



# **HEDGERLEY WASSAIL**

## **Community Orchard, Glebe Field**

**“Wassail the trees, that they may bear  
You many a plum, and many a pear:  
For more or less fruits they will bring,  
As you do give them wassailing.”**

*– Robert Herrick, 16<sup>th</sup> century*

# Datchet Border Morris: Old Apple Tree Wassail

The word “wassail” comes from two Saxon words meaning “be of good health”.  
The response to “**Wassail!**” is “**Drink hail!**” – “drink in health”.

Wassailing wishes good health and fertility on the object of the wassail, whether people, trees, crops or animals, and necessarily involves a sacrifice, music and loud noises to scare away any evil spirits!

We use our Wassail bowl to bring our sacrifice to the trees in the Orchard, and we begin this Wassail by mourning the death of the little Robin, herald of Christmas, now long past.

## Cock Robin

### **Who killed Cock Robin?**

I, said the Sparrow, with my bow and arrow, I killed Cock Robin.

### **Who saw him die?**

I, said the Fly, with my little eye, I saw him die.

### **Who caught his blood?**

I, said the Fish, with my little dish, I caught his blood.

### **Who'll dig his grave?**

I, said the Owl, with my little trowel, I'll dig his grave.

### **Who'll be the parson?**

I, said the Rook, with my little book, I'll be the parson.

### **Who'll be chief mourner?**

I, said the Dove, I mourn for my love, I'll be chief mourner.

### **Who'll toll the bell?**

I said the Bull, because I can pull, I'll toll the bell.

**All the birds of the air fell a-sighing and a-sobbin'  
when they heard the bell toll for poor Cock Robin.**

**While the cruel Cock Sparrow, the cause of their grief,  
Was hung on a gibbet, next day, like a thief.**

Having mourned the passing of the old, we look forward to new life by making a toast – of toast – to the trees, to the accompaniment of a song which tells of the end of one year, and a new beginning.

**Please join in on the last line of each verse, which is repeated.**

## **Summon up the Sun**

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The Green Man shakes with fear,  
For the winds are North and chill;  
He knows his days will not be long,  
**For it's old Jack Frost a-waiting on the hill.**

John Barleycorn is in his grave,  
The stubble marks his tomb;  
Orion stalks the wary stars  
**And the barn owl calls to greet the hunter's moon.**

The snows are thick and cruel  
When the year its race has run  
The god of night is strongest now  
**So we burn his heart to summon up the sun.**

Mid-winter day begets the May,  
The darkest hour, the dawn;  
The deepest snow in Spring will go  
**And John Barleycorn is sure to be reborn.**

And now the snows are growing thin;  
The god of Winter yields:  
Again the spirit is re-born,  
**And the young Green Man comes dancing  
through the fields...**

# Datchet Border Morris: Wassail Song

*(from Bodmin, Cornwall)*

## Traditional blessing of the Orchard

**The Butler:**      “Good apple trees, we wassail ye  
                            And hope that ye shall bear;  
For the Lord doth know where we shall be  
                            Till apples come another year.  
To bloom well and to bear well,  
                            So merry let us be;  
Let every man take off his hat,  
                            And shout out to ye:”

**All:**                    “Good apple trees, we wassail ye  
                            And hope that ye shall bear  
Hat fulls, cap fulls, three bushel bag fulls  
                            And a little heap under the stairs.”

**The Butler:**                    **Wassail! Wassail! Wassail!**

**All:**                                **– Drink hail!**

**[loud percussion noise to scare away evil spirits from the trees]**

Please feel free to linger by the bonfire, or retire to the White Horse.



**Datchet Border Morris** is a local group of Morris dancers who play and dance in a traditional style. We also perform a sword dance and a Mummers play. We welcome new members to our weekly practice sessions in Datchet. If you would like to find out more, please speak to us, or visit: [www.datchetmorris.org.uk](http://www.datchetmorris.org.uk).

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