



## *Grimsbury Farm E-Newsletter – December 2011*

### *Hello everyone*

We are fast approaching the end of what has been a very busy and successful year for Grimsbury farm and a year which has seen the Friends working hard to bring to fruition one of the projects that was mentioned at our very first meeting back in early 2006. The opening of a café at the farm.

We started the building work in the depths of the cold of last winter, opened for customers in the early summer and have not looked back since. The work has been hard but very rewarding and we have been fortunate enough to have had a lot of complimentary comments made about our efforts. Over the last few months we have steadily increased the range of food that we have been selling to include a number of savoury items on our menu. The one thing that we have strived to do is to follow the principle of what we have done at all of our events. That is to provide good quality food at affordable prices and in this we think that have been successful.



**Before**



**Before**



**After**



**After**

When we were looking at the café project, we were always aware that we would be unable to get enough volunteers to enable us to open throughout the week so we have teamed up with the Brandon trust, a charity that works with people with special needs, to ensure that the café is open for the maximum time possible.

The Friends look after the overall management of the Barn café and staff it on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays as well as Wednesdays in the school holidays, with Brandon trust providing staffing on Mondays, Tuesday and Thursdays.

Due to limitations on what Brandon Trust can provide, the menu is different on the days that the 2 groups are staffing the café, with more hot food available on the days that are staffed by volunteers from the Friends.

We are currently in discussion about how we can further increase our menu to provide more hot meals and I am hoping to be able to announce something about this early in the new year. Our aim is to have somewhere that when people decide to pop out for some lunch, one of the first places they think of is The Barn Café. If we can achieve this, then we can hopefully increase our income which in turn will help us to make further improvements to Grimsbury Farm which people appreciate as an important local facility.

The importance and value of the farm to local people was recognised earlier this year when Net Mums gave us an award after being voted the best free place to visit in our area.

We did receive one bit of un-wanted attention on a summers' night when someone managed to break into the café and stole a significant amount of stock. Not only was this a financial loss for us but the damage caused had to be repaired incurring yet more expense as well as having to have a thorough clean up of the mess left behind. We also had further expenditure as we had to increase security yet again to try to prevent further break-ins.

To coincide with the opening of the café, the childrens' playground has been totally refurbished by SGC with the help of a grant aimed at improving play areas across the country. We were very lucky that this work was done as the funding of these projects was withdrawn as part of the cuts and at one stage we thought that after all the campaigning to get a new playground, the funding might be lost. However, it wasn't and the result is a very popular addition to the farm.



**The new childrens playground**

The small animal pens at the top of the farm which have suffered repeated attacks by vandals are currently being refurbished which will hopefully provide better animal accommodation and better resistance to vandals. Only time will tell !!!



**The small animal pens currently being re-furbished**

Early spring this year saw the first birds take up residence in our new bird boxes. These were a high “Des Res” as far as the birds were concerned and gave us all the chance to watch nature in action via the installed web cams which could be viewed via our web-site. These proved very popular with many people and we quickly received e-mails to tell us if the system wasn't working. The web-cams are offline at the moment as the boxes are currently empty but they will be switched back on in the next few weeks and we can keep our fingers crossed that we quickly get residents again.

The Friends have also continued to organise events throughout the year although the first one of the year, the Wassail, had to be cancelled at the last minute due to a severe weather forecast. You might not be aware, but in the 2 weeks leading up to any of our events, we closely monitor a number of different weather forecasts to see what is predicted as we generally have to purchase considerable amounts of food and get all the other bookings confirmed. The final decision whether to go ahead with an event is always made on the Tuesday evening before the actual event when hopefully the weather forecast is more reliable.

Open farm Sunday back in June was one of the events that shows how much we rely on good weather. On the day, the heavens opened and we had torrential rain which meant that most of the things planned had to be cancelled as we had virtually no visitors which was no surprise given the rain.

The “street party” that we had to celebrate the royal wedding this year turned out to be a surprise success. It was organised as a relatively low key event which on the day turned out to be very popular. The good weather saw people picnicking, competitions, old fashioned games for the children and people generally relaxing and enjoying themselves. It just goes to show that sometimes even simple things can turn out to be a great success.

In October we had the Big Apple day which again was spread over 2 days. On the Saturday we returned to the orchard at Oldbury power station where many families turned up to help pick apples to be pressed back at the farm.

The Sunday saw us taking those apples, and many more beside, and showing people how they can be turned into pure apple juice for drinking or, with further processing, how it can be made into old fashioned cider. The day was a great success with people joining in with the production process. The produce of that day, and many other days as well, can be seen in the café where you

can buy bottles of pasteurised pure apple juice, the profits from which go straight back into the farm to help us make further improvements.



This event very nearly didn't happen as the weather conditions throughout the year meant that for the first time in about 30 years, fruit trees everywhere were fruiting up to 6 weeks early when none of us were ready and some of us were still away on summer holidays.

We were very lucky in securing access to a number of other local orchards that still had fruit and we were able to go ahead with the event although our plans for apple juice production had to be severely cut back. We hope that next year nature is back on track and we have plenty of fruit in September and October when it should be ready.

There are a couple of very good presentations that show the fun that was had at the apple day and also giving some information about orchards that we used to have in this area. Please follow the links to have a look.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPRiyRlojkc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPRiyRlojkc)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=2m-U-0obLpQ&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2m-U-0obLpQ&feature=related)

The Carols in the Barn a couple of weeks ago was another great success with probably the biggest crowds we have had since we started it 5 years ago. With the children from a local primary school taking part in the nativity as well as providing a choir and with music provided by Oldland Brass band once again, the atmosphere was truly magical. The illuminated trees were complimented by the mini hot air balloons and children of all ages enjoyed playing and having their picture taken in the snow storm that seemed to be centred just in front of the farmhouse. Our aim was to provide a simple traditional nativity play with carols that can be sung by everyone and judging by the looks on peoples faces, I think that we achieved it.

Photographs of the Carols can be seen on our Web-site in the near future. In the meantime there is a selection of photographs of the mini hot air balloons on :

[www.modelballoonsuk.net/picture\\_galleries/grimsby%20farm/album/](http://www.modelballoonsuk.net/picture_galleries/grimsby%20farm/album/)





## **Carols in the Barn 2011**

A lot of people have asked us why we didn't have our Fun day this year as it had been so successful in previous years. And thereby lays the problem.

The more successful we are in attracting visitors to the farm and particularly to our events, the more our limited parking facilities show themselves. In previous years we have worked hard to resolve the parking problems and last year we were able to use the memorial park as it had not opened at the time. However, it is now open for business and is not readily available, and although we can use the official car park, that only helps with relatively small events. Even during a normal summers day we have had to open up one of the fields for parking to cope with the number of extra visitors, although this is a "good" problem, as it shows how popular the farm is getting.

We have also put a lot of effort in trying to find sensibly located parking for our larger events but drew a blank so reluctantly had to cancel the Fun day. The good news is that since that time we have negotiated good parking nearby so in future big events such as the fun day should be able to go ahead albeit at a slightly earlier time in the year compared to our traditional September date. However, in 2012 we will not be having the Fun Day again due to the close proximity to another event we are planning and the relatively low numbers of volunteers available to undertake the heavier tasks although we hope to be back with the Fun day in June 2013.

## **So what does 2012 hold for Grimsbury farm.**

### **Wassail**

We start on **January 14<sup>th</sup>** with our Wassail which will hopefully scare away the bad spirits and ensure that we get another bumper crop of fruit from our trees. It is a traditional local event which has taken place for hundreds of years so please come along. Don't forget to bring something with you to make some noise to frighten away the bad spirits from our trees. I will be sending out a flier for this in the next couple of weeks.

### **Queens Diamond Jubilee**

The event that we are organising instead of the Fun day is another "Street party" to celebrate the Queens Diamond Jubilee on June 4<sup>th</sup>. Not only are we holding another, hopefully bigger, street party but we also have the honour of hosting one of the 2012 beacons that will be lit across the country in the evening to bring the days activities to a close. A nationwide lighting of beacons has not happened for many years and is unlikely to happen again in the near future so come along and

be part of this landmark celebration. We are now actively planning this event so please keep an eye out for further details and put **June 4<sup>th</sup> 2012** in your diary.

### **Open Farm Sunday**

Open Farm Sunday which is part of a national event will be happening in mid June and we hope for better weather this year. More details nearer to the date.

### **Big Apple Day**

The Big Apple day will be take place in early October when we hope to give you another chance to join in and help with the apple juice production or to simply watch how it is done.

### **Carols in the Barn**

And to finish the year off, we hope once again to bring you Carols in the Barn on **Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> December 2012**. (*Arrive early for food!!!!*)

### **The Barn Café**

Our biggest on-going project is the Barn Café where we have a number of improvements planned.

Firstly, we will be finishing off some of the detailed work within the café building just to tidy up a few of the bits that we didn't have time to finish before we opened.

In the springtime we will be putting in another doorway to give access to a new seating area at the picnic area end of the building. This will also give a ramped access to the picnic area itself from where you can watch the ducks and geese in the pond. Near to this new doorway we are considering putting in small sofa and coffee table where people can relax with a drink.

Although some of the funding is in place for this work to go ahead, we still have to get the final lump of money for the exterior decking and seating area itself so I can't say exactly when it will be finished.

Something that has become rapidly obvious to us, and to our visitors, as the cold weather has moved in is the fact that we desperately need a better heating system. What we have currently is just what we have managed to get in quickly and is not really up to the job. As part of this activity we have to look at insulating the roof as this is where most of our heat goes at the moment. Also, the windows and doors need replacing not only from the heat retention point of view but also the fact that they are well past their best.

All of these improvements add up to a very significant sum of money and it is not going to happen in a hurry so we would ask that people understand the problems of heating the café in the cold weather. If we cannot come up with something that is effective to get us through this winter, we might have to close down and open up when the weather warms up again.



**The Picnic area where a new doorway and decked seating area is proposed.**

With the need to raise additional funds very much in our minds we have been looking at how we can raise more money in the café and the one area that we hope to improve upon is in the range of food that we provide. We have been looking at how we can provide a better range of hot meals within the confines of the facilities we have and are confident that we can increase our menu whilst still keeping our prices at a sensible level. It is important to us that whilst doing this we are also able to continue to raise funds to make further ongoing improvements to the farm in general. Please keep an eye out for more details of the new menu in the near future.

Around the rest of the farm, the other big project that we are looking at is the addition of animal runs to be built alongside the stable block. This will enable the animals that are kept indoors at various times to have easy access to the outside and to enable people to see them even when the stables are closed. Again, although this is an important project to get in place, it is also an expensive one which requires considerable funding to be found.



**The stables where new outdoor animal pens are proposed**

I think that is everything for now. We have yet another very busy year ahead of us and are always keen to hear from potential new volunteers. If you would like to get involved and to become part of the team, please contact me at [chairman@fogf.co.uk](mailto:chairman@fogf.co.uk) or drop into the Barn Café on a weekend to get some more information.

And so it simply remains for me, on behalf of The Friends of Grimsbury Farm, to thank all those people that have supported our efforts in the past year, either by coming along to our events or by purchasing refreshments in the Barn Café and to take this opportunity of wish you and your families a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Best wishes

Pete Davies

The Friends of Grimsbury Farm

