

SUNNYSIDE ALLOTMENT SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

2/2003

This year's gardening and planting has begun in earnest. The prolonged spring sunshine has been ideal for last minute digging, and sowing early crops. A walk round Sunnyside will show we are following the current trend for taking up allotments. Suddenly it is becoming a popular activity for families, with young children, as well as those who are retired. It is very good to report, therefore, that Sunnyside Old has only one and a half plots remaining and we hope these may be taken up very soon. There are thirty unclaimed on Sunnyside New, but there are environmental plans for this area, which you will read about on the following pages.

Allotment gardens have been a familiar feature of the British landscape for over two hundred years. They had their origins in self-help, which has always been and still is, their motive. The land designated for this purpose was usually land which could not find a more profitable use. It was not chosen for its horticultural potential! Sites were often close to railways, as old railway companies, with their large holdings of land, were second only to local authorities, as providers of allotment sites. Sunnyside, however, came from Lord Brownlow's estate. It was offered to the Local Council for purchase on his death in 1925, having been used for several years before that, with his permission. 1908 had seen the Small Holdings and Allotments Act which became the basis of the modern responsibility of Local Councils to provide allotments. By 1910, the Allotment Committee was meeting in Berkhamsted, and the minutes of these meetings can be seen at the Heritage Centre. Among the items on the agenda, the size and assortments of sheds were frequently discussed and their erection without permission was a cause for concern even then!

By chance, Geoff Giles has just done some research and found that on the Hungerhill Garden Allotments in Nottingham, a late 19th century shed has been listed as a Grade II building. He comments "Should we get the tea hut listed?" Allotments are such a fascinating part of social history, but I had better give up research and get on with the gardening!

KIT OWENS

It is with sorrow that we have to announce the death in Florida of Kit Owens on 31st March, and our sympathy goes to Moyra in her loss. Kit was a familiar figure on his allotment, usually stripped to the waist showing off his tan. He was an excellent conversationalist and you could be sure of an interesting and wide ranging discussion of events of the moment over a cup of tea when Kit was about. But he also valued the peace and tranquillity of Sunnyside, and he appreciated and felt closer to the changing seasons as he tended his plot. He will be greatly missed. A memorial service will be arranged when Moyra gets back from America.



Left: Kit chatting to Peter Phizackerly over a cup of tea.

NEW PARTNERSHIP

A partnership has been formed between the Town Council, Sunnyside Allotment Society (SAS), Sunnyside Rural Trust (SRT) and Countryside Management Services (CMS) to manage jointly the Eastern side of Sunnyside New to the benefit of all of us. It is a long-term project which should result in the area looking much more cared for. Active management of the site will hopefully make it less desirable to developers. A 30 foot wide strip adjacent to the Eastern boundary will be allowed to develop as a natural habitat. Together with a South-facing wildflower meadow, attracting bees and butterflies, this should result in a valuable ecologically sustainable habitat where all forms of wildlife can flourish. Importantly the provision of an orchard (maintained by SRT clients as part of their horticultural training) and the planting of different kinds of willows for hurdles and other garden structures continues the allotment tradition of productive use of the land. CMS are providing environmental guidance and practical help, and are applying for grants. Their projects have to meet certain criteria; the educational and public access elements can be fulfilled by school visits and special events. The environmental aspects will be met by enhancing the viability and biodiversity of the site.

OPEN DAYS

Saturday 28th June (followed by the Barbecue)
and Saturday 27th September

There is a preliminary plan on display in the Tea Hut but the precise shape and location of the wildflower meadow and the extent of the willow area are still to be finalised. We will be involved in the planning and planting of the meadow and the annual cut will be financed from the Environment Committee budget (not the Allotment budget). The first joint event took place at the end of March, when SRT clients, CMS Conservation Volunteers and SAS members combined to clear rubbish and scrub. The next stage will be clearance of the area leased to SRT as preparation for the orchard. This work will also benefit SSN ploholders as surplus soil will be used to widen the central roadway, which will allow the tractor to deliver muck to a point between the top and bottom plots. As the project progresses there will be more opportunities for SAS members to be involved.

Volunteers will be needed to help plant the orchard trees and the indigenous shrubs surrounding them, planting the willows and of course the wild flowers. When dates are known far enough in advance, they will be publicised in the Newsletter; otherwise they will be displayed on the allotment noticeboards. We have set up a small group of people keen to be involved in the project; if you are interested in joining in please contact Angela Wheeldon at the Tea Hut.

RUBBISH CLEARANCE

Over the last few years we have been very successful in improving the appearance of our sites by getting rid of unwanted plastic, glass, and scrap metal. Unfortunately it has become more difficult to arrange for their removal without incurring a charge. Therefore we have decided that once the existing rubbish pile on Sunnyside Old has been removed, tenants will have to arrange for their own rubbish removal making use of the civic amenity tips.

TOILET FACILITIES

The Society has prepared a submission to the Town Council for funds to build a toilet on Sunnyside Old on Plot A15 for the use of tenants. So far the Council's F&P Committee has recommended the expenditure of £1105 on this project, but it still requires approval by the full Town Council. It has not been established whether Thames Water will make the connection to the main sewer or whether we will do it ourselves, but the Town Council are clarifying the position. Planning permission may also be required and if so may take sometime to finalise.

In the meantime Sunnyside Rural Trust has no objection to tenants using their toilet facilities whilst the training Centre is open (between 8.30am and 3.00 pm Monday to Friday).

GARDENERS CLIPPINGS

Is there anyone interested in being a 'watering monitor' on our plot when we are on our annual holiday in the summer, in return for half a case of french wine? If so, please call Fiona on 874334 for details.

GARDEN TOOLS

Lionel Batchelor has decided the time has come to give up his allotment – after nearly 66 years. He will still be growing a few veg in his garden, but as he won't need all his tools he has given them too the Society to dispose of. Please ask at the Tea Hut if you are interested; we suggest £1.00 per tool to go into Society funds.

RAILWAY MODERNISATION

Once again railway contractors are seeking access to Sunnyside New Allotments to erect a signal gantry later this year. The works will involve the occupation of plots 1,2 and 3 on Sunnyside New for a period of 6 months. The Town Council are currently in negotiations with Network Rail's contractor about the fee for access to the site.

In brief the works will involve the removal of the top soil on all three plots with a bund being formed on Plot 3. A membrane will be put down and covered by rubble and stone to form a working area which will be fenced off. On completion of the works the land will be restored ready for use as allotments.

A large crane will be needed on site and the gateway will be widened to six metres. We will, therefore, end up with a gateway much larger than at present.

DATES TO REMEMBER

Tool Marking Weekends

Bring your tools to be marked with the Neighbourhood Watch equipment which will be available in the Tea Hut on 10th & 11th May and 17th& 18th May from 10am to 6pm. Arrangements will be made for the equipment to be taken over to Sunnyside New.

Open day and Barbeque – Saturday 28th June

Open and Harvest Day – Saturday 27th September

Any donations of produce will be gratefully received, for sale on these days as visitors like to be able to buy fresh produce.

The barbeque will take place in the early evening of the first Open Day and follow a similar format to previous years. All allotment holders and their friends and families are welcome to come along – bring you own food to barbeque and something to wash it down with! Harvest day is in response to several suggestions that we should show the allotments bursting with flowers and vegetables.

Sunday 4th May

Peter Block's beautiful garden at 22 Hall Park Gate is again open from 2-6pm, in aid of local charities.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

The Treasurer would be happy to receive any more subscriptions to Sunnyside Allotment Society. Remember, if you are a paid up member (£2.00 per annum), you can take advantage of the seed scheme and save money.

TREE PLANTING IN MEMORY OF KEN HARBORD

On the 8th March, an oak tree was planted in Ken's memory in the presence of his daughter and son-in-law. In addition Patrick planted two ash trees for Ken at the request of his daughter Patricia and son Peter. Patrick has also arranged that there is a cherry log to sit on at the site of Ken's trees.



The tree planting with Ted and Patrick watched by Ken's daughter and her husband.

