



Chairman's Chatter

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New Year - New challenge

The interest in grow-your-own is stronger than ever and many sites have a waiting lists including ours. A survey in carried out in 2013 by the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners suggested that for every 100 allotment plots, 52 people were on waiting lists.

This suggests there is still a need for increasing the provision of allotments and indeed I go hedge laying with a chap in Bracknell who is currently setting up a new allotment site to provide allotments for the housing growth in his area. Much debate with other plot holders in the group about how large the allotments should be – a few larger ones or more smaller plots? Strangely, everyone thought that the size they currently have is about right!

Yet some allotments are battling against closure. Last November twenty four allotment holders at Farm Terrace allotments in Watford lost a case at the high court to defend their allotments from development. The land was wanted for a hospital extension and housing and after a battle that went all the way to the high court it was ruled that the development could go ahead.

As required under the Allotments act of 1925 replacement plots were provided however the financial compensation paid for the disruption will have been small comfort for the hard work and inconvenience caused to the plot holders who fought so hard to stay where they were on their much loved allotments.

Whilst the 1925 act provides safeguarding and a requirement to provide allotments this was updated in 2014 by a Government Department for Communities and Local Government guidance that said:

Councils cannot dispose of statutory allotment land without the Secretary of State's consent. Section 8 of the Allotments Act 1925 states – "Where a local authority has purchased or appropriated land for use as allotments the local authority shall not sell, appropriate, use or dispose of the land for any purpose other than use for allotments without the consent of the Secretary of State".

This consent "may be given unconditionally or subject to such conditions as the Secretary of State thinks fit, but shall not be given unless the Secretary of State is satisfied that adequate provision will be made for allotment holders displaced by the action of the local authority or that such provision is unnecessary or not reasonably practicable" (Section 8, The Allotments Act 1925 – hereafter referred to as "the Act").

This rather feels like a weakening of the protection to allotments in general.

I find this interesting when there is so much talk by the government and media of the need for us all to take more exercise to benefit our physical and mental health. Maybe I am naïve to expect that Government thinking might be joined up?

More locally Wargrave Parish Council is reviewing the way their allotments are run – they have published a draft strategy that they are consulting their parishioners on. The strategy can be found here <http://www.wargrave.org.uk/Files/WPC%20Allotment%20Strategy%20FINAL%20DRAFT.pdf>.

It is interesting to note that Wargrave do not have a waiting list for allotments, neither do Henley Town Council.

Chairman's Chatter

The Skip – a big thank you

The skip in December was, with a couple of exceptions, filled only with green waste. Thank you for your restraint and cooperation. In recognition of our collective improved waste management Earley Town Council have agreed to provide a green waste only skip at the end of the 2017 season.

New faces on the site?

We are all wary about security on the sites and I would ask that if you see someone you don't recognise just say a polite hello. It might be someone who should not be there or you might meet another plot holder just like you! It is also the time of year when new plot holders start and a friendly face would be welcoming for them – we were all new plot holders at some point.

On Saturday and Sunday mornings there may also be new faces coming to visit the trading shed. We have made contact with the allotment holders association in Woodley, as their site is just a mile from ours. Whilst there are many more allotments on the Woodley site, their Trading shed had to close a few years ago.

Their Chairman Scott is keen to get them the benefits of a Trading Shed like ours and several people have already been in and stocked up. They also have access to fruit bushes at very advantageous prices that will be available to us – more details later in the year.

Richard Tredgett

Plot 46

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HPHS Trading Shed

The trading shed has re-opened for the new season. Subscriptions will remain at £1.50 which is still the cheapest in the area and are now due for 2017. It is necessary to be a member of the society to comply with the Sunday Trading Act.

If you are sat by an open fire (or indeed a radiator or storage heater) planning this season's allotmenting then it might help to know that the shed has the usual great deals on seed potatoes, onion sets and shallots:

Seed potatoes – all £2.70 for three KGs:

Earlies: Pentland Javelin, Arran Pilot & Foremost

Main crop: King Edward, Majestic, Picasso, Desiree

Salad: Charlotte

Onion sets - £1.10 for 500 grams

Red Barron, Sturon, Stuttgarter & Turbo

Shallots -- £1.40 for 500 grams

Golden Gourmet & Pikant

Bulk seeds

We have various pea and bean seeds which sell loose by weight, and these show considerable savings on the price of packaged seeds.

Suttons and Fothergill's

Catalogues are available in the shed and seeds will be on sale as usual – choose this year's crops in the comfort of your own home.

Pop in and see the folks in the shed, buy your winter supplies and renew your membership.

Manure Supplies

I am sorry to report that the supply of manure from the University farm at Sonning has been temporarily suspended until later in the year. There was no explanation of why from Charlie. This is a blow because most people who had received a load were very satisfied with the quality and the price.

Therefore if anybody knows of an alternative supplier please share the good news.

Newsletter

I am very pleased to be involved with assembling the bi-monthly newsletter again. I am sure you will agree that Liz has done a great job over the last year and I hope to carry on the good work.

If you have any interesting article you would like to be included in the newsletter, my contact details are linda.pelling@ntlworld.com

Dates for the diary

HPHS AGM - Wednesday 19th April at 7.30, at the Parish Rooms, Radstock Lane Earley

Earley Green Fair - Saturday 5th August. EAA will be having a stall there.

EAA BBQ - Saturday 2nd September. Come and join this annual get together.

EAA AGM - November, actual date to be decided as we would like a representative of ETC to attend to announce the winners of the Best Allotment and most Improved Plot.

EAA Christmas meal - 7.30 for 8 Wednesday 6th December. Venue to be confirmed

Seasonal Tips - February/March

We get a glimpse of the early signs of the arrival of Spring this month. The soil begins to warm up around the middle of February. Never work the soil when it is too wet and sticky and clings in lumps to your boots. You do more harm than good by walking on it and working it when it is like that. And that applies also to sowing seeds, for seeds sown in cold, wet soil will rot instead of germinating, or they will make but poor growth.

Now is the time to start chitting your early seed potatoes. simply place them upright, with their 'eyes' or growth nodes in a light (not sunny), cool, but frost-free place, at about 10°C

Think about sowing a row of early, peas and broad beans using a hardy cultivar. Parsnip seeds can be germinated first on damp kitchen roll and then put in cardboard tubes (insides of toilet rolls) to grow on and then the tubes can be planted out.

Prepare a seed bed and sow 'White Lisbon' Spring onion, early short horn carrots, early types of lettuce.

February is the best month to plant out garlic and shallots. Plant using a trowel don't push the bulbs into the soil. Plant the garlic cloves about 2ins/5cms deep and leave the tips of the shallot bulbs just at the soil

surface. The birds will pull one or two out leaving them lying on the ground. Replant them as soon as possible the birds will quickly lose interest.

Pick overwintered crops because as soon as the weather improves, most will run to seed.

Top dress all of the fruit trees and soft fruit bushes with a general fertiliser at the recommended application rate. At the same time top dress the rest of the plot with a general fertiliser as land becomes available.

Prune late/autumn fruiting raspberries down as low as possible and mulch around them. Tip back summer fruiting back to around 6ft/1.9mts to encourage the development of fruiting side growths

Complete any outstanding winter pruning of soft fruit bushes cutting out down to soil level the older dark stemmed shoots of blackcurrants.

Now is a great time to start your dahlia tubers, on a window sill or in the greenhouse in the light and warmth of the sun which will help them to sprout prior to planting. They will need to be sprayed now and again to stop them drying out.

Leek, mushroom and goat's cheese strudels

This recipe from the BBC website uses up leeks that you may still have in the ground and are thinking need using up to free the ground for the new season. Richard has tested it and recommends it as tasty. If you use the appropriate goat's cheese it is vegetarian:

Makes 4 strudels

Ingredients

500g leeks, thinly sliced

150ml vegetable stock

175g chestnut mushroom, sliced

4 large sheets filo pastry

1 tbsp olive oil

85g soft-rinded goat's cheese or vegetarian alternative

1 tsp poppy seeds

Method

1. Heat oven to 200°C/180°C fan/gas 6. Put leeks and stock in a large pan, cover and cook for 5-8 mins until starting to soften. Add the mushrooms, cover and cook for 3 mins. Remove lid and continue to cook until the juices have evaporated. Tip on to a large plate and cool slightly.

2. For each strudel, lightly brush half of each filo sheet with olive oil. Fold the un-brushed side over to make a smaller sheet, 2 layers thick. Brush the edges with a little more oil. Then spoon a quarter of the veg along one edge. Crumble over a quarter of the cheese, fold over the pastry edges, then roll up to seal in the filling.
3. Put the strudels on a baking tray, brush with any remaining oil and scatter over the poppy seeds. Bake for 25 mins until crisp and brown.



Strange stone on Plot 46

Report by Kevin Hayward Building Materials Consultant, University of Reading and Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd, London.20

Part of a large (1metre x 60cm x 18cm) stone object from the allotment patch in Reading belonging to Mr & Mrs Tredgett was examined by Dr Kevin Hayward on Tuesday 2nd August 2016 to determine the material, geological source and if possible say something about its possible function or even age. The application of a sharp masons hammer and chisel ensured that the fresh fabric sample could be examined and if possible compared to a reference collection of geological samples.

Geological character

The stone was a light cream shelly limestone made of small broken oyster fragments. This biosparite was surprisingly hard and somewhat flaggy.

Geological source

Identical to examples of Purbeck limestone from the Upper Jurassic beds (Purbeckian) of the Isle of Purbeck coast Dorset.

The use of such a large piece of Purbeck limestone so far away from its geological source poses a number of questions 1) What is it doing in an allotment in Reading? 2) If it is worked what was it used for 3) From its source and shape can we say something about when it was used.

Other than its use in Roman villas as roofing tile (Hayward 2013), these hard slabby limestones were occasionally shaped into square 220mm x 220mm x 40mm pavers for use in medieval monasteries. The size of this block fits neither of these scenarios.

Far more probable given the vertical sided gabled shape is that this block forms part of a post medieval tombstone or just possibly a machine base to support some sort of industrial process.

Gravestones

The fashion for commemorating the dead with an inscribed and shaped upright tomb using a range of Dorset stones (Blue Lias, Portland stone, Purbeck limestone) took off during the 17th century. A recent survey of reused 17th century to early 18th century tombstone0. from St Mary Bethlehem or the lunatic asylum "Bedlam" East London (Hayward pers. Obs.) identified all three materials, with Purbeck limestones (often with gabled shape) particularly prevalent. Some 18th and 19th century tombstones from Oxford are carved from Purbeck limestone and some were identified in an 18th to early 19th century sailors grave yard at Greenwich (Hayward pers. Obs.) A sea route, from the quay at Swanage and hence up the Estuary and upstream along the Thames seems a likely route. It is possible however, that the later 19th century rail link from Swanage could have provided a more direct route to a burgeoning industrial and railway centre such as Reading, with a rapidly growing population and consequent need to bury more dead.

The site lies some 1 mile from the nearest churchyard but did form part of Palmer Park in the 19th century. Was this a private commemoration stone? It certainly is of 18th and 19th century date. It lay on top of some red post medieval brick fragments Was there a monumental mason nearby?

Machine Base

The possibility that these robust materials are 19th century machine bases to support large equipment during manufacture also need to be considered. They have been identified for this purpose.

Recommendation

The block needs to be levered over on its underside to determine whether or not there is any lettering and I would strongly suggest that some early maps of this part of Reading are consulted to see whether there are any indications of manufacturing buildings, monumental masons or even grave yards?

Secretary Wanted

Maybe spending a morning in the Trading Shed chatting to people and selling them stuff for their allotment is not your thing (although if it is please speak to Liz Atkinson on plot 35 or email her on lizatkinson28.8@btinternet.com).

The H&P Trading Shed needs a new secretary. In the last year the sum total of the duties were to attend the AGM and take notes and then write them up and pass them to the Chairman. It is not expected that the duties will be much more going forward.

If you think this is something you could do to help keep the trading shed going please speak to John Snow in the shed, Brian Hackett, the current secretary or Richard Tredgett.

This year's H&P Trading shed AGM is on Wednesday 19th April at 19:30 in the Parish room, Earley Community Centre, Radstock Lane, Earley.