

NEWSLETTER

GUILDFORD ALLOTMENTS SOCIETY
AUTUMN/WINTER 2010

It was a beautiful, warm summer, Saturday morning when members of the committee arrived at Merrow Village Hall to set up tables and hang the bunting and balloons, ready to take the entries from exhibitors for the Guildford Allotments Society first ever show. By 10.30 am, very few entries had arrived and these were largely by veteran exhibitors. They looked very good flowers and vegetables but the committee had hoped newcomers would also compete, and sure enough, in the following half an hour, they did! A total of about eighty exhibits were judged after 11am, largely by committee member Chris Short, before the doors opened again at 1 o'clock for all to see the produce, check out the stalls before enjoying jazz, tea and a talk on composting.

Secrett's garden centre sold their own vegetables and fruit alongside the exhibits! They also generously helped sponsor the prizes and donated three magnificent boxes and trugs of their produce for a raffle for breast cancer awareness. Clandon Park garden centre also contributed a plant for a raffle.



Hall decorated and produce displays being prepared, ready for the judging, before doors opened at 1pm

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

We allotment tenants are food producers on a small scale but we are aware that growing food is not something easily accomplished. This year we were forcibly reminded of the effects of the weather when we had the longest dry spell for 50 years. Crops were barely kept alive by constant watering. Yields were either well down or non-existent. No crops really started to thrive until we had some decent rain. Once that arrived, the growing season was almost over. Still, we and our families will not starve. Imagine the situation where threat of starvation is very real. The recent floods in Pakistan – a mass producer of grain normally – will have a global impact in food production and food prices. This is a grim thought.

Recent television programs about food waste in this country also shock. Whole fields of lettuce are ploughed in because they didn't conform to supermarket requirements – meaning they were the wrong shape. Oversized courgettes and misshapen vegetables of all types fed to pigs! Are we, the consumers, to blame for this? Allotment people eat our produce in all its various forms and if you have your own apples off the tree, you notice immediately that they are not uniform shape. What has shape to do with taste and food value?

How do food shortages and food wastage sit well together in this day and age when we talk about a global economy and welfare of the whole planet?

GAS Committee know that there are patches of land on some sites which could be brought back into cultivation and we will be spending money to accomplish this in 2011.

And we are asking once again of our councillors – what about the unused land on Aldershot Road site?

FROM THE SECRETARY

Minutes of the last GAS AGM contain most of the current news.

The Allotment Rules will be updated and this will include additions to Rules 18 & 19. In 2005 GAS Committee 1 were required to take measures to bring allotment sites into compliance with new Water Regulations. One of these was to prohibit use of hose pipes unless they were hand held and have a gun attachment on them. This was not published in the Rules and new tenants are unaware. Enquiries made to Thames Water have confirmed that this is still law.

Rule 18 will now read:

“Not at any time to use any oscillators or sprinklers with any hosepipe, nor to leave any hosepipe unattended at any time. *Hose pipes must be hand held and have a gun attachment.*”

Rule 19 will now read:

“Not to light any bonfire anywhere on site *unless in the period November 1 to 10 after sunset and strictly to adhere to the Society's insurers conditions which state:*

- a) *Fires are to be in a cleared area at a distance of at least 10 metres from any property*
- b) *Fires are not to be left unattended at any time.*
- c) *A suitable fire extinguishing appliance to be kept available for immediate use.*
- d) *Fires to be extinguished at least one hour prior to leaving the site.”*

JOINT TENANTS

Communications from GAS are sent to the main named tenant only. If you would like a separate copy please write to or email the Secretary. We are unable however to supply separate invoices for joint tenants.

WARDEN ELECTIONS

These wardens have served their three year term and notice must be served that elections for these sites will be organised if requested by tenants. (Requests to the Secretary).

Aldershot Road – John Steer
Epsom Road – Ray and Shirley Tebenham
Farnham Road – Jeanette Collings
Larch Avenue – Les Daubney
Lime Grove – Tony Grant
Westborough Bungalows – Deric Chambers
Worplesdon Road – Dave Pickler.

All the above mentioned wardens are prepared to serve another term and will definitely do so if no election is requested.

FROM THE TREASURER

Notice has been given of increased charges for this year. We have been forced to do this for reasons that were explained at the AGM. We continue to try and reduce unnecessary costs which is why we made the decision to put the full colour edition of the GAS Newsletter on our website, this saves GAS over £500.

The investment in new water pipes at Bellfields has really improved things for our tenants there and we are now working to rectify the water shortage at Epsom Road.

The new computer programme purchased in July has made our Administrator's job manageable and kept us in-line with data protection regulations.

Looking ahead we want to make best use of our funds in improving the “allotment experience” for our all our members. Whilst we receive suggestions for improvements from our wardens, the Committee welcomes your ideas too. So please contact us directly with any suggestions you may have.

BELFIELDS

With ample water and an abundance of good growers



Bellfields returns to its former glory – giving its wardens plenty to smile about

GAS SHOW

The Mayor, Marsha Mosely, arrived to award the prizes and spoke sincerely about how encouraging it was to see so many people new to allotmenting, participating in the first ever show.

She hoped it would be the first of many and that it would be a chance for the varied, thirteen sites to join together in a thriving community spirit in Guildford. She spoke of the Society's gratitude to Simon Arthur for his initial ideas that had sparked off the event; and Sheila Morris who helped Lori Winch-Johnson set up the sections and criteria, based on Sheila's vast knowledge and experience.



The Treasurer, Alastair Watson, thanked the Mayor for her attendance, and expressed the Society's delight at her agreement to present the prizes which he announced as follows:

The Cup for the best 5 – 10 year old category went to St Joseph's school.



The Cup and top prize for the Best Gold in the flower section went to Barney Montgomery (below).



The Cup and top prize for the Best Gold in the vegetable (and fruit) section went to John Bayley.

The prize for the Best Silver in the vegetable (and fruit) section went to Neil Gratwick.

The prize for the Best Bronze in the vegetable (and fruit) section also went to Neil Gratwick.

The prize for the Best Silver in the flower section went to Neil Gratwick.

The prize for the Best Bronze in the flower section went to Colin Woolgar.

It was a very encouraging first show for GAS and it is hoped it will pave the way for future events, especially as so many tenants are new to gardening and may now feel encouraged to enter an exhibit next year. Alastair thanked all committee members and their friends and family, for helping with the organisation; the refreshments; the musicians, the stall holders, Secretts Garden Centre and, ultimately, he thanked all exhibitors for making the effort to help create what had been a most successful, first show for Guildford Allotments Society.

Peter Hill of WRAP also had a stall showing composting methods and gave a well-received talk on the subject with a very useful question and answer session.



Members listened with interest to Peter Hill's talk on the best way to compost on the allotment: the secret is 50:50, green (vegetation) to brown (carbon), plus damp and air circulation.



WASHA exhibited: a self-help group based on Aldershot Road site advertising its campaign with an impressive stall including jars on sale of prize-winning jam. Face-painting and old-fashioned sweets could be bought by children from a stall set up just for them.



The jazz trio provided a lovely ambience of summertime music.

The recipients of the raffle prizes were very pleased indeed with the high quality prizes their winning raffle tickets yielded and all but one of the winning four ticket-holders were present to take them home at the end of the day and to hear their numbers announced. Mr Turner, who was not present, was telephoned and managed to collect his raffle prize of a giant trug of produce before the doors finally closed at 4.30pm at the end of the show.



Stunning children's clothes and fabric items were on a charming stall, made by the excellent craftswoman, Kryisia Watson.

MEMOIRS OF AN ANCIENT GARDENER

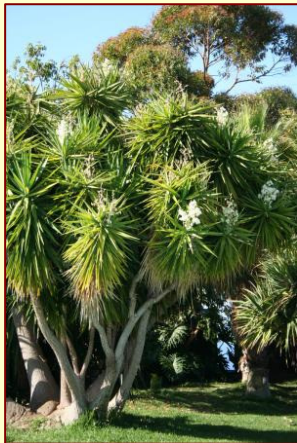
On my trips “up country” to visit farming areas in West Africa I observed that much of the field cultivation of subsistence farmers was carried out by women. I had the opportunity to discuss this with a village headman. He was a person of indeterminate age but a substantial figure in the community who, like many in his position had 4 wives and some 36 children.

He explained to me that in their tradition women cultivated crops with many seeds (fertility) whereas men took care of crops with few seeds (power/strength). I thought about this for some time and finally concluded that this “folkloric” explanation was in fact based on pragmatic considerations.

From his position in the shade of a mango tree the much stronger and aggressive male could guard the valuable cash crop (in this case the mangoes) and at the same time observe his wives and children cultivating the subsistence crops of maize, pumpkins etc. In addition to shouting encouragement and advice he could also be on the look out for predators that could endanger his family and even, from the vantage point afforded by climbing into the higher branches of the tree, drive off the leopard or lion with well aimed sticks or fruit.

When I eventually returned to England and settled with my much younger wife in Surrey I felt that a similar arrangement would be advantageous. Accordingly I would sit in my deckchair under the plum tree whilst my wife cultivated the vegetable garden. This was idyllic. From my vantage point I could offer encouragement and advice. As my young bride carefully worked the vegetable plot I could relax with the soothing sounds of birds, the scrape of the hoe and listen to the gentle mutterings of my wife.

I was shocked when she decamped with a handsome, 26 year old Greek chap I had employed to tile the bathroom. My only contact with her since then was a postcard from Cephalonia the contents of which were somewhat uncomplimentary and I felt hurtful. I did notice that there was a particularly fine *Yucca Elephantoides* in the background of the postcard so was mollified that she still remembered my love of gardening. But as a result of having to cultivate my own vegetables I did have a spectacularly good yield of sprouting broccoli which I was able to enjoy every day for 6 months. Which was good.



I haven't grown it since then.

Gerry Attrick

LOST THE PLOT.....

So you've watched the gardening programs, heard the expert opinion and applied for an allotment. After a long wait - your initial enthusiasm a bit dimmed but still alive - you receive the email or phone call.

"An allotment is available." Note the word 'available' NOT 'ready'

You arrange to meet the warden and are shown to an overgrown area of land. It's nothing like the telly program! Your face registers your concern

"Hell! What have I let myself in for?"

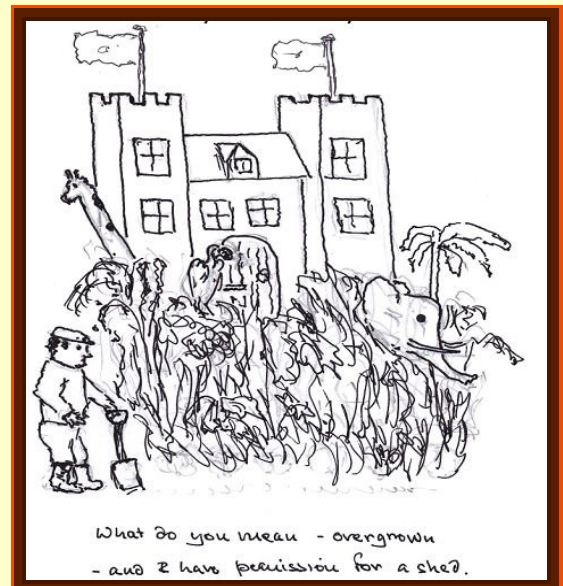
The warden's face registers very plainly, "Another useless wimp!"

Gender is irrelevant here! You are at the pit face. No one has to get your land ready for you – not GAS, the Lessee – not GBC, the landowner. On sites which have housing threats hanging over them, you are more likely to get help as it is in everybody's interest that you succeed. On most sites – you're on your own. If your allotment is 10 rods then you just can't see how you'll be able to do it. You are surrounded by plots which are lovely; fruit and vegetables in neat rows; no really nasty weeds of the variety clearly evident on yours.

What's happened here? By the end of this article you will know exactly what has happened.

You decide to have a go.

Here is some crucial starting advice from one who knows. Understand immediately that you have taken an annual lease on an organic object. This is completely different from leasing say - a beach hut or a caravan or a seat at the opera. These inert objects will wait for your presence without deterioration. Your allotment will not. It needs constant attention. If you do not/cannot factor time for your allotment into your life style, then you are wasting your time. Don't even start. You have programmed in failure from the word 'go'. You will have wasted your money. You will get little return either in food, exercise or satisfaction. You will constantly be in the bad books of the site warden who will eventually report your 'underuse' of the plot to the GAS Committee.



The Secretary will write a series of letters culminating in the termination of your tenancy.

Soon afterwards, someone exactly like you will be soon looking at the same piece of land which will, by now, be in an even worse state. The cycle begins again!

Okay, you've factored in the time but what now?

Have you got relatives, friends – anybody really – who might help? Those with some gardening experience are best. They might even be interested! Let it be known that you need help and get any who volunteer on plot with you.

Have you got the right tools? An overgrown plot can have brambles and tree seedlings. These will sneer at your little garden hoe and soon break it - but how to get close enough to bramble base to use a spade?

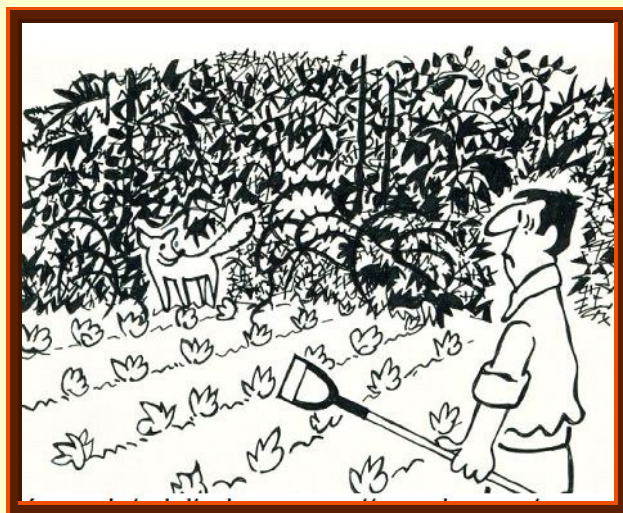
A Chillington hoe is a good investment. They can only be bought online as most of those produced are exported. This is the big hoe you see being used in aid posters of cultivation in places like Africa. Big heavy hoe head - long handle. Stand back out of thorn's way and whack off trailing overgrowth. This hoe can then be used to get the roots out, as it is strongly built and has more leverage than a spade. With a broad heavy cutting edge, it makes short work of ordinary weeds. It easily turns over soft soil and one day you will have soft soil if you keep going.

So you've hoed off the overgrowth or killed it with a herbicide. Do not under any circumstances begin construction of 'raised beds'. Another big 'no no' - do not buy or plant any permanent crop such as soft fruit, rhubarb or asparagus.

Why? No weed gives up easily and most have an underground reserve root system which is ready for regeneration and some can survive herbicides. Not repeated doses, but if you've conveniently planted a permanent crop, you won't be able to apply a repeat dose. Before you plant or build anything permanent, you need to have dug your soil and removed these roots. Use machinery if you can. Most machines will not bite into undug soil but rotavators fine dug soil down nicely and make weed root removal easy. Don't be put off by cries of "Chop them up and you'll have twice as many". You'll have a lot which ever way you do it. Don't let anyone tell you that you'll never get rid of bindweed. You will. The weed root has a big disadvantage. It has to reveal its whereabouts by putting up green shoots. At this point it is easy to get out. Eventually, even bindweed will die out completely.

When your ground is free of persistent rooted weeds (you'll never be free of weed seeds), you can consider putting in something permanent. If you want something to trip over and ensure that you can't use a machine easily, then build raised beds. Soft fruit? Yes always expensive to buy and easy enough to grow. You will realise as soon as you plant something that you are imposing your presence on the local wild residents and they will take their cut. All sites have feral pigeons, foxes, crows, magpies, mice, and slugs. Some have rabbits. These are only the larger consumers. There are also blackfly, greenfly, cutworms and caterpillars to name but a few of the more common. Fruit is a favourite but they enjoy all brassicas and have even learned to husk sweet corn.

You've got a bigger brain than them and you'll need to use it.



Your plot visits have a pattern. Inspect crops, do some work, check watch – overstayed time, quickly pick produce and rush home. You need to break this pattern. What you should keep in mind is that you might not return for a month. Yes, you've made the plot part of your life but it can happen that it rains for a fortnight and you are then ill. By the time you return, your plot is very weedy. Whatever you failed to store away safely at the end of your last visit is now obscured and rusting away in the overgrowth. You'll find it again one day but it won't be a happy reunion.

So you have your plot all dug and producing loads of food. It tastes great and you're saving money. You're getting exercise and keeping fit. You've made friends and life is good.

This happy state of affairs can continue for many years but the time comes when you just can't keep on top of everything. The plot deteriorates. You've gone right off that warden who keeps asking whether you'd like to reduce the size of your plot. What do these youngsters know anyway? You've had a letter from the Secretary saying that your plot is neglected and not producing food. Stuff and nonsense you tell her. It's only because you had a fall. Every day you pick soft fruit amongst the bindweed. It is getting difficult to find the shed amongst the brambles though and what's this? A bramble tendril in the shed! How did that happen? You've tended this plot with loving care for forty years. Past it now? Give it up? Unthinkable! Maybe this year you'll do better.

No good. They're calling time. Something about the Leasing Agreement!

Whoever takes this plot on now will have their work cut out!



GUILDFORD IN BLOOM COMPETITION RESULTS (ALLOTMENT SECTION) 2010

| | | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Mrs Jean Allen | gold | Burpham | Plot 20 |
| Mr Simon Arthur | gold | Farnham Road | Plot 23 |
| Mr Norman Barraclough | gold | Burpham | Plot 1 |
| Mr Mike Beckwith | silver gilt | Burpham | Plot 58 |
| Mrs Nan Bennett | bronze | Merrow | Plot 20c |
| Mr Jeffery Champness | silver | Merrow Street | Plots 4a & 5c |
| Mr & Mrs Peter Cox | gold | Burpham ? | Plots 14 & 17 |
| Ms Wendy Cradock | silver gilt | Burpham | Plot 32 |
| Ms Alison Craze & Mr Sat Luthra | silver | Merrow Street | Plot 10c |
| Michael & Cathy Curtis | silver | Pewley Hill | Plot 3a |
| Ms Linda Custerson | gold | Aldershot Road | Plot 47 |
| Mr David Drake | silver | Lido | Plot 20 |
| Mrs Rosemary Dresler | silver gilt | Burpham | Plots 12, 13, |
| Mr Michael Embleton | silver | Burpham | Plot 4 |
| Ms Tania Grant | silver | Burpham | Plot 22 |
| Mr Peter Hill | gold | Pewley Hill | Plot 15 |
| Mr Gerald Jones | silver | Merrow Street | Plot 5 |
| Mr D Love | silver gilt | Merrow Street | Plot 24 |
| Mr Peter Meads | bronze | Epsom Road | Plot 18a |
| Mr Barney Montgomery | bronze | Aldershot Road | Plot 40a |
| Mr David Newman | silver gilt | Burpham | Plot 19 |
| Mr Alan Noakes | silver gilt | Burpham | Plot 28 |
| Mr M Preece | silver | Lido | Plot 15 |
| David & Janet Robins | gold | Burpham | Plot 7 |
| Mr Tom Smart | silver gilt | Merrow Street | Plot 29b and 30 |
| Miss Emma White | silver gilt | Merrow Street | Plot 13b |
| Peter & Maureen Whitfield | gold | Aldershot Road | Plot 42 |
| Mrs Victoria Whittaker | silver | Old Farm | Plot 12 |
| Mr John Wild | silver | Burpham | Plot 33 |
| Mrs Marian Collier | Gold and best allotment | Aldershot Road | Plot 32a |



Mrs Marian Collier

Plot 32a Aldershot Road Allotments

