

SPRING NEWSLETTER 2008



ABOVE: the planters



ABOVE: Chris (80) was helped to plant a cooker (tree) by 10 year old Mia, maybe the youngest plot holder-worker.



RIGHT: joyfully busy

Planting an orchard at Spring Hill allotment

Tree musketeers and allotment holders got together to plant a community orchard

This project is part of the ongoing *Tree musketeers'* activity in increasing trees in Hackney. The orchard was planted in recompense for three mature trees cut down when expanding the allotment this year and presents a link between the local community and the allotment holders.

Over 25 volunteers aged 10 to 80 came along to plant, guard, mulch and water the trees. We planted eight - mostly rather rare - varieties of apple, including a Kerry pipper apple and the almost famous 'bardsey apple' rediscovered in 1999 by

Ian Storrick. Thanks to Ian who generously posted the trees free of charge from Wales and for his selection of the varieties. Another tree is a plum and the only native plum now growing in Wales.

Mike the tree guarder hammered in many of the guards with assistance and everyone was joyfully busy. Even the sun showed its nose a few times... Jess joined us and provided a big big pot of lentil soup. It was well supped by the hungry planters... The orchard looked like it had just been born but also as if it has always been there.

Eugene Clerkin

It is important that allotment holders participate in watering these trees, especially from April to June, when the young hair roots are emerging. In the first place the allotment holders are responsible for watering, mulching and protection. A hessian mulch cover will help maintain moisture and keep too much competition at bay.

Waiting list update

We currently have a waiting list of 213. There have been 6 new lets since October 07 due to vacancies arising, plus another four plots currently being relet, one of which is a new addition due to Spring Hill extension.

As the actual waiting time is almost impossible to predict the Secretary requests that you do not email her regarding more specific details. Actual offers

are, of course, dependent on your stated site preferences. As the preference for plots in N16 is higher than in E5 sites, let the Secretary know if you wish to change your preferences.

The next lucky recipient is number 978 (depending on choice of site). The top 25 waiting list numbers are on the website, www.hackneyallotments.org.uk.

We take the upkeep of plots very seriously, so please think hard whether you really do have the time and commitment to work a plot.



GARDENER'S CALENDAR -

February's Top 10 Jobs

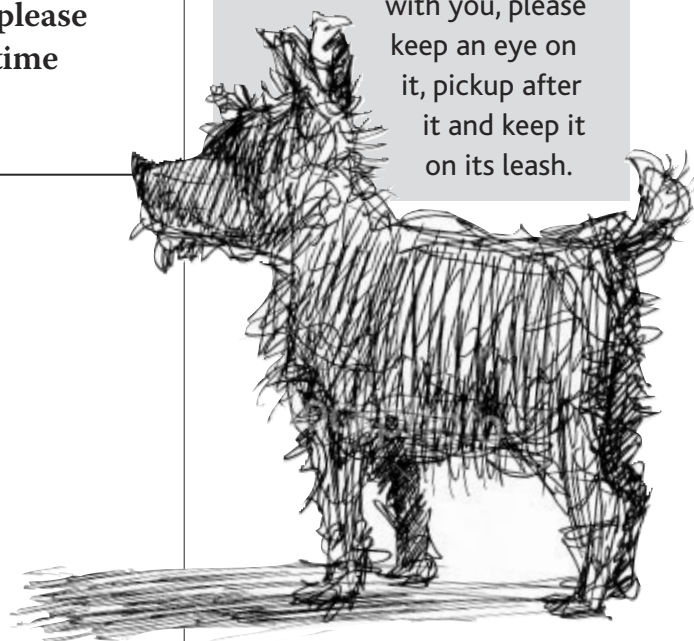
1. Prepare vegetable seed beds, and sow some vegetables under cover
2. Cut back deciduous grasses left uncut over the winter
3. Prune winter-flowering shrubs that have finished flowering
4. Protect blossom on apricots, nectarines and peaches
5. Net fruit and vegetable crops to keep the birds off
6. Prune Wisteria
7. Prune conservatory climbers
8. Divide bulbs such as snowdrops, and plant those that need planting 'in the green'
9. Prune evergreen hedges and renovate overgrown deciduous hedges
10. Chit potato tubers

Dogs on site

There have been complaints recently, regarding dogs running free on allotment sites. The rules state that:

No dogs shall be allowed on the ground unless on a leash, (nor shall young children be allowed unless accompanied by an adult). **By Law number 7**

If you want to take your dog with you, please keep an eye on it, pickup after it and keep it on its leash.



Want to help out with Society business?

Your site rep may be grateful for some assistance, for example representing the site at meetings or helping to organise clear up days or social events.Or you may like to offer support to the Committee on new developments or PR.

Contact your site rep or the secretary on suecarling@waitrose.com

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

HELD 1ST OCTOBER 2007 ST MARY'S COMMUNITY CENTRE N16

PRESENT:

Jon Fuller
(President),
Maggie Wilkinson
(Chair),
Sue Carling
(Secretary),
Jackie Breakwell
(Treasurer);
Committee members:
Mary Connolly
(minutes),
Joss Bany,
Jessica Datta,
Martin Klurowicz,
June Lancaster
+ 40 ordinary
members of the
Society.

APOLOGIES

Apologies received
from Christine
Hathaway, Sean
Meaney, Marlis
Scholz, Martin &
Deborah Jeffries,
Stephen Palmer,
Amanda Scope,
Eugene Clerkin,
Annie Wilson

MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the AGM 2006.

REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

A year ago the report included a good deal about the long hot summer and the hosepipe ban. What happy days these have seemed this year as we stood in the pouring rain pulling slugs the size of guinea pigs off our dying courgettes. Other than weather, the main events of this year have been as follows.

COUNCIL FENCING

Following the Council's agreement to improve our fencing, we have seen new fences at Spring Lane and Spring Hill, and repairs at Springdale Road which is now a much more secure site.

The fencing at Spring Hill involved a boundary move, which led to the Society's principal achievement, the development of six new plots at Spring Hill in early spring this year. This has been mentioned in newsletters and on the website, with photographs, so no doubt you all know about it. I would like to thank the committee for their work on this, Sue for her council liaison, but most of all Joss Bany who was the inspiration behind the development and followed it through, with many meetings, discussions and hard physical labour, to its fruition. Joss was also responsible for getting hold of some wooden benches which have greatly enhanced the communal area of the site.

Thank you, Joss.

WATER

While on Council assistance, on the negative side we have no progress on water provision at Queensbridge. It is clear the Council is unwilling to make a big financial investment for the sake of three members'

plots. All the committee can hope for is that a new site member will take on the development of a rain harvesting project. For sure there would have been no problem this year.

WASTE REMOVAL

The Council continues to empty our brown bins and remove bags; on the whole, with occasional hiccups, this has been a success. However can I ask all plot-holders not to overfill either bins or bags and certainly not to put stones and rubble in them, if we want the service to continue.

WAITING LIST/MEDIA INTEREST

There has been an ever increasing interest in the allotment movement in the last year which has had two noticeable effects. One is the continually increasing size of the waiting list; the other a growing demand on committee members, especially the secretary and the chair, to deal with requests from the media of all kinds.

To outline the second point first: the committee has mixed feelings about the amount of publicity we can supply and which is useful. We get requests from journalists, writers of books, radio, television, photographers, film makers, to give interviews, to give access to sites, to arrange meetings with other members. In recent months there have been requests for an interview with a radio company from the Czech Republic and a daily newspaper in Portugal, as well as a request from Gardener's World to take over a plot for a year. Later in the meeting I would welcome your thoughts on how much the society might comply. However, if we are to engage with these requests, it is clear we need a new volunteer to the list of officials, a PR person, as Sue and I can no longer keep up with the requests.

We may decide that the publicity only fuels the already over-long waiting list. We

may decide though that all publicity for the allotment movement is a good thing, and that if we are ever in danger of losing sites to developers – not something on the immediate horizon, but never completely out of thoughts – we will need all the public support we can get.

After the main business of the meeting has been concluded we can discuss this, time permitting.

Linked to that is the size of the waiting list. There are about 270 waiting, which may soon drop a little as people fail to renew membership. The next two on the list likely to receive offers will have waited four years and three years respectively. The turnover in the last year has been eleven new plot-holders; however six of those got the new plots at Spring Hill, likely to be a bit of a one-off situation. So five plots were re-let. Even if there is a big drop out as people give up, move, or take up other interests, it could be many years before no. 270 picks up the key and walks with their zimmer frame on to their plot. The committee have discussed whether to freeze the waiting list and we would like your thoughts on this too. Is it fair to remove all hope? Are we being sufficiently clear about the length of wait ahead? For their membership fee of £4, a member on the waiting list gets about three newsletters a year, a chance to come to an Open Day when available and visit this AGM. The society gets their fee, arguably increased ammunition when lobbying for additional provision, and rather more work, including answering queries from those eager to know how much longer they will have to wait.

One effect of the length of the waiting list has been an increased pressure on the committee to deal swiftly with neglected plots and I think it is fair to say that we are as vigilant as we can be. Sometimes action

ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Maggie Wilkinson was re-elected as Chairperson.

Sue Carling was re-elected as Secretary.

Jackie Breakwell was re-elected as Treasurer

Amanda Scope was elected as Newsletter editor

Maggie Henton and Bob Geater were re-elected as auditors. The position of Vice-Chair was unfilled.

SITE REPRESENTATIVES

Aden Terrace: Martin Klucowicz.

Church Walk: June Lancaster.

Leaside Road: Lou Crisfield.

Overbury Street: Stephen Palmer.

Queensbridge Rd: unconfirmed

Spring Hill: Eugene Clerkin, Jessica Datta were re-elected and Phillip Pearson was elected as an additional representative.

Spring Lane: Gavin Everall. ➡

is held up by simply not getting regular reports from site reps, but the site visits this year were well attended by site reps and very focused, resulting in a number of letters. We need to remember though that the aim of a neglected plot letter should not be to evict that member. If the plotholder turns the plot around, that is surely a better result than a notice to quit ensuing.

TREES

The third balancing act is the Society's policy over tree removal or tree surgery. Four members submitted topics to be discussed and three of these topics are to do with trees – two asking for more cutting back and one asking for more consultation and agreement.

No one wants an allotment site that resembles an industrial estate. Similarly no-one can grow vegetables in a forest. This debate arose – heatedly – over the development at Spring Hill and as a result the committee has evolved a procedure which I suggest to the meeting. Before we are asked to fund any tree work, consultation with other site members must occur. (How this consultation happens is up to the good sense of the site rep and the person wanting the tree work – email, conversation, phone calls, depending on the circumstances. But it must happen.) If a clear majority of those who respond are in favour or at any rate support the work, the proposal goes to the committee for funding. (Exceptions: danger to persons and damage to infrastructure – obliged to act) This consultation procedure would be for established trees only. I emphasise it is the job of each plot holder to remove saplings – remember you need permission to grow a new tree.

HAS AGM MINUTES CONTD.

SITE VISITS

Bearing in mind the difficulties caused by the weather, the committee felt that the standard of site maintenance was pretty good. Award-winners are published on p6.

Open Days were held at Aden Terrace, where 15 members visited, and at Church Walk when despite a thunderstorm there were five visitors. I very much hope that next year all the sites will try to open – it doesn't necessarily have to be on the same day, though makes sense for sites in the same area to liaise. It is the least we can do for the waiting list members.

To end up I would like to thank all the committee for their work and particularly, in her absence, Sarah Mott, who left London in the summer for Bristol. She combined work as vice chair – we need to replace her - with doing the newsletter for a few years, and was a very able and hard working rep for Overbury Street. We will miss her and wish her well.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

WAITING LIST - The merits of freezing entry to the waiting list were discussed. It was agreed that, due to the small cost of membership, the difficulties that would arise when the list was 'unfrozen' and the fact that the large waiting list emphasises the lack of allotment land in the borough, the current system would continue. However, it was important that site reps, whilst making allowances for occasional lapses due to unavoidable personal circumstances, ensured that existing plots were properly utilised. It was also suggested that the Society website includes links to allotment organisations outside the Borough that may have vacant plots or shorter waiting lists.

PUBLIC RELATIONS - Due to the Society's London location, the website

⇒ **St Kilda's Rd:** J Jeffreys was provisionally re-elected but may be standing down.

Springdale Road:
Annie Wilson

OTHER COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Co-opted members will be elected at the next committee meeting.

Treasurer's Report

Jackie Breakwell presented the statement of accounts and reported that expenditure had been very low because the Council had failed to submit the annual rent charges and there had been few site improvement and maintenance works. However, outstanding commitments and anticipated site works will result in much higher spending in the next financial year.

and the current interest in allotments the Secretary has been contacted during the year by local, national and international press seeking interviews and information. It was agreed that the website should host a downloadable fact sheet/press release and a template letter for people to send to the Council asking for greater provision of allotment land. Also, if a suitable volunteer comes forward, the committee would welcome someone to handle press enquiries.

TREE POLICY - The sensitive issue of tree control was discussed. It was agreed that tree matters, when they arise, should be agreed by the members of each site following the procedure developed at Spring Hill and outlined in the Chair's report to this meeting. If there is deadlock the matter will be passed to the committee for a final decision.

USE OF CHEMICALS - Unless a site is designated as organic, members are entitled to use appropriate chemicals. Site representatives may point out possible disadvantages where chemical use seems to be excessive.

OVERHANGING TREES - The overhanging tree at St Kilda's is still problematic. The tree is on adjoining land owned by the Council. They have been approached previously but although action has been promised nothing has yet been done. The committee are to try to resolve this matter.

SPLITTING OF PLOTS - Some plots had been split where people were having problems managing a full plot.

The President thanked the Committee for its work over the year and all for attending. There being no further business the meeting closed at 9pm.



Plot Awards 2007

Plot inspections were held in July; criteria for the awards were variety of produce, creativity, productivity, most improvement. Congratulations to the winners!

LEASIDE ROAD

best plot:

No 7 - David Shenton

SPRING LANE

best plot:

No 18 - Christine Turner

SPRING HILL

best plot:

Paul Howarth and
Jason Cole

ADEN TERRACE

best plot:

No 16 - Elizabeth Reynolds

E5/E8 SMALL SITES

best plot:

raised bed at Overbury St
- James Copperthwaite

N16 SMALL SITES

best plot:

St Kilda's plot 1
- Marie McShea



PARSNIP, LEEK AND CARROT GRATIN

Smooth and scrumptious, this recipe will make a fine winter dish.

INGREDIENTS

- 3 tablespoons butter
- 1 kg parsnips, sliced
- 1 kg leeks, sliced
- 1 kg carrots, sliced
- 480 ml double cream
- 240ml single cream
- 4 tablespoons brown mustard
- 4 tablespoons sage chopped
- wedge of Parmesan, grated
- salt and pepper to taste

Heat the oven to 400°F/200°C.

Put on a pot of salted water to boil for the carrots and parsnips. While water is heating, sauté the leeks in butter until they start to lightly brown (about 10 minutes). Remove from heat. Add the carrots and parsnips to boiling water for about 3 minutes and drain.

In a large bowl whisk the

cream, mustard, sage, salt and pepper. Taste the mixture and adjust from there. Add all the vegetables to the cream mixture and gently stir to mix thoroughly.

Pour the mixture into a 9" x 13" baking dish, top with grated Parmesan and cover with foil. Bake for half an hour.

Serves 4-6

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