serious injury back in the summer, but hopes to be up and running again next year.



Set up and Volunteers

Set up and take down was again led by AI with a FAB team especially from Tinkers Bubble, including the wonderful horses that came with Steph and Chris .. and their bantams! Meg sustained everyone with her open-fire cooking of locally procured venison and other delights. And the joining together of site and scythe crews worked well again – Lilly was especially pleased having the scythe crew help with preparation and washing up.



On the day itself, ably coordinated by Sian, we had just enough **volunteers** but could definitely have used more. And none on Monday to help with glass washing so a lot were taken home to wash by the committee. Otherwise, there were no incidents or dramas on site. Special thanks to our stewards, glasswashers, bar and bike MOT volunteers, and indeed to all other volunteers, on set up and take down, the Rainbow Scouts carpark marshals, in the Green Info Café and Green Kidz – so many who come back every year saying ‘it’s their favourite event of the year!’

Layout and stalls

It seems like the revised **site layout** really came of age this year, with all the recent additions (Community Tent, Cider Tent, Craft Bar tent) becoming well established, plus this year resizing the scything area, and also establishing the Green Craft pop-up music yurt. There was both plenty of action and good circulation everywhere. And all stalls and catering were very happy with the day.



Saturday Courses and Green Craft Area

On the Saturday, we had 14 **courses** with improved participant numbers compared to last year. Highlights included solar powered blacksmithing, sewing a pair of hemp drawstring trousers, bamboo Native American flute making, weaving a willow garden trug and eco poetry. And special thanks to Richard Toogood for painting the site maps which really helped participants find their workshop locations – and everything else on Sunday too!



We had 28 Green Craft Stalls this year, including biochar making, earth pigment paints, green ash hay rake making, tin smelting, and abundant quality bric a brac and recycled clothes. A special highlight was Sam Lee performing in Jya's We Are Wild music yurt and finishing with everyone all singing a song in rounds as they processed out of the yurt.

Bars

Our **three bars** all ran smoothly and queuing was not an issue. Over 3500 pints of beer and 2000 pints of cider were drunk. Many thanks to Geof, Bert, Tim and Callum for all their hard work in preparing and staffing them. The three bars combined had an income of £17,350, netting the Fair a vital £5550.

Green Info Cafe

The **Green Info Cafe** had another successful year, staffed by a wonderful band of volunteers working together and making it memorable for all. The organic and locally sourced produce ensured the cakes were both delicious and great value. Fresh coffee and tea was enjoyed by hundreds of satisfied customers.

Scything

The **Scything** event programme drew lots of positive comments, with punters enjoying both the slo-mows and the speedsters in the finals! Our champion this year was Kevin Austin from Cornwall who reclaimed his crown, with local Plotgate resident Dan Brittan finishing 2nd, and up and coming Tom Waters, also of Cornwall, a close 3rd. And it was a good year for the old guard, as Andi Rickard claimed the Women's Cup (as usual!), Richard Brown took the Vets Cup, and Terry Standen reclaimed his English Scythe Cup. The real surprise was newcomer Richard Stump with a standout performance taking the Quality Cup.

In the scything courses over the previous days, it was good to see some of last year's beginners returning as improvers! However, despite more practice grass there still wasn't enough, so that needs looking at again. There were also some excellent scything workshops on Saturday which now need incorporating into our online booking system.



Community Tent

In the East Field, the **Community Tent** embraced community arts, showcasing entries from an 'open call' exhibition titled Green, the walls of the marquee showed off some really beautiful creations from the local community. The Tent hosted a series of well attended events: storytelling, craft and folklore talks, a book shop with signings, a singing workshop plus the escapades of the Scythe Fair's new folk legend Hay Man... who will be returning for more adventures. Outside of the tent we had a creators' corner where attendees could get stuck in, and a herbal spa for just relaxing during the Fair.

Green Kidz

The Green Kidz saw a jam packed lineup with top quality artists offering environmentally aware Storytelling, a radical Punch and Judy show, plus Bubbles, ukuleles, circus skills and fairground rides. The Somerset Youth Theatre performed their show about recycling 'Go Green or Go Home!' And there were Skool Beanz gardening workshops, 'carve a mushroom' woodworking, Bear Cat Collective crafts and their ever-popular Swap Shop, Tipi Tarot readings, Face Painting and Henna Tattoos.



Out and About

The Opening Procession with the XR Samba Band was joined by 2 giant puppets, the huge Sovereign Nature figure and a Giant Egret. Elsewhere, the Glastonbury Border Morris danced, the Brutones female choir sang and an iridescent Dragonfly was seen stilt walking amongst the crowds. Some also saw a Hay Man and a Hobby Horse. Finally, the Willow Woman presided over the Hay for Play area beautifully decorated with flowers donated by a local nursery.



Entertainment

Our two music stages saw a steady stream of great music, curated in the Music Marquee by Fanny Hatstand, and on the outside Acoustic Stage by South Petherton's David Hall. The Acoustic Stage finished with the Ceilidh, moved outside to give more space – it was a big hit, and still it was bursting! At the same time the Music Marquee hosted a lovely Brazilian Singing Workshop, finishing with the wild King Salami & The Cumberland Three.



The Parley this year settled really well into its more collaborative format, with the topic 'Land Ownership or The Commons?' Big Dorset landowner Sir Philip Colfox was paired with land campaigner and author Guy Shrubsole. We ended up with a heartening amount of agreement: the need for a proper Land Use Framework; it's not the 'tragedy of the commons' but rather 'tragedy of the market' (partly due to the unequal power of landowners); ownership responsibilities are not properly regulated; it's as much about 'belonging' which should include a right of access, but it must be 'responsible access'.

I'd like to finish by quoting from what Cara, who always has her finger on the environmental pulse, sent to me as her thoughts on the Fair.

"From my view the event was another huge success. We were lucky with the weather and the turn out with many people choosing to cycle as a transport option. But transport overall is a challenge. We do need more people to come by bicycle, the bus scheme or at the very least lift share to help reduce the Fair's greenhouse gas emissions.

"We were lucky to have an upgraded renewable power system for the Music Tent and our own Green Energy trailer for the Acoustic Stage was also upgraded which supports us continuing to ensure all our energy needs are supplied by onsite renewable solar power.

"We had a new recycling company support the waste and recycling from the event and though most of the waste collected was recycled there was a noticeable increase in bulky food & drinks packaging. We hope more people will choose to bring their own plates in future to reduce the volume of cardboard (made from trees!) that is only used for minutes to transport food and then binned. Transporting waste and processing it for recycling uses a lot of energy, most of which comes from using fossil fuels so the more we reuse rather than recycle, the better for our environment.

"So, as we strive to improve our event each year to reduce its climate impact & to educate, inspire and inform people how to reduce theirs, we hope our supporters coming and engaging with the fair can help us by reducing their environmental impact."

Thank you Cara for you spot-on analysis of our 'to do' list for next year. And a BIG THANK YOU to all our incredible committee members and key volunteers who devote a huge amount of time, expertise and energy to the Green Scythe Fair and without which this very special event wouldn't happen.

Francis (Herbi) Blake, October 2024