

ANCIENT TRADITION RESTORES LINK TO TOWN

Bodmin's wassailers, who receive traditional hospitality at 15 to 20 houses throughout the town on 12th night dressed in top hats, dickie bows, waistcoats and tails, will restore a link with Bodmin Town Council dating back to the seventeenth century when they commission the new Wassailing Bowl in the presence of the Mayor of Bodmin, Cllr Bob Micek.

The Bodmin Wassail is one of only two surviving traditional visiting wassails which are very different from apple tree wassails. It is unique in that records confirm it has survived continuously since 1640 although it was certainly well established even then. There was a visiting wassail in Malpas near Truro which finished in the 1960s. The male only group visit houses in Bodmin singing two songs – again this is unique – one when seeking entry and another upon leaving – in return for hospitality and donations to local charities.

Director of Folk South West, Eddie Upton, said “the Bodmin Wassail is an ancient tradition taking place on 12th Night and is equally significant in its own way as Padsow’s May Day or Helston’s Flora Day. The town and people of Bodmin are an essential part of the tradition – without their support and close involvement there would be no wassail.”

The wassailers have continued since just before World War Two without a drinking vessel. At that time it disappeared having last being seen on display on top of a plant pot in a shop in Honey Street in Bodmin. The original bowl was donated to the wassailers by town clerk, Nicholas Sprey. Maclean's History of Trigg Minor records: "In 1624, Nicholas Sprey, town clerk of Bodmin, by his will, bequeathed 13s 4d amongst good friends and inhabitants of Bodmin, at some convenient house on 12th day, a supper, and for furnishing a wassail cup with wyne and sugar, and from thence go with the cup to every mayor's house yearly, and for ever, for the continuance of love and neighbourly meeting."

Former Mayor of Bodmin, John Chapman, commissioned a new bowl from potter John Webb of Lostwithiel. This is now the centrepiece of a Wassailing Display beside the Tourist Information Centre in Shire Hall. Vic Legg, who has been part of the wassailing tradition for 33 years said “John has been a keen supporter of the tradition, as was his father and grandfather, and we are extremely grateful to him for this generous gift. We've carried on without a bowl since before the war, visiting houses, pubs and residential homes, but now we can fill it up with beer or cider and offer people a drink, the original intention when Nicholas Sprey bought the first wassailing cup all those years ago. Having the new bowl makes a tremendous difference as we can use it as the focal point of the wassail”

In the last three years the wassailers have extended the custom by going out in the afternoon to residential and nursing homes, shops and the library. Vic Legg said "This extends the tradition to many more people in the town. Wassail is a living tradition in Bodmin and is changing and developing all the time so who knows what the future may bring."

Bodmin's Town Clerk, Paul O'Callaghan said "The town council is delighted once again to contribute to the tradition of wassail. I shall be following in the footsteps of my predecessor Nicholas Sprey when I fill the wassail bowl with fine wine as it begins its twelve hour journey across our town."

CONTACT DETAILS:

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PHOTO OPPORTUNITIES:

Presentation of Wassail Bowl by Mayor of Bodmin to Wassailers. Wednesday 6 January 2010. Mayor's Lounge, Bodmin Town Council, Shire House, Bodmin at 12.00 noon or possibly at other times during the day by agreement with the Wassailers.

RECORDINGS:

The Voice of the People Vol 16 You Lazy Lot of Old Boneshakers. TOPIC TSCD 666 Track 23. Live Performance of Bodmin Wassail in 1970s. MP 3 download from www.amazon.co.uk

WESTCOUNTRY CHRISTMAS Folk South West Track 16.

MORE INFORMATION:

<http://www.thisiscornwall.co.uk/news/1947-Wassailers/article-1481215-detail/article.html>

<http://www.thisiscornwall.co.uk/news/symbol-proud-tradition/article-1437986-detail/article.html>

<http://www.thisiscornwall.co.uk/news/Wassailing-bowl-link-forged-long-gap/article-723273-detail/article.html>

<http://www.thisiscornwall.co.uk/news/Fine-voice-good-cheer-wassailers/article-607023-detail/article.html>

<http://www.thisiscornwall.co.uk/news/Gift-wassail-bowl-restores-tradition-ancient-glory/article-548157-detail/article.html>

http://www.bodmin.gov.uk/PDF/PDF_Minutes/2009/CC0209%204Web.pdf