



SUNNYSIDE ALLOTMENT SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

3/2004

Once again it has been a busy and active season. Long spells of dry weather have been a mixed blessing, but most plots are showing good results, and the pleasure of picking and eating one's own fresh vegetables and fruit is the highlight of the year.

Our Open Day on 26th June was a great success in spite of grey clouds and threatening rain. Local artists have discovered the attraction and beauty of Sunnyside and are holding an exhibition of their work on Saturday 14th August, in National Allotments Week. By popular demand, we are holding another Open Day on 18th September which we hope will be well supported. All these extra activities represent much energy and enthusiasm not only for gardening but all its fringe benefits!

Another treasured aspect of Sunnyside is its wildlife and in this newsletter Jane Dickenson reports on the activity of her bees. She has updated us with the news about the bees she found in her shed last year and tells us how she has encouraged their increase in numbers. We should note her plea to grow a few flowers to support their presence.

Allotment Strategy and Proposed Rent Increases

Bruce Jones and Angela Wheeldon, our representatives on the Allotment Management Team have been working hard on our behalf to obtain a strategy for taking allotments forward and dealing with matters such as the proposed rent increase. We have all received a letter setting out your committee's opinion on the Council's proposals. Here are Bruce's comments on the situation:-

Allotment Strategy – note from the Chairman of SAS

The Berkhamsted Town Council have decided not to proceed with the proposal for delegating the management of the allotments to an organisation composed of representatives of the allotment tenants. Instead they intend to consider –

- a) The membership of the Councils Allotment Management Team
- b) The Terms of Reference of the Allotment Management Team
- c) Strategic Policy for the management of Allotments

The Sunnyside Allotment Society considers that the Strategic Policy should include the following:

- The Council to adopt the 'Good Practice Guide for the Management of Allotments', and, subject to any special local circumstances, resources, etc., follow its recommendations.
- That public consultation is undertaken for the creation of a 'vision' of how the allotments can be taken forward to the benefit of the tenants and the community at large.
- That there be a plan to bring the vision to reality.
- That there be active promotion of vacant allotments to achieve high occupancy levels and good, environmentally sustainable gardening practice on all allotment sites.

- Any vacant allotment plots (after active promotion) are temporarily used for purposes that are complimentary, and do not prejudice their early return to allotment garden use when required.

(As we go to press, we have heard that the proposed new rate is likely to be £1.30 per pole, with an increased charge for water).

Rod, Pole or Perch

Here is some information on a lighter note! We know our plots are measured in poles. Rod, pole or perch, they are all the same, five and a half yards long. A rod is an old land measurement, the distance required to turn a team of oxen pulling a plough. The pole is the long whip the ploughman carried, exactly one rod in length. Perch is from the Norman French perch, meaning pole. This interesting information was in an article by Peter Quillian in Allotment magazine.

Open Day & Barbeque

In spite of inclement weather, these were well attended by the public and allotment holders. There was plenty of interest and admire. The tours over Old and New sites were popular and the children loved their pot painting sessions which were kindly organised by Freda Earl. Refreshments were offered on both sites and homemade produce was very popular.

Such a day takes much organisation and preparation and we must thank Angela, Jenny and Fiona for all their hard work. The sites were looking at their best and this does not happen without extra strimming and grass cutting by Ted and his helpers. In the evening about thirty of us enjoyed a jolly barbeque until the rain came down! We thank Patrick, Daniel, David and Peter for providing food



and entertainment – as always, we are grateful to Sunnyside Rural Trust for lending their premises.

Angela writes her first hand account below.

Open Day – June 2004

Our first wet Open Day; the heavens opened onto the cakes at 11am! But a few hardy souls braved the elements and came for coffee – they must have been gardeners! By lunchtime a good number of visitors had been. Each of our guided tours attracted a few takers; some added to the numbers en route, one mysteriously lost some.

We had several expressions of interest in taking on plots, at least one of which has resulted in action. We had many appreciative comments about the tranquil rural nature of Sunnyside, away from the noise and bustle of the town and it is important that we continue to give local residents opportunities such as this to share the site with us.

Freda Earl's flower pot painting activities (our horticultural equivalent of face painting) kept many small children happily absorbed and we hope to repeat this in September. We didn't manage to find a volunteer to organise a scarecrow competition this year but we hope to hold one next June, so start planning!

Our thanks to everyone who contributed cakes, produce and as importantly, their time both beforehand and on the day itself. In spite of the uncertain weather we made about £200 for Society funds.

Due to popular demand at the last AGM we will be putting on an

Autumn Open Day on **Saturday 18th September** so we will be calling on people who volunteered to help.

The Committee would be pleased to hear from anyone else who now feels they can contribute, and we would appreciate any useful feedback and ideas from tenants to improve open days.

'Art in the Garden' & National Allotments Week

We were pleased to welcome groups of artists onto Sunnyside during June. Local art tutor Sarah Moruzzi arranged to bring students from some of her classes to paint outdoors. They felt spoilt for choice with subjects to paint – the views over the town, vibrant colours of the flowers, old sheds, rusty wheelbarrows; an artistic feast. An exhibition of their work was arranged in the SRT Training Centre on Sunnyside on August 14th, to coincide with National Allotment Week.

This year marks, I think, the 2nd National Allotments Week. Last year Monty Don marked it with a whole Gardener's World programme on allotment gardening (Committee members have videos). This year various allotments are using it to celebrate and publicise the joys and benefits of allotment gardening.

The Town Council devoted their Saturday Market stall on 7th June to publicising Berkhamsteds' Allotments and local residents were encouraged to visit a site near them during the week.

Railway Works Sunnyside New

Balfour Beatty's licence agreement covering Plots 1,2 &3 on Sunnyside New is coming to it's end. The Company have produced a statement detailing the works to be undertaken in the near future following discussions with the Town Council, following which agreement is required.

As yet no date has been determined but is likely to be in the next few weeks, so tenants on the New site will need to take care during the works, which will include:-

1. Removal of the hardcore on plots 1, 2 & 3.
2. Widening of the middle roadway.
3. Works to the car park.
4. New wooden main and wicket gates.
5. Restoration of the hedge.
6. Return of the top soil to plots 1-3.

Recipe Reminders

Do you have a favourite or unusual recipe for any of the crops you grow? Our Calendar this year is going to feature seasonal recipes. As well as the usual, we hope perhaps to include recipes for preserves, salad dressings & pesto, soups and what about preserving & cooking with lavender?

Recipes together with any digital photos of the crops can be sent to Jenny Sippings (82 George St. or jenny@sunnysideallotments.org.uk) or to the Tea Hut on B15 by **end of August** please. Any recipes which are not included in the Calendar will be posted on the web site.



Far left: The children were kept busy painting pots at the open day.

Left: Artists capture the colour and diversity of the allotments.

Sunnyside Church Car Park

Works to the roadway are expected to take place during August and the Reverend David Abbott is to inform us of the start date.

Book Reviews

If you wanted to buy a small present, look for *Allotment Folk* by Chris Opperman. It has some amusing descriptions of allotment holders all over the country, with some excellent black and white photos.

Jane Dickenson writes about a book which has interested her.

The Allotment, Its Landscape and Culture

By David Crouch and Colin Ward
(ISBN 0-907123-91-0 Five Leaves)

I've had this book for a year or so now, but it was first published in 1988. It has been updated since then as quite a lot has changed in the last few years in the world of allotments.

Just how much it has changed can be glimpsed if you go to the 'Art of the Garden' exhibition at Tate Britain, where one of the exhibits was a cabinet of humorous postcards telling of progress on the artist's allotment. Yes, allotments appear to

be trendy. The Tate shop was selling copies of this book.

Everybody who has an allotment should read this. It documents the history of the allotment from its original creation as an answer to rural poverty after the enclosures, and as part of the cultivation of crops for sale which took place on the edges of towns from medieval times onwards. The start of the allotment in its current form probably dates from the early nineteenth century, with the creation of gardens on the edge of town as retreats for the urban middle classes (like the famous Guinea Gardens) alongside urban allotments created for labourers working in the city, to enable them to supplement their wages. By the end of the century, demographics meant that allotments had become more an urban than a rural phenomenon.

The boom time was the First World War. At the beginning of 1913 it was estimated that there were between 450,000 and 600,000 allotments; by the end of that year it was closer to 1,500,000. The government's campaign to get people to grow their own food during the war introduced a huge number of people to gardening and vegetable-growing, and they carried on after

the war. Many allotment sites owe their existence to the First World War. 'Dig for Victory' during the Second World War actually increased the allotment acreage, but it was downhill from then on. Pressure on land use around cities after the war reduced the number of sites, and people began to see allotments as antiquated and associated with poverty. Since the 1960s though, we've seen an allotment renaissance and this book really documents what having an allotment means to people today. The authors show us all sorts of people who have allotments, what they personally get out of it, and something about the history of various sites round the country - it's fascinating.

Your Committee Members

Bruce Jones	<i>Chair</i>	866078
Ted Dyer	<i>Vice Chair</i>	872684
Jenny Sippings	<i>Secretary</i>	865890
Daniel Bartlett	<i>Treasurer</i>	877109
Brenda Baynes	<i>Editor</i>	865853
Fiona Duck		874334
Graham Hall		873408
Patrick Stileman		874457
Clive Weakley		875373
Angela Wheeldon		874440

Bee update

by Jane Dickenson



On my shed I've now got four mason bee nesters. Last year, when I put up the most recent one I thought I might be overdoing it. How many mason bees can one site hold? The third nester was a 'freebie' in return for sending some occupied tubes back to the Oxford Bee Company. About 20 tubes were filled the previous year, which I duly sent off, receiving empty ones in return. So with the arrival of the fourth nester I had pretty well two unoccupied nesters and two occupied this spring.

Obviously I shouldn't have worried about the demand. From April to the beginning of March, the air round the nesters was busy with bees zooming in and out of the tubes. With the old nesters, it wasn't clear whether the bees were emerging from their larval state or arriving to lay their eggs, or combining the two! Either way, the activity was constant.

The nesters are designed for red mason bees. They look like small honey bees, and they were certainly the most numerous. However there were other smaller bees tootling in and out of the gaps between the tubes, creating their nests. These were another variety of mason bee – possibly

the blue mason bee, for which you can also buy special nesters. This will make things a little awkward come the autumn, as it is suggested that the tubes are removed and put inside a shed when the weather gets very cold. I will just have to leave them in situ and put some fleece round them instead.

I now have four full nesters, and I'm thrilled to bits by the fact that they 'worked'! Given the number of bees I saw, I probably could have filled several more nesters. I would recommend anybody at the site to get one, as there is obviously latent demand! If my shed were larger, I would site the nesters higher up, as they are about head height, and while I never felt threatened by the bees, even when there was a lot of activity, and I was certainly never stung, you had to be careful not to shut any in the shed when you closed the door! When you put up your nester, there might not be many bees the first year, or they might not appear until the end of May, as they seem to take some time to 'find' a new site, but they will turn up.

The bumble bee nest was an abject failure this year, but having seen similar ones built into walls or on pillars on the BBC's 'Wild about Britain' it may be a case of moving it round until I find a suitable spot. We certainly have no shortage of bumble bees at Sunnyside.

I hope people are finding room for a small patch of bee-friendly flowers on their plots, even if they don't want a nest or nester. They won't take up much space, they will brighten the plot up, and you'll be making bees happy!

Don't forget – Autumn Open day, 18th September
helpers needed, please contact Angela or Jenny.