

Press Release

Celebrate the ancient tradition of wassailing in Devon's famous cider orchards

Devon's famous old cider orchards will be alive with the sound of singing, music and cider drinking this January as local people take part in the much loved and ancient tradition of wassailing.

Wassailing is an ancient ritual which is designed to wake up the cider trees, scare evil spirits away and guarantee a good apple harvest in the autumn. There are a number of special wassailing events across Devon this month where this traditional ceremony, which is believed to date back to Anglo Saxon times, is still observed and enjoyed on 17 January, or old Twelfth Night.

Wassail, is derived from "waes hael", an Anglo Saxon custom, in which local people, animals and crops were wished good health for the coming year. The Devon wassailing events are a great opportunity to enjoy some of the county's famous cider, cheese and local apple cake.

The wassailing ceremony varies from village to village but generally a procession of villagers follow the wassail Queen and King on a tour around local orchards, where the Queen is lifted into the bough of an apple tree where she will place toast soaked in cider from the previous harvest. A poem or incantation is recited such as; *"Here's to thee, old apple tree, that blooms well, bears well. Hats full, caps full, Three bushel bags full, An' all under one tree."* The assembled crowd then sing, shout and bang pots and pans before

a gunman releases a volley of shots into the trees to finally scare any malignant spirits away.

One of the most important wassailing events is the “Whimble Wassail” which is held at the village of Whimble near Exeter on Monday 17 January. Whimble has enjoyed a great tradition of cider making in the 20th century as the Whiteways Cider company was based there until it closed in the 1980's. Locals have set up the Green Valley Cyder company to keep the art of cider making alive.

The procession usually starts at the New Fountain Inn in Whimble at 6.30pm and proceeds around the various orchards in the village finishing at the local cricket club where wassailing refreshments such as cider, cheese and apple cake are enjoyed. Participants are asked to join in the spirit of the event by dressing in traditional rural costumes and to bring along instruments or pots and pans to make as much noise as possible to scare the evil spirits away. For more details visit www.whimble.org/wassail.htm

The quintessential Devon village of Stoke Gabriel in South Devon will mark its own wassailing ceremony with a lantern procession, folk music, morris dancers, a mummers play, as well as story telling. It starts at 4.30pm on 15th January at the Old School Room in Stoke Gabriel and proceeds to the local community orchard. Plenty of refreshments and a cider bar will be available to sample some of the famous local brews.

www.visitsouthdevon.co.uk

At Branscombe in East Devon local pupils from Branscombe Primary School have composed a special wassailing song for the wassailing ceremony on Monday January 17th from 6-8pm. The song is part of a collaboration with Folk South West, it is also part of an initiative with the National Trust to raise awareness about the importance of

orchards. For more information contact Lucy Morton East Devon Community Ranger on 01297 680507 or lucy.morton@nationaltrust.org.uk

At Buckland Abbey near Yelverton in South Devon join the Lodestone Morris Dancers in the abbey orchard on 15th January. Cider from Brimblecombe's near Dartmoor and pork and apple hot dogs will keep out the January cold to accompany the dancing and story telling from Steve Manning. More information available from Buckland Abbey, 01822 853607 or bucklandabbey@nationaltrust.org.uk

The Dartington Morris Men will be at Saltram House orchard near Plymouth for the wassailing event on Saturday 15th January. There will be an opportunity to indulge in mulled Devon cider and apple cake from 6pm-8pm. www.nationaltrust.org.uk/events

Join a lantern-lit musical procession to the orchard at Ocombe Farm near Paignton in South Devon on Sunday 16th January from 3.30 – 5.30pm. A glass lantern making workshop, mini toffee apples and other crafts will take place followed by the procession to the orchard at 5.30pm. www.occombe.org.uk

Notes to Editor:

In partnership with Visit Devon, Devon County Council supports Devon food and drink producers through a varied programme of skills training and the promotion of local food and drink to both local and national consumers. Contact Rachel Mildon on 01392 382837 or rachel.mildon@devon.gov.uk.

For further press information please contact: Jane Adkins, T/: 01935 813114; M/: 07960 698089 E/: jane@aheadforpr.co.uk or Gail Livingstone, T/: 01823 252415; M/:07767 055595; E/: gail@aheadforpr.co.uk.

January 2011 (Devon F&D08)