

## **Picnic at Hapton Chapel Ground**

### **By Bruce Chilton**

It was a lovely spring day in Norwich on Sunday 1 May 2011 and a quite beautiful afternoon at Hapton in the Norfolk countryside. It was bright and sharp and just warm enough to be pleasant out of doors as long as one stayed in the sunshine. It was just the afternoon for a picnic and Hapton Chapel Ground was just the place!

A group of us came after the meeting at the Octagon Chapel that morning. We ferried folding chairs and a table, blankets to lay on the grass and bags of lovely things to eat and drink up the path past the old black barn. For some it was time to inspect the growth the spring had brought to the Chapel Ground. Last autumn's planting had taken well even if the small holly bush had succumbed to the fierce winter. The Chapel Ground does not seem sympathetic to the quick thorn bushes Judith and others planted on the boundaries. We must try some other plantings. And meantime the mole had been as active as ever on the freshly cut grass swathe.

A quiet time was spent together reflecting on the spring. We shared poetry, stories and meditations. Simon told us a story which amused the children of all ages. Then the picnic bags were opened as Dizzy, Judith's Dachshund, got excited. So Dizzy chased the children and the children chased Dizzy while the tea and soft drinks were poured. Betty passed around Kiwi fruit and cake slices. Bob entertained us to folk songs accompanied with his guitar and the girls, Kerensa, Eleanor, Jocelyn and Dorothy bathed, indeed drowned, Dizzy with affection.

Simon had brought his own childhood pushcart. The original paint has faded but it was handy for pulling up a pile of folded chairs. But it went straight back to its original use when the four girls saw it. The gentle slope on the Chapel Ground helped the excitement if, fortunately, the grass was just too long to allow the excitement to turn into cuts and bruises. The children brought out an unusual ball of plastic netting which expands as it flies from one hand to another. It was just the right game for quick, lively children learning how to catch and throw and the rest of us, former athletes as we all once were and who are now forgetting!

All too soon the sun was setting behind the trees to the west and it was becoming chilly. We gathered up our things and, closing the old oak lychgates, left the mole to enjoy its restored quiet and what remained of the dappled afternoon sunshine.