

Chairperson's Report 2022

Thorney Lakes

After a two year Covid-induced hiatus, our planning for the 2022 Green Scythe Fair started with some trepidation. We had high hopes of introducing several innovations this year, building on the progress made in 2019 on site layout, ticketing, gate management, transport options and Saturday workshops. We also welcomed two new committee members (Sian Gill and Henry Hall) who I'm glad to say reduced the committee's average age quite considerably which made us all feel younger!

Henry was central to many of these innovations: he set up a new ticketing website with all the ticket and transport options: bus (124 tickets, including a new route from Wells), river & horse (49), cycle (535) and car (2849, with a carbon tax donation of £3500 to Reimagine The Levels) and he organised the gate team, complete with barcode readers to at last capture visitor numbers properly, well more or less – about 4500 people. He was also on the front line of answering lots of online queries about tickets and their new prices, which we also changed quite radically – higher ticket price but no parking fee, both to reduce roadside parking, and so incoming traffic could flow without interruption... which all worked pretty well. Next stop, maybe a Green Scythe Fair app...



Set up and Volunteers

Deprived of horses during Set up, Simon Davies and Joe came to the rescue and proved fine work-horses themselves getting everything on-site and running necessary transport errands. Another great team upgraded the compost toilets – new timber and plumbing all round. And with more hard-working volunteers, we got the site built in time and all ready for Saturday, except for a few finishing touches of signage etc.

And with the help of Simon, Joe and volunteers, take down and packing up was completed by Tuesday evening – that's record time! Well done and many thanks to them all, and especially the kitchen staff and washer uppers, keeping the team well fuelled during the week.

Al also developed a good relationship with Alison Kirkpatrick from SSDC Environmental Health who has recommended a number of improvements to washing facilities, etc.

As the new Volunteers coordinator, Sian stepped into the job with calm efficiency, creating spreadsheets to streamline things for the event. We had approx 70+ volunteers, whose roles ranged from gate staff, stewards, glasswashers, bar and bike MOT crew. However, this figure excludes the invaluable help of the set up crew, carpark and road marshalls (scouts), and the Green Info Cafe helpers who were under other responsibility. There was exceptional turnout and punctuality with the rota and there seemed to be a lot of enthusiasm amongst the volunteers after the long gap. Overall, the day went extremely well, with the only weak point being the digital radios.



Layout and stalls

The new site layout, first used in 2019, felt like it came of age this year. The Acoustic Stage and Craft Bar were well settled in the East Field and the new Community Tent there gave a brilliant additional focus – LWA pulling out late in the day allowed us to use that space as a farmer’s market and to showcase some of the great local green projects we have funded in recent years. The scything had more space and all the wonderful stalls exhibited all their vibrant and eclectic variety. The one fly in the ointment was having too few food stalls, due in part to one or two pulling out at the last minute. It was a sobering lesson seeing how quickly the queues built up, and stayed up, throughout the day – some people taking 2 hours to get through. It was also gratifying to see the good humour shown by the majority of those affected. However, most people eventually got fed and watered even if it almost ran Lily and her wonderful team in the Canteen into the ground!

Green Info Cafe

Similarly, the Green Info Cafe did a roaring trade, selling out their mouth-watering range of organic cakes, gluten free cakes and simple savouries, along with a selection of organic teas, coffees and juices. Next door, the workshops again had an XR flavour, featuring non-violent direct action, DIY 12v electronics, earth systems science, and the rather noisy samba band practice, before joining the Dragon Parade.

Green Crafts and Saturday workshops

There were 23 Green Craft stalls, including pottery, weaving, sewing craft, pigment making, basket making, copper jewellery, rope making, green woodwork, tool sharpening, lime mortar skills. 10 ran courses on the Saturday which were reasonably well attended, but we need to integrate them into the online ticketing system for 2023. Nick says “I put my small marquee up as a Green Craft Area meeting point and exhibition space of my alabaster carvings and rustic furniture. There was no shortage of people coming in to “Take a Seat” and chat, there was even a poet who regaled us with his poems”.





Scything

During the two year 'break' ideas for improving scything events and demonstrations were developed, so this year it was safer, a better experience for participants, and more entertaining for spectators. It was also great to see a lot of young newcomers taking part, with a total of 64 scything competitors. Overall champion was Michael Gerrard with a time of 1m 9s and quality 8. Women's champion was, as ever, Andi Rickard on 1m 18s quality 7. The Quality Cup went to Tracy Harris 2m 23s quality a faultless 9. By total contrast, Fast-but-Crap was the Bubble's Richard Toogood on 1m 4s quality 4.5. There were also team competitions, hay races, scythe v strimmer, and various demonstrations – a photo of the synchronised team mowing even got into the Times!



Green Kidz

Highlights in the Green Kidz Zone included Hang About Ariel with hoops and trapeze; Rattle Box theatre with stories in the Saxon tent; Uncle Tack's Flea Circus; Isabella's Story Bicycle, Tiny Tales for under 5's. There was a Dragon Parade around the site, the Glastonbury Border Morris Team danced, Bear Cat collective continued with their wonderful Swop shop and Craft Workshops; and other workshops were: Soft Stone Carving, Wood Carving; Circus Skills and last but not least the 'The Mighty Fairground Striker'.

Out on the Scything field children helped decorate the Queen of the Meadow willow figure with locally donated flowers, and spent many hours playing in the designated 'Hay for Play' area.



Site Info Tent

Next to Green Kidz, a trusty team of Volunteers look after the Site Info tent on a rota basis, giving info on Whats on and location of stalls, and selling raffle tickets – over 100 tickets were sold. The top prize of an Austrian Scythe, kindly donated by Simon Fairlie, was won by Dave Oliver. No accidents or incidents were logged; a small amount of Lost Property was dealt with, the majority of it was returned to owner. It is also the Lost and Found children point, and there were 2 incidents of lost children who were quickly returned to their parent/carer.

Entertainment

Geof, is the Fair's DPS and runs the main Scythe Bar, with Bertie responsible for the Craft Bar – they were all at full stretch the whole day through, selling prodigious quantities of local beer and cider, though the feeling is that this could be more still with a redesign to extend the bars somewhat.

In the Marquee Fanny Hatstand delivered another fabulous line up of music, including a wild, if rather squashed, ceilidh that spilled outside at times. The Debate on 'Can veganism save the world?' featured Radio 4 Food Programme's Sheila Dillon, our very own Simon Fairlie and animal rights campaigner Dr Alice Brough. Sadly, but perhaps unsurprisingly, consensus was not forthcoming, but Sheila's final comment probably got closest: "No, because it doesn't address, and indeed partly depends on, the industrialisation of food production, which is a major part of the problem".

Over on the Acoustic Stage, the David Hall in South Petherton was our new curator this year, whilst Camelot Acoustics were otherwise engaged fighting eviction as a result of the A303 duelling at Sparkford. They did a great job and put on a succession of local musicians who entertained substantial crowds all day.



So, 2022 was a wonderful return for the Green Scythe Fair which yet again shone like the sun did, with even better elements than before. From the success of the solar boat & horse transport combi plus our dedicated busses, the huge number of cyclists and our carbon tax for car drivers, it all helps to reduce the Fair's carbon impact, which is the most challenging part of putting on such a responsible green event.

It was so great to see everyone back again at Thorney Lakes watching and participating in so many workshops and the scything competitions. As the summer turned out to be the hottest on record we hope our event has helped to increase action on the climate & ecological emergency. And we're already getting excited about what we can improve in 2023!

All that remains is for me to say a particular thank you to our wonderful committee members and key volunteers – too many to mention – who work so hard help put it all on and make it the very special event it is.