



SUNNYSIDE ALLOTMENT SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

1/2007

We are well into the new gardening year by now and hopefully the worst of the winter is behind us. We may have been hindered by rain and wind, but certainly not by cold. As we look forward to new plans for our plots, or to experimenting with new varieties of vegetables, so our society looks to the future. We have a new Chairman, Angela Wheeldon, elected at the AGM in November and for the first time we are starting the year with a waiting list of prospective tenants instead of empty plots. It is very exciting to know that we are keeping up with the national trend of renewed interest in the cultivation and consumption of organic produce.

You will read how Angela is planning ahead and continuing the work of Bruce Jones our former Chairman.

As we have quite a few new tenants who are taking on plots for the first time, there are in this issue and the next, some very useful gardening hints, written by Clive Smith. You can also find his article, *Breaking New Ground*, on our website, which is well worth a visit. Perhaps some of you are also hoping to gain more tips when Gardeners Question Time visits Berkhamsted on 26th. February.

The year is starting well and looks promising.

Report on the Annual General Meeting Saturday 25th November 2006

The meeting, held at Sunnyside Rural Trust was well attended, in spite of coinciding with a deluge of rain! The retiring Chairman, Bruce Jones gave a detailed account of his activities on our behalf, working with Berkhamsted Town Council. He reported on good relations, with the Council and the acceptance of a detailed allotment strategy, which had been his aim. He was pleased to announce that all plots had been taken and there was now a waiting list. He believed that the profile of allotments had been raised in this area by all the different activities throughout the year like the Open Day, being present at the Lions fete, and the Pot to Plate event at Ashridge. He went on to thank Angela & Jenny for all their work in organising these events and Ted for his ever ready help throughout the year.

Angela Wheeldon was elected Chairman, Prue Schofield and Anna Dolan kindly volunteered to be on the committee and were duly elected.

The Treasurer, John Powell reported that the finances were in a healthy state, but hoped that all subscriptions would be soon paid.

A presentation was made to Bruce on behalf of the society. He was sincerely thanked by Angela for his enthusiastic commitment and he and Liz were given our best wishes for their new life in Wales.

Right: Some of the 3rd February working party in action on a lovely sunny, crisp day!

Working party on 6th January

A few hardy souls braved the rain to work in Birtchnell's Copse under the direction of the warden, Patrick Stileman and two new oaks were planted to replace an oak and an ash which hadn't survived. Some sycamores were re-coppiced to let in more light (and to provide bean poles).

Half the hazels in the Jubilee Coppice had their first cut. These have done really well and it was amazing to see catkins full of pollen so early in January. Last year we gave this area a really thick mulch of wood chip and it did a good job in keeping the weeds down and the soil moist underneath. The plan was for the working party to do this, but by this stage we were all so wet that we chickened out!. But it does still need to be done, so if all of you on Sunnyside New could barrow and spread a few loads of woodchip before the weeds start to grow, it would be very helpful. (It's really good warming exercise on a frosty morning when you can't get on with the digging!)

PS. The next Working Party date is Saturday 3rd March, from 10am onwards, with light lunch provided.



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).

Future events

Monday 26th February

Berkhamsted Gardeners' Society is hosting a recording of Gardeners' Question Time in the Civic Centre and as a result of contacts we have had with them, they have invited us to take part too. You should have already received details about this.

Sunday 25th March

A date for your diary. – Tenants from Tring Allotment Association have been invited to visit us to see how we do things here. It should be a good opportunity to exchange tips and ideas. Please contact Angela Wheeldon or Jenny Sippings if you would like to help show the visitors round the site.

Points from the AMT meeting of 10th January

Rabbits: As the rabbit problem is proving so difficult to resolve, we suggested that the Council should try to negotiate a discount with a local company for allotment holders who feel the need to purchase rabbit netting for all, or vulnerable parts of their plots. Apparently tenants had to net their plots in the 1970s.

G.& M.B. Mannings of Hog Lane, Ashley Green (phone: 01442 866264) can offer us a 10% discount if we collect, or a 5% discount if they deliver. They recommend 31mm wire type mesh rabbit netting. A 50m x 1.05m roll is £38.64. They recommend 1.65m stakes at £1.53 each, installed at 2.4m to 3m centres, or less if you want to avoid straining wire. Simply tell them that you are a member of Sunnyside Allotment Society to qualify for the discount. It might be practical to share an order with a neighbouring tenant.

Another bit of rabbit news – we have recently seen several rabbits on site with myxomatosis. Not nice for the rabbits but this may be a partial solution to the problem.

As part of the process of implementing the allotment strategy, the AMT decided to prioritise site infrastructure and boundaries. Members of the committee will be working with the Town Warden to map properly the boundaries & note their type, condition etc so that a rolling programme of



Above: There was plenty of sunshine for the annual Christmas drinks afternoon back in December.

work can be planned.

We will also be doing a survey of the water supply pipes, tanks etc on both parts of the site. Because the metal pipes are in a bad state of repair, we will be putting forward proposals to lay a new configuration of pipes which would give us better control in the event of leaks. If this work is approved, a mini digger will be used for the hard work of digging the trench and our plumber will fit the stopcocks etc. This will probably be done in November and we will be looking for an enthusiastic gang to lay the pipe and backfill!

In the meantime, we do have a leak which neither we nor Three Valleys Water have been able to locate. The water pipes run along 'A' road and under Ivy House Lane to the 2 tanks on the lower roadway. On SSO the pipe runs from 'A' road up between plots A16/A18 and B15/B17, along 'B' road and up to 'C' road between plots B26/B28 and plots C29/C31. Once the ground has dried up a bit, please let us know if you come across an unusually damp patch in the vicinity of a water pipe.

Uncultivated gardens

We make no apology for returning to this topic yet again. We are now full and are operating a waiting list. The Council is unwilling to consider reinstating any plots which they have temporarily removed from allotment land until all our tenanted plots are cultivated in accordance with our tenancy agreements ie tenants

should "keep the whole allotment garden...clean and in a good state of cultivation and fertility and in good condition." We no longer have the luxury of part-cultivated plots when we have prospective tenants keen to start gardening.

This does not mean that we want a manicured site – far from it. One of the delights of Sunnyside Allotments is its natural almost rural nature, with its areas designed to encourage biodiversity as an aid to environmentally friendly gardening. But a good state of cultivation must be demonstrated too. In light of the current situation, we would ask tenants to consider whether they could manage better with a smaller area to cultivate.

Members of the committee have been charged with making an overall inspection in March/April.

Winter job

Plot numbers seem to be missing from some gardens. Please make sure that your plot number is visible from the roadway. It helps the committee when giving directions and putting up signs for events, and it helps new tenants to orientate themselves. Indulge your creative talents.

Tenancy Changes

Welcome to:

Steve Massey	A4
Grace Phipps	A6A
Adam Driver	A6B

Goodbye to

Amanda Montague	A4A
Bruce & Liz Jones	A4B, A6



Obituary Notice

We are very sad to tell you that Clara, the last of the Black Rock hens, died on the shortest day of last year, 21st. December. She was put to bed by Angela as usual but literally fell of her perch. She was lively until her last waking moments and will be missed by all of us who have enjoyed seeing her over the last seven years. She had a very happy life and was very well cared for, to the end.

Seasonal Recipes

LEEK, ONION AND POTATO SOUP

4 large leeks
1 medium onion (peeled and chopped small)
2 medium potatoes (peeled and diced)
2 oz butter
1½ pints hot vegetable stock
½ pint milk
salt and pepper
1½ tbsp snipped fresh chives or chopped parsley
2 tbsp cream or crème fraîche



Trim and clean the leeks. Cut in half lengthways and slice them quite finely.

In a large, thick-based saucepan, gently melt the butter, then add the leeks, onions and potatoes, stirring them so they are coated with the butter. Season with salt and pepper. Then cover and let the vegetables sweat over a low heat for about 15 minutes.

After that add the stock and milk, bring to simmering point, cover and let the soup simmer very gently for a further 15 minutes. Blend to a puree then re-heat and check the seasoning. Stir in the chives or parsley and add a swirl of cream or crème fraîche before serving.

PASTA WITH PURPLE SPROUTING BROCCOLI

Serves 2

½ lb dried pasta, such as rigatoni or fusilli
½ lb purple sprouting broccoli, washed
¼ lb dolcelatte cheese, broken into small pieces
juice and grated zest of 1 lemon
2 oz pine nuts, toasted
2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
freshly ground black pepper

Bring a very large pan of cold water to the boil and add a pinch of salt. Add the pasta to the pan and boil until just cooked.

Meanwhile, simmer the purple sprouting broccoli in a medium pan of boiling water for 4-5 minutes, until just tender.

Drain the pasta and purple sprouting broccoli and return both to the hot pasta pan along with the dolcelatte cheese, lemon juice and zest, pine nuts and olive oil. Season generously with black pepper, place over a low heat and toss together well. Spoon into serving bowls and eat at once, with a green salad.

STOP PRESS – ADVANCE NOTICE

Photographic Competition

There will be a Photographic Competition as well as our Scarecrow competition this summer for our Open day. More details will follow in the next newsletter, but in the meantime you may want to dust off your camera and start capturing the sights at Sunnyside. Up to 4 pictures can be submitted and we would like to use a selection of the submissions in our calendar next year, so it will be preferable to have digital files as well as prints for display. Start looking for those special views!

Your current Committee Members

Chairman :

Angela Wheeldon 874440

Vice Chairman:

Ted Dyer 872684

Secretary :

Jenny Sippings 865890

Treasurer :

John Powell 878640

Fiona Duck 874334

Patrick Stileman 874457

Brenda Baynes 865853

John Driver 862734

Billy Wall 871425

Anna Dolan 870918

Prue Schofield 878559

Breaking new ground – or how to turn a ‘forgotten jungle’ into a ‘cultivated allotment plot’ Part One

There comes a time when we allotment gardeners have to bite the bullet – and break new ground, or rather break old ground that is either turf, a mixture of turf and a few interesting perennial tap-rooted weeds or a nightmare vision of the former, plus bumpy ground, old fruit bushes and the inevitable brambles.

Unfortunately, this is often at the start of our tenancy and with little if any allotment gardening experience to fall back on. Inheriting a plot that has long since ‘lost it’ is the norm rather than the exception; fertile soil and the wet but temperate British climate being ideal for nature to run riot in a couple of years or less - when left unchecked.

It is thus the fortunate few who inherit a perfectly cultivated allotment plot – and even they sometimes don’t always realise quite how ‘stuck-in’ they must get, to stem the tide of mother nature, creating not only a plot to be proud of, but one that will grow good crops, whether that be vegetables, fruit, or as is traditional - a combination of the two.

Times have changed in allotment gardening; with a more varied approach to the use one might make (within the tenancy agreement) of the ‘resource’ that is 10 poles, 1/16 acre or about 2,727 sq. ft of prime land. The bottom line remains though, that of producing edible produce! To this end, here are some ideas, general rules and practical help on ‘breaking new ground’ as well as becoming an allotment gardener.

Decide on a style of garden

Take time to save time (too few do!). Walk around and up and down the paths of a wide range of plots, looking at the way others have attacked the problem. From traditional ‘dug-all-over’ (for maximum and efficient vegetable crop production), ‘deep-beds with gravel paths’ to small dedicated areas of veg., herbs, flowers, fruit bushes and trees – there are many styles.

Decide on the style of garden you are aiming at. Traditionally, allotment plots are ‘dug-all-over’ with few if any cross paths, and often have a row or two of raspberries and fruit bushes near one end with rhubarb (and perhaps horseradish) always in one corner. This is not by accident, as once fully cultivated this type of plot is relatively low-maintenance – possibly surviving with just one annual dig. There would be little wasted space – as little as 50 years

ago, all plots were tenanted, newcomers might be given the worst and have to earn their stripes and a working man might only be able to keep his family fed properly by becoming expert at using that space as efficiently as possible!

Think wind, think rain and drainage, but most importantly think light and shade – vegetable and some fruit crops need light! Soft fruit bushes and canes might be positioned mid-plot to act as windbreaks for instance, but with rotation, each year they might shade an adjacent crop, preventing it drying out when overly wet or happily shielding it from wind.

Then consider your options. Do you have a shed, plan for a greenhouse or cold frame? If so, decide their positions (glass is best kept well away from public paths) and when you plan to tackle them. Likewise, consider an area for a compost heap or proper New Zealand bins – or at least a staging post for manure deliveries next to the best access road or path – 50 to 100 sq. ft is an average allowance, don’t skimp unless you really need every square foot for growing).

Existing fruit bushes, trees and canes

First consider cutting down unwanted fruit bushes, brambles, raspberry canes and any small trees. It’s always worth getting an opinion on fruit bushes or trees before removing them as although they may look quite poor and neglected, if you like their fruit, very often a good pruning and root area dig-over can revive them to produce excellent fruit again within one season. Alternatively, if you decide to rearrange or move currants, cuttings can be taken (some don’t like being moved e.g. gooseberries). Plan to move raspberry canes (suckers) at the right time of year (Jan, Feb, pref. during wet weather) into a single or double row (prepare a well-composted trench in advance). Take advice on blackberries, these are generally very nice to have at one end of a plot (under control) but not in the middle or edges! Finally, if in doubt about what is on your plot, even under a veritable forest, find someone knowledgeable to ask – valuable specimens might just be awaiting your arrival and their revival!

How much do you aim to tackle in the first season?

If the plot is wild and grassy, full of deep-rooted perennial weeds (e.g. large dock and thistles), decide how much you are likely to be able to dig and clean in one season – be circumspect! It’s certainly not a big problem to kick-off by cutting down and tidying grassy or rough areas, leaving until the next year or for wintertime, when cultivating, planting, watering and cropping are not the main criteria.

The beginning of the allotment season is reckoned to be Feb 1st (broad beans), but to get at least a reasonable range of crops in, aim to have a decent area dug over, cleaned and cultivated ready for planting not much later than a late Easter.

More to follow in the next issue....

Society subs (£2.00) for 2007 are now due. They can be sent with this slip to John Powell, 20 Castle Hill Ave, Berkhamsted or put into the post box on the tea hut on B15. (Cheques payable to SAS please).

Name _____

Address _____

Plot Number _____

Amount enclosed _____

cash/cheque (please circle)