

Chairperson's Report 2019

Thorney Lakes

Overview

Our planning for the 2019 Green Scythe Fair started with a visioning session in September last year, led by Ed, our FAB new stalls manager. This was primarily a response to the access and crowding problems we had in 2018 which necessitated closing the site for 2 hours in the middle of the day. Some brilliant ideas emerged from this session which we put into effect this year and the results were overwhelmingly positive, though with a few teething problems to challenge us along the way.

The ideas we put into effect included:

- online ticket sales (via Bradsons, a very helpful company based in Wincanton) and at local outlets, with gate sales at a higher price – we sold about half online
- our own bus service: 2 return journeys each from Taunton and Yeovil with intermediate stops, to complement the ferry and horse transport combo from Langport provided by the (now solar powered) Duchess of Cocklemoor and (the pasture powered) Steel Suffolks
- extending the site east of the Willow Walk, and moving the 2nd bar and acoustic stage there, along with several stalls, so opening up the scything area along the northern avenue
- a new access route to the parking fields, with ticket office and 2nd gate in the SE corner
- Saturday green craft workshops
- engaging Golden Apple to run both gates and the access route all through the event.

Despite significantly higher ticket prices (especially on the gate), the numbers were maybe slightly higher than last year, but in the larger area it felt less crowded. We estimated a total of around 4000 people, including some 700 crew/scyther campers/stallholders/performers/etc.

Set up

With a great team of volunteers the site crew were able to complete the set up in good time for the start of the Saturday courses (with the exception of a few signs). We also welcomed Kirby from the LWA to the team, which allowed him to see how we operate and will give us the opportunity to share ideas on how best to accommodate what we hope will be a significant LWA presence next year.

The take down was also done in good time despite the usual problem of many glasses that needed washing, drying and putting away. The site was left clean and tidy and handed back to The Englands on Wednesday evening.

Our storage took a battering from the winter storms with the roof between the containers blowing off, but big thanks to Damon for repairing this and installing a new door – we now have a proper, weather-protected lean-to.



Scything

The new layout for 2019 succeeded in the objective of making the scything more visible to visitors. In expectation of changes, the scythe setup team were well organised, and had a new tea tent to bolster the helpers' efforts. The added space around the grass arena facilitated managing the grass for the competitions as well as the courses on Friday and Saturday. These courses (beginners and improvers) were well attended, but feedback suggests that there needs to be further thought about managing such numbers of attendees. The competitions were as exciting as ever, with a landmark victory for Andi Ricard becoming the first female overall champion!



Stalls

The 2019 fair saw the usual mix of stalls and caterers, with many friendly faces returning and new faces alike. Reports from our guests and many stallholders suggested the new layout, which saw many stalls move over the Willow Walk to the new event area, was well received. The new sense of space was wonderful, and it creates many opportunities for future development. Some stallholders had mixed feelings about it, but we are sure we will address this in the coming fairs. For the first time, this year we brought our fee ask to caterers in line with other similar local fairs/festivals, charging an additional 20% of takings.

There was one incident with a stallholder selling alcohol without the correct paperwork on them, which is required in any situation. This created a lot of angst on all sides and we have apologised to those who were caught up in it. We managed to resolve everything with the parties concerned and have reviewed what happened and have agreed procedures that will ensure better management of any such incidents in future.



Green Crafts

The new area in the East Field created more space for green craft stalls (and others), it eased the pedestrian flow and provided a much better acoustic stage and seating area for the enjoyment of the music. The great innovation this year was the Saturday Craft Workshops. Six workshops were available ranging from copper jewelry to rope making. We look forward to expanding on this in 2020.

Green Kidz

The Green Kidz area helps to keep alive the traditional performing arts of clowning, puppetry and storytelling: real entertainment from real live humans - shows & walkabout characters with an environmental message as well as craft workshops using natural and recycled materials. For some it is their first experience of offline entertainment!

New this year were:

- Pom Pom productions with their unbelievably talented Flea Circus
- Rattle Box Theatre with their Robin Hood Puppet play
- Emma Morag Telling Tales of magic in ancient Wales
- Dragon Stories with local storytellers Sharon & Jem, and our very own Snow Dragon puppet, Misty, parading around the site with the help of numerous children
- Rainbow yoga workshops for kids
- The Re-Usery, making badges and washing sponges from recycled materials
- Reflective Yurt - a quiet space beautifully decorated by Emma Czelusta
- High Ham school Eco-Warriors demonstrating and weighing eco-bricks, together with a display of the recycling projects they run in their school



Site Info

Our wonderful volunteer team helped lots of people seeking info and collected a selection of lost property items, some of which we managed to reunite with their owners, but the rest went to charity shops after 2 months of clogging up Hannah's shed. We had no Accidents reported and no Lost Children incidents lasting more than 10 minutes.

We replaced the Raffle with an Eco-quiz. Answers to questions were on boards around the site. The main prize of an Austrian Scythe donated by Simon Fairlie was won by Sally Worby of Drayton. There are reports she has been using it and has even been on a training course with Andi Ricard! Take up on the quiz was poor and it would be good if someone could come forward to run a dedicated stand near the entrance promoting the Quiz as people come in, otherwise it will be back to the Raffle next year.

Green Info Café and Workshop tent

The Green Info Cafe and Workshop tent were taken on by the Willis Lane Sustainability Centre this year, promoting Extinction Rebellion. They tried a new layout, opening up the marquee to give more light and encourage folk in, which worked well. And they organised a bake off day before the event which was well supported by extra volunteer bakers, many of whom donated both their time and their cakes.

Workshops introduced South Somerset XR, non-violent direct action and Citizens Assemblies, as well as exploring climate science and 12 volt DIY electricity – all were packed.

Bike MOTs

To support those who cycle to the Fair, we are grateful to Davva and friends for providing ‘free’ Bike MOTs next to the cycle parking area, with the Bike Vet alongside for fixing more complex problems there and then.

Bar and Music

Geof and Calum lead our hard working bar staff. The second bar worked really well in its new location and we sold most of our stock of local beers and ciders - the increased price to £3.50 a pint did not seem to deter drinkers!

Our two music promoters, Fanny Hatstand in the Marquee, and Camelot Acoustics on the relocated Acoustic Stage, delivered a succession of wonderful and wackily named music acts throughout the day, providing great atmosphere and fine sounds on each side of the site. Both stages were powered entirely by the wind and sun.

Debate

The Debate continued the XR theme with “Surviving Extinction – 11 years to stop runaway climate change?”. Tessa Munt, Somerset Councillor and prospective Liberal Democrat candidate for Wells, Robin Maynard, director of Population Matters, and Zoe Young, researcher, author and artist, were all hard hitting about what lies before us, but also positive about how we can address these issues, if governments would really take the necessary action, and we all of us also play our part in doing what we can.

Volunteers, stewarding and event management

The most disruptive event this year was finding a new Safety Officer after the stalwart Jez had to pull out quite late on for family reasons. Luckily we found Nikki Allbut, living locally and experienced with H&S, and she fitted in seamlessly and brilliantly! Our new layout meant we had to make an application for a variation of licence which involved going before the Safety Advisory Group of SSDC. We were pleased and not a little surprised that the meeting went well and they were happy with all our preparations.

Jack took on the role of volunteer management and he was pleased that we had plenty of volunteers and the new layout worked well. He’s looking forward to doing some tweaking to the ticket handling and gate management in 2020.

Cara reported that the recycling went well and several kids did good work extracting glasses that had been thrown in with the recycling.

Publicity

This year, Cara also took on publicity which primarily centred on issuing two press releases and managing our Facebook presence. Carole continued to manage our revamped website which gradually expands with more sections and more information, and some great photos.

So, in summary, I think we can, with confidence, congratulate ourselves on a very successful Fair which has taken a significant step in the right direction and therefore lays excellent foundations for our next steps. In particular, we look forward to partnering with LWA to increase the educational reach of the fair and make much better use the facilities we put so much energy into building every year.

It remains for me to say a massive 'THANK YOU' to all those who put so much into making the Green Scythe Fair the wonderful and special event it is: our hard working committee, the 100 or so volunteers and other helpers who contribute so much time, energy and expertise. It wouldn't happen without you and them, and whilst it's hard work and time consuming and sometimes frustrating, I hope you all agree it's also a lot of fun and rewarding. And of course, it's made all the more important because of why we are doing it – to promote our shared ethos of helping to save our precious planet. Hmm, we better get on with planning an even better Green Scythe Fair 2020!

Francis (Herbi) Blake, October 2019