



Wassailing Story

Many years ago, in a small village in the Kent countryside there was a farmer who was becoming very worried.

He was a fruit farmer who owned an orchard. In the orchard were hundreds of apple trees. At the end of the summer months the trees had grown plenty of apples for him to harvest. He and the rest of the villagers spent weeks picking the apples and turning them into apple juice and cider to sell at the market.

But once all of the apples had been picked the trees started to change. First the leaves turned from green to orange and then they all turned brown and eventually the leaves fell from the trees completely. The orchard was bare.

Winter came, the nights got longer and the days got colder but the trees remained bare. Maybe they had all died.

The farmer was very very worried. 'If the trees haven't got any leaves on them how will they make apples for me to harvest and sell at the market?' he thought.

'What are we to do' said the farmer to his wife 'How can we get the trees to start to grow again?'

'I know' said his wife 'Why don't we try and wake the tree up, after all if I were a tree I would want to sleep if I was outside on these long, cold, dark days'.

'What do you mean?' said the farmer 'How can we wake up a tree?'

'Well I have heard of a special ceremony which takes place to wish apple trees good health for the future and asks them to grow lots of apples. 'It's called Wassailing, which is an old word for good health' said the farmer's wife.

'How do we do that then?' said the farmer

So his wife began to explain the whole thing, it went like this...

We get all the villagers together and paraded into the orchard singing a song so that the trees know we were coming. We then choose the biggest strongest looking tree to represent all of the trees in the orchard, that one is called the Grand Old Apple Tree'

The villagers then stand in a circle around the Grand old apple tree and chant a poem to wake up the tree

The poem goes like this:

Grand Old Apple Tree
We Will Wassail Thee
In the hope that you will bring
Fruit to us this spring.

Once we have chanted the poem we will then sprinkle the roots of the tree with a special drink called wassail. The wassail is a hot drink made of apple juice and spices. By sprinkling it on the roots of the tree it will bring the tree good health and encourage it to grow.

Once the tree is awake the villagers have to show the tree what they want it to do. They do this by walking around the tree pretending to carry heavy baskets full of apples. This will show the grand old apple tree that lots of fruit is needed.

Once this is done we will welcome good spirits into the orchard to help the tree to grow, we could do this by offering them food so that they will visit the trees. If we are welcoming the good spirits we must also scare away the bad spirits so the villagers need to take anything they can find or make that will make a loud noise. This noise will then scare away the bad things.

The last important part of the ceremony is to sing a special wassailing song to the tree and then everyone has to drink some of the hot wassail to show the tree how important the apples are.

'What do you think?' said the farmers wife to her husband 'shall we give it ago'

'Well.....OK' he said dubiously 'if your sure it will work, lets give it a try'

So that is what they did!

That summer the trees were bursting with apples, so many apples the farmer couldn't pick them all, he was very pleased and every winter ever since then the farmer has wassailed his orchard.