



SUNNYSIDE ALLOTMENT SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

1/2006

Since the last newsletter in October some of us have been quite inactive gardeners, not enjoying the cold frosts and threat of snow, with days darker than usual and finding heavy rain has made heavy digging. But so far the forecasted extremely hard winter has not materialised, although there is plenty of time yet! The survey, broadcast by the BBC, of plants flowering on New Years Day claimed that not one snowdrop had been sighted nationally and this was extremely unusual. So perhaps there has been some excuse for those of us who have preferred the fireside to the allotment!

But we have been very busy with other activities. Several keen helpers attended the clearance day in November, the AGM was well supported, we had a very successful Christmas party in winter sunshine; and on a serious note there has been considerable development in the altercation with the town council about their intention to take some plots out of allotment use for a permanent Wildspace project. You will read about these developments below and learn sadly how they are going to affect us in the future.

I am very grateful to Patrick Stileman, Michael Barwise and John Driver for contributing their knowledgeable articles. Patrick is warden of Birtchnells Copse and a tree specialist. Michael has already written one expert article on roses and this is a follow up to that printed last year. You will find them interesting reading.

I hope you are enjoying your 2006 allotment calendar. The photographs will grace any wall and the year-long tips on mulching and water preservation are well worth following. Jenny is to be congratulated again on this excellent production. She still has a few left for sale for those of you who missed the chance of buying one previously.

Best wishes to you all for a happy, healthy and productive New Year.

Annual General Meeting – 26.11.05

This was held, as usual in the premises of Sunnyside Rural Trust and the Chairman Bruce Jones, expressed his thanks for the use of their amenities.

Members were very pleased to hear his positive report about past activities of the year and the increasing popularity of allotment gardening. It had been the year of big machinery with the creation of the new road on Sunnyside New but the high point of all activities had been the completion of the toilet on Sunnyside Old. It had been an amazing community project with several tenants putting in many hours of skilled labour. He expressed his thanks on behalf of all members to these tenants and also to Berkhamsted Town Council for payment and provision of the connecting sewer; and he particularly welcomed the Town Mayor who officially opened the toilet after the meeting.

As to the future, Sunnyside Old was completely full and there were only twelve and half plots left on Sunnyside New. The standard of cultivation was improving, there was an increased demand for half plots and it was very good to see so many young mothers with children and families enjoying their gardening together. But there was still an ongoing discussion with the Town Council about their desire to take some statutory allotment land out of use and he warned that we must watch this situation closely.

Other new issues to be aware of were water

conservation, the control of bonfires, and the aim to ensure that the Allotment Management Team has a proper place in the structure of the council.

The Treasurer John Powell reported very good results, largely due to Jenny Sipping's efforts with the calendar and seed ordering and Angela Wheeldon's selling of produce on the very successful Open Day in August. Copies of the accounts are available from Ted Dyer, (tel: 872684).

Before the meeting officially began, Mary Wilson from Herts Organic Gardening Society told us of their activities in St. Albans and their varied programme which included seed swapping and talks on beekeeping, compost making and other aspects of organic gardening. They would welcome new members.

Grand Opening of Toilet Facilities

We were very lucky that our Town Mayor, Geraldine Corry agreed to come and cut the tape! The occasion was held after the AGM on 26th November so the Mayor was well attended by tenants as she walked down to the site. She was quite amazed, as were the rest of us, by the superb amenities, beautifully tiled floor, modern hand basin, as good as any hotel could offer, and all with second hand materials. It surely must be the smartest and cleanest allotment toilet in the country!

Residential Qualification for New Allotment Tenants

We have had to turn away an applicant for a plot on Sunnyside new because he lives outside Berkhamsted. The applicant had been shown over the allotments in October and had come back to us earlier this month. The policy of Berkhamsted Town Council has changed, apparently to protect the supply of allotments for Berkhamsted residents because of the increasing demand. This sits rather strangely alongside the decision to exclude plots 14-19 Sunnyside New from letting to the public, for use as 'Wildspace'! See the last Newsletter and below.

Sunnyside New – Town Council's Wildspace Project

At the December meeting of the Council's Environment Committee a paper was produced detailing their plan for Plots 14 to 19 on Sunnyside New.

It is the Council's intention to engage a contractor to cut back the trees and scrub at eastern end of the site and to plant a hedge along the railway fence and up Plot 14 to the allotment roadway. It would therefore, appear that the Council wish to take Plots 14 – 19 out of allotment use on a permanent basis.

Tenants should be aware of the following statement made in the Council's paper :-

"I am very satisfied with the progress and appearance of both the Wildspace and the (SRT) rented allotments north of the Activity Centre (on Sunnyside Old). Together they provide an area of ecological and habitat interest, combined with an appearance of pleasant well managed landscape, thus offsetting the rather scruffy appearance of some of the allotment areas."

The underlining and the brackets are ours but tenants should be mindful of the Council's comments.

Birtchnells Copse

This winter, some of our Clearance Day activities have been centred on Birtchnells Copse which is an integral part of our allotment site. This was originally allotment land of about



forty plots on the boundary of an old bungalow in Ivy House Lane. It fell into disuse and it naturally developed into a nature reserve which is now managed by the Town Council and named after Percy Birtchnell who was a well known local historian.

The first warden was a resident of Ivy House Lane; the second was Ken Harbord who looked after it for several years, as well as Long Green woodland in the other side of the valley. Since Ken's death, Patrick Stileman, a member of our committee has been appointed warden and his update on it's present condition follows.

Birtchnells Copse Update

by Patrick Stileman

Birtchnells Copse is a nature reserve owned by Berkhamsted Town Council approximately 1 hectare in area, located directly above Sunnyside New Allotments.

I am in the privileged position of being the volunteer warden of the reserve. I have written a management plan (which admittedly requires updating), I oversee occasional work within the copse, and conduct guided walks. I have a co-opted seat on the Town Council Environment Committee in which I discuss progress/issues relating to the Copse.

The Copse is located on old allotment land, much of which was cultivated some 30 years ago. It has developed naturally following years of no human activity, and is an extremely good demonstration of how land will eventually revert back



to woodland if left untended. Although the Copse may appear to be a static woodland that never changes, it is in fact a dynamic structure, with changes slowly, but very surely taking place. If you were to take a snap shot of the reserve now, and come back in 30 years to compare it, you will find that it is very different in nature.

Most of the Copse is still in a relatively early phase of natural succession, and a long way from an eventual mature 'climax' woodland state. Early, aggressive pioneer plant species remain dominant, particularly bramble, elder, hawthorn and sycamore. Oak trees have also self seeded and there are a few high quality semi-mature trees which will eventually become established as high forest trees. These in turn will shade out the pioneer species which were essential for establishing initial woodland cover.

The broad management objectives for the Copse are to promote habitat diversity in order to maximise the wildlife potential, to improve the overall structure of the woodland, and to maintain access through it. The majority of the work is carried out on a voluntary basis by Sunnyside Allotment Society, and I am very grateful to everyone who has assisted. On 19th November 2005, we had a working day within the Copse, and cleared a significant amount of bramble and elder. We have now obtained 5 locally grown oak trees which will be planted



Far Left: The Mayor officially opens our new 'Loo'.

Left and Below: Views of Birtchnells Copse including two of the newly planted Oak trees.



strategically in January in clearings we made, in order to bolster the number of eventual high-forest trees.

The Copse has potential as an educational resource. In November 2005, I gave a guided tour to a group of enthusiastic Ashlyns School 'A' level students. Their tutor suggested the possibility of research projects/ecological surveys within the Copse which I would welcome.

I am intending to conduct guided walks around the Copse during the Allotment Open Day in the summer, and hope to see some of you there.

Roses as a Crop – Part Two

By Michael D. Barwise

In my last article I discussed the election of old fashioned roses for use as a crop. So what can be made from them? We all know of rose hip syrup. However the old fashioned roses are very variable in their production of hips. The best source of rose hips remains the wild dog rose (*Rosa canina*) in the hedgerow. The red-hipped rugosas also yield a good syrup, and make good hedging as they can be clipped hard with impunity once the hips are ripe.

Where the old fashioned roses are unsurpassed is in the perfume of their flowers. There are many recipes from the 17th and 18th centuries, although they frequently refer to rose petals as "rose leaves", causing much confusion.

The flowers must be collected on a dry day just as they are fully open. Whole flowers should be cut and

carefully laid in a basket to avoid crushing. Once in the kitchen, the petals are pulled away from the receptacle by hand. Any petals that are damaged or have brown patches must be discarded. If you are making foodstuffs, the small thickened white base must be snipped off each petal, as it is bitter and spoils the flavour. The petals must then be used immediately, otherwise they will start to decay. However, if you are making cosmetics, this process is not necessary, as it does not affect the perfume.

For cordials, syrups and wines, the prepared petals are infused in hot water. They must not be boiled: a temperature of about 60°C is ideal. A double boiler or bain marie with a thermostat is best, but a stock pot with a lid, suspended inside a larger one filled with water can serve as a makeshift double boiler. The petals from a dozen double or about sixty single roses are infused overnight in one litre of water. Three consecutive batches (about a thousand rose petals altogether) should be infused in the same liquid to obtain the required strength of flavour. A teaspoonful of fresh lemon juice should be then added per litre to stabilise the infusion, which can be kept deep frozen in a closed polythene container for up to a year. Sugar (or honey) is added to make the recipe of your choice, and the amount will depend on the intended use (syrup, cordial or wine).

For a rare treat, try rose petal conserve. Take a clean sterile jam jar,

put in a thin layer of white sugar, followed by a layer of prepared rose petals, another layer of sugar, more petals, and so on, pressing down gently, until the jar is full. Store it in a cool dark place for a year, then empty into a blender. Blend well, re-pack the jar, heat it very briefly to 80°C in a water bath with the lid loose. Seal it immediately, and put the jar back in the dark. This ruby red fragrant confection will be ready in about another year, and it keeps for ever. I still have a small quantity that was made in 1964. It has turned the colour of Branston pickle, but is still strongly redolent of roses.

For simple cosmetics (creams and soaps), rose petals are crushed in a mortar and mixed into warm lanolin at the rate of one kilo of rose petals per kilo of lanolin. The mixture is put in jars and stored in a cool dark place for about six months. After this, if a clear (petal-free) cosmetic is required, the lanolin is gently melted and poured through a nylon sieve into a new container. The rose scented lanolin can be used as a base for many home made cosmetics. If you do not like (or cannot get) lanolin, you can use purified salt-free lard.

So there we are. I have only given a very brief outline here of the possibilities, but I hope I have shown that the old fashioned roses have more to offer than just as garden ornaments. Investigate. Experiment. Enjoy.

Your current Committee Members

Chairman:

Bruce Jones 866078

Vice Chairman:

Ted Dyer 872684

Secretary:

Jenny Sippings 865890

Treasurer:

John Powell 862734

Fiona Duck 874334

Patrick Stileman 874457

Brenda Baynes 865853

Angela Wheeldon 874440

John Driver 878640

Billy Wall

Tenancy Changes

IN

Lesley & Ian Macdonald A41b

John Eaton A3b

Adam Smith N45

Barry Gavan N62

Dave Roberts N58

Mr Alexander N59

OUT

Richard Pollock A41b

Judith Stringer A3b

Anne Griffiths C3

John Hill N4

Lynne Bennett N30 & N31

Victoria Fox N40a

Paul Nuttall & Jennie Flower N42

Michael Barwise N58 & N59

Please note: The copy date for the next issue of the newsletter is 5th April 2006.

Dates for your Diary – Clearance Days

Saturday, 11th February. Meet at 10.00am on Sunnyside New for work to plot 46. Hot soup and snacks are provided and the aim is to work on the trees and the wide pathways. If you can only spare an hour or so, it would be much appreciated. The following clearance date is **Saturday 11th March.**

Fruit Trees

By John Driver

If you are contemplating planting some fruit trees on your allotment this winter then the recommended time to do this is November to March.

Trees you purchase will usually be 'bare rooted' and for the allotment a 'dwarf' or 'semi-dwarf root stock' would be ideal so your fruit trees do not take over your allotment.

The latest thinking on how best to plant your new tree is to dig a hole deep enough to take the root ball with the bottom of the hole well dug & broken down. Make sure the planting hole is fairly generous in size and 'square' in shape – which allows the roots as they develop to break out towards the four corners.

Also, do not add any manure or other fertilisers into the planting area as this inhibits the natural growth of the root system and forces the roots to go looking for it's own nutrients and moisture, which in the long term this will give you a healthier tree.

After planting the tree 'upright' back fill with the soil you removed and firm the ground all around with your foot, then finish off with a good surface mulch of 'Chipped bark/wood Chippings or similar to conserve moisture.

Finally, it is a good idea to implant a stake offset from the tree and then

to nail onto this stake some form of circular fencing material (chicken wire is ideal) sufficient to keep deer and rabbits away from the new tree trunk until it has established itself.

During the first year or so it is important to ensure you keep the tree well watered in the very hot dry summer months (usually June to September).

If you are looking locally for Cherry, Plums, Apples & Pear trees then the following places have a good range of varieties and represent good value for money:-

- Homebase Store at Apsley near HH - Price £9.99 each

- Batchelor Brothers Nursery (sign posted from the far end of Northchurch) - Price £13.50 each (wider range than Homebase and better tree quality in my view)

- Chicken Wire is available locally from Mannings at Hog Lane, Ashley Green - Price of 50mtr roll (1mtr high x 3cm holes) - £44 (88p/mtr)

If anyone else has information on other 'Good value for money Suppliers' of 'Fruit Trees' or 'Other allotment Materials and Plant Stock' then perhaps they'd let me know.

John Driver (Tel: 01442-862734 & e-mail jdriver@dsigns.freeseve.co.uk)

Please Note: To offset rising printing costs, an electronic version of future editions of the newsletter will be sent to all those people that supply an email address to Jenny Sippings – (jenny.sippings@ntlworld.com).

If you were unable to attend the AGM, then subs can be sent with this slip to either John Powell, 20 Castle Hill Avenue, or Jenny sippings, 82 George Street or put into the post box on the tea hut on B15. (Cheques payable to SAS please).

Name

Address

Plot Number Telephone

Amount enclosed cash/cheque (please circle)