

RHSO (Rivers Heritage Site and Orchard)

Minutes from the AGM

Wednesday 21st February 2024 @ 19.30

Sawbridgeworth Library

1. **Welcome** – Ruth welcomed everyone and explained the format of the meeting.
Present were: Eric, Colin, Steve K, Elizabeth W, Lanier and Officers Ruth, Hazel & Nickie
2. **Apologies** were received from Adrienne, Steve K, Monique, and Geoff
3. **Minutes from last year** – approval of these was proposed by Hazel , seconded by Lanier and agreed by all present.
4. **Matters Arising not covered elsewhere** – Elizabeth discussed the Archive materials that are now available in the Council building
5. **Chairs report** – Ruth gave an interesting account covering the purpose of the group and the events that the volunteers and community supported. This included Apple Day, Wassail & The picnic in the Orchard plus the numerous juice selling opportunities. She included how RHSO thanked the committee and volunteers (both active volunteers caring for the trees & those who did other tasks in support of the Orchard . Ruth concluded by briefly talking about how we aim to run 3 events for the community a year. A copy of the report is included in the appendix
6. **Maintenance Report** – The report from Adrienne was read out and we all agreed that Adrienne was doing a great job and all those present extended their thanks to her. The report is attached in the appendix and includes her thanks to all those who have helped maintain this site for its heritage value and the community.
7. **Treasurer’s report** – Hazel explained the balance sheet was in the process of being checked and verified by Jeremy Dickson FCA. The balance at the end of December 2023 stood at £4019.40 with a profit of £1000. Juice sales at Full of Beans is very successful and all present extended thanks to Trula for all she does. A summary of the accounts is in the appendix with the full accounts available on the website. A vote of thanks was extended to Jeremy Dickson was agreed wholeheartedly by all present. We thanked Hazel for her work. Hazel proposed the accounts and Colin seconded. All present raised hands to show approved.
8. **Election of Officers** – All three Officers are happy to stand again and were re-elected:
Chair (Ruth) Treasurer (Hazel), Secretary (Nickie), all were proposed by Lanier & seconded by Elizabeth

9. **AOB**

Colin spoke of the Network group where they talked about Blossom Day and blossom watch

The Approved Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy Statement was agreed post meeting and will be updated by Nickie and posted on the web.

Ruth concluded by thanking those present for attending and closed the meeting at 20.20

Appendix

Chair RHSO report for AGM (written and read by Ruth Buckmaster)

Thank you everyone for attending the AGM.

The year started with a very successful Wassail. The ground was very muddy but everyone enjoyed the evening. We had the usual refreshments of hot drinks, mulled cider and apple juice, with the cider proving very popular as usual. This year we also provided savoury snacks as well as the cakes. All the volunteers work very hard to make this event the success it is.

We held juice stalls in Bell street throughout the year to raise funds. March juice stall was cancelled due to bad weather but we held sales in June and December.

The May fayre is a fantastic community event bringing together many community groups and commercial businesses. I feel it is very important that we attend these community gatherings to promote the Orchard and publicise it, to encourage more people to volunteer and get involved. It is in this way we can try to ensure the continuation of RHSO.

This year we trialled a new event, Family picnics in the Orchard. We were very lucky with the weather as it turned out to be a perfect day. We didn't sell any hot drinks only juice. But think that we should next time. There were approximately 50-70 people in various groups. Everyone I spoke to thought it was a lovely day and something that should be repeated.

We had a presence at the allotment show and sold some juice. As usual the Scarecrow Festival was very busy. It is now held on the playing fields rather than the church grounds. This makes it harder work for us as we can't leave the juice on site overnight.

Unfortunately, before this years Apple Day there was a lot of unauthorised fruit picking. Obviously in the past when people have helped themselves to a few apples so it has not been such a problem. But this year there was large organised picking witnessed. I received many reports of people being seen in the orchard with ladders and pickers, stripping many of the trees. Consequently, we are not able to offer the Cox Bramley variety this year as it was the Bramley apples that were taken.

This years Apple day was a warm sunny day that generated a large turnout of the community. Even with a lot of trees stripped It was a very successful day with enough fruit for over 1000 bottles of juice picked.

One of the concerns of the group is the long term sustainability of the orchard. To this end a small group met and drew up a plan for new plantings at the far end of the site. Some of us met with Peter Laws and Paul Read for their expert advice on what to plant and where. It was decided to start the planting with some new varieties of plum trees. Obviously only Rivers varieties. These have now been ordered as it takes time to be grafted. We look forward to planting them next autumn (2024). This is part of the 300th Anniversary of Thomas Rivers that will take place in 2025.

All these events and the monthly maintenance takes a lot of time and effort from all the volunteers. Without all of you there would be no orchard so I would like to give a huge thanks to all of you. Thank you.

Maintenance Report March 2023 – February 2024 (Written by Adrienne Richardson)

This year in maintenance sessions we have continued with normal annual pruning's, the apple restorative and regeneration policy, membrane removal programme outlined in last year's AGM report and clearance of eastern boundary.

Weather this year not as extreme. Orchard experienced more rainfall overall that helped with tree growth. Despite a long dry two months, from mid-January to mid-March, with very cold sessions, the fruit crop was good across all varieties. However, recent storms have caused damage to several old plum trees and this is an ongoing worry for this species.

Damage to tree bark by rabbits continues to be minimised by guarding of all apple trees. However, the crab apple and a lone apple variety in the 'plum' area not guarded were attacked this January and so guarded. Also,

damaged discovered at base of some guarded apple trees in main apple area, so had to widen guard and peg securely.

Practise of laying down apple pruning's from December onwards is a great deterrent. These pruning's have been avidly munched by our growing fluffle of rabbits.

Ant colonies still evident throughout site. Size of hills not as large as 2021.

The annual grass cutting in September saw the contractors tackle whole site. The larger machine used in western half of site has caused more damage to cherry membranes. The long grass does disguise their existence. Adrienne did attach red and white tape to membraned trees to help identify

Apples

The reshaping , restorative programmes continue to target the older trees , together with general pruning of the smaller older varieties of Cox and Laxton. This year we again pruned in Dec, Jan and Feb and a good strong workforce of knowledgeable volunteers have dealt with all the younger trees and again made excellent headway with many of the older varieties.

Apple crop was good. Laxtons abundant, but no Coxes or Bramleys.

We experienced a record amount of 'scrumpling' this year.

Pears

Most older pears are of manageable size and need little pruning. Large pear at N14 pruned this February. Some young pears need a lot of support and many had membranes removed and mulched. At Peter Laws and Paul Reeds suggestion, two younger pears (O2 and O3) removed completely due to lack of development.

Pear crop good. For better use of crop, better identification of varieties and their category of a 'cooking' or 'eating ' pear would be advised.

Plums

Younger plums pruned in July. Those not left to grass will need top up mulching this Spring.

At least four older plums have been severely damaged in the January storms and it is proposed we attempt restorative pruning this Summer. Colin and Adrienne attended a Course on this last August.

These trees remain very vulnerable to wind damage.

However, the old damson and plum tress produced a good crop this year. September maintenance day saw us harvest this for jam sales and 'home' consumption. A plum tasting session of at least 10 varieties was organised by Rob.

Cherries

The young cherries have done well due to membrane protection in this drier area of the Orchard. The bark size has noticeably widened on many. Where membrane has been damaged by cutting it is proposed to remove and leave to grass if trunk size adequate, but heavily mulch and maintain thick level ,if not. Important to be aware of 'dry' nature of this area for future projects.

Some older cherries appear alright at present but many still have issues with disease. Previous years have seen several approaches to this problem....heavy pruning, light pruning or leaving alone. No evidence this has halted disease or decay. Accept many reaching end of their lives. Paul Read advised not to remove dying trees as these are source for other species and bio diversity of site.

We have removed dead branches that may be danger to those on site.

Meadow

Little done here this year. One of ring barked trees in poor condition. Others alright at present.

Work carried out following policy on membraned trees set out in last year's AGM maintenance report:-

- a) removed membranes from all young apple trees with good trunk diameter and allowed to return to grass
- b) removed membrane from reasonably established tress, fed and mulched heavily with woodchip.
- c) removed membrane from young apples that had seen little development for over 10 years and left to grass. Future decision to be made as to whether we remove these trees completely.
- d)Trees mulched last year topped up with more woodchip. Important to keep mulch thick for moisture retention.

e) Approx. 20 trees in apple and pear area still membraned due to small size.

f) Young Cherries still membraned. Due to good growth removal policy will be task for this coming year.

Deciduous Woodchip currently provided by Richard Newman free of charge.

Note has been made that disturbing very fresh woodchip can cause volunteers with asthmatic conditions breathing difficulties.

Other maintenance

From April to September we continue to maintain the paths within the Orchard ourselves. In July and August volunteers tackled the ditch and hedge along the eastern boundary and either side of the bridge. A good thorough job was done and hope tree and hedge line good for several years. Ditch needs raking of soil dislodged by animal activity and leaf litter.

Continue to remove ragwort from site when identifies itself in Aug/Sept.

Volunteer Support

A few new faces recently. Many established members have only been able to attend intermittently this year, but we have an average monthly core attendance of 10. Many thanks to all those who have helped maintain this site for its heritage value and for the community.

Plans for the coming year.

The preparation for and proposed planting of new trees in area that has been chosen. Colin leading this project.

Rivers Heritage Site & Orchard

Balance Sheet 1.1.23 – 31.12.23

Balance brought forward	3217.21		
Wassail (January) refreshments	284.35	Wassail spices, cups etc.	16.50
Sum up	47.68	Wassail refreshments	17.35
Talk to Sheering W.I.	25.00	Insurance	99.31
May Fayre (May)	289.40	May Fayre stall	10.00
Sum up	75.72		
Barratt Wilson donation	750.00	Teddy Bear picnic expenses	33.80
Teddy Bear picnic (May) juice sales	87.25		
Sum up	26.55	Apple pickers	251.96
North Thames sponsorship	500.00		
Bell Street stall (June) juice sales	171.20		
Sum up	73.75		
Autumn Show (September) juice sales	36.00		
Sum up	5.90		
Scarecrow Festival (September) juice sales	469.10	Scarecrow Festival stall	30.00
Sum up	202.56		
Apple Day (October) refreshments	195.70	Apple Day transport & expenses	226.77
Sum up	116.98		28.99
			67.55
		Apple juice pressing	2431.00
Bell Street stall (December) juice sales	304.00		
Sum up	177.00		

Full of Beans juice sales	657.00	Website	62.32
General juice sales	633.00	Library room hire	15.00
Book sales	90.00	Flowers for Trula	60.00
Van hire refund	12.00	Gift card for Trula	25.00
Donation	21.00	EEAOP membership	15.00
East Herts Lottery	166.50	Pruning course	80.00
		First Aid course	195.00
		First aid box items	5.99
		Archive materials	81.86
		Tree grafting	240.00
		Christmas tree festival	5.00
		Wassail licence for 2024	21.00
	8634.85		
	<u>4019.40</u>		4019.40
Balance	4615.45		
Cash float	70.00		

27.6.23 £1000 to be ringfenced for trees project