

Wassailing time

This is the time of year, especially in the country, when wassailing happens. There are two types. The first one is a house – visiting when people go round door-to-door singing and offering a drink from the wassail bowl in exchange for gifts. The more common practice is the orchard – visiting wassail which refers to the ancient custom of visiting orchards in cider producing regions, reciting incantations and singing to the trees to promote a good harvest for the coming year.



This year we went to Kilmersdon, the original place connected with the nursery rhyme 'Jack and Jill went up the hill'. We assembled at a public orchard somewhat above the village. A wassailing Queen was chosen. It was her job to place a slice of toast in the tree to encourage Robbin Goodfellow to visit the tree and bring it luck, to pour cider in a ring around the tree, and also to hand around the wassailing bowl full of

cider.

The words are as follows:

*To thee, to thee, old apple tree.
Be growth so strong and true.
So fair of blossom and sweet of fruit.
Be yours the season through.*

Chorus after each verse

*O. We'll Wassail thee, old apple tree
and bless thee through the year.
And raise a glass of the goodly brew.
"Good luck" to all of us here*

*O Apple tree, O Apple tree.
Now spread your branches wider.
To bear more fruit for we to crop.
And turn them into cider*

*We'll wassail thee old apple tree.
With cider around thy feet
And a round of toast in your branches high.
For the little robin to eat*

This was followed by an incantation

*Here' to thee old apple tree.
Long may you bud, long may you blow
And may you bear apples enough.
Hats full, caps full,
Bushell, bushel bags full.
And pockets full too.
Hurrah, Hurrah, Hurrah*

It was 4.30 pm and getting dark so about 50 of us went off to the home of the organiser and the ceremony was repeated with their apple tree. This video shows the loud bang made to

frighten off the evil spirits. The laughter is because a bird appeared to be shot out of the tree and fall to the ground. I think it was a model one.

Martin and his wife had provided a bread and cheese buffet, apple cake with three types of local cider on offer. My goodness it was lovely to drink something with no additives and chemicals. Much convivial conversation was had and the singing of local songs went on for an hour or so.