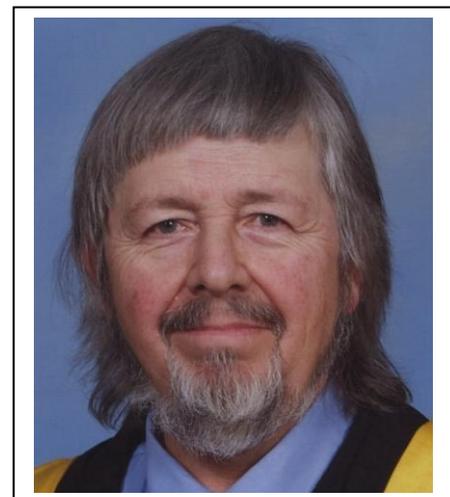




Spring at last! Or, at least, it appeared to be the case when this newsletter was put together. The EAP-AGM held back in February was a great success with upwards of sixty plot holders in attendance. The draft minutes of the meeting and copies of the accompanying reports can be accessed on the EAP website at the address above. The main event of the evening was the talk by Richard Wiltshire entitled “Allotments – a Broader View”. A summary of his talk, in which he gave a snapshot of what is happening on the national scene as far as allotments and allotment management are concerned, is given below. This was followed by a very useful question and answer session involving John Bradley (Blondin), Christina Fox (Northfields), Hillary Jayne (Framfield) on site development, fund raising etc.

“Allotments – a Broader View”

Our guest speaker, Richard Wiltshire, a widely acknowledged expert on the UK allotment scene, started his presentation with a summary of the background to the law underpinning the provision of allotments and the major Local Government-commissioned reports on the management of allotments, several of which he authored or co-authored (see links provided below). He explained how following the end of the second world war, there was a steady decline of interest in allotment gardening until the late 1990’s followed by a major surge in public interest in environmental and green issues in general and in gardening in particular. This resulted in a massive increase in waiting lists for allotments, that has largely



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continued until the present day. For much of this time, Councils were happy to run, and even subsidise, their allotment sites. However, following the financial crash of 2008 and the resulting cuts in Local Government grants, Councils throughout the UK have come under considerable pressure to reduce their administrative expenditure on leisure activities. This in turn, has led to a nationwide push towards the introduction of self-management systems of various sorts under which allotment tenants take over collective responsibility for the management of their sites.

Rather than go through the various schemes of self-management on offer throughout the country, he chose to make a number of general points that underpin current thinking on self-management. The first point, not widely appreciated by the majority of tenants, is that while there is a statutory obligation for Councils to respond to a request to set up allotments there are no specific requirements regarding either the number of allotments provided or their maintenance provisions. Individual Councils have traditionally rented out their plots at what they consider a fair rent to cover services: maintenance of fencing, water supplies etc., but the provision of these services is not underpinned in law and in hard times could well disappear. A cycle of neglect combined with a not particularly assiduously maintained waiting list could soon lead to major problems in justifying the continued provision of any given site. Under self-management, it is in everybody's interest to avoid such problems. The best defence of your site is that it is fully occupied, well-run and that everybody is happily gardening away.

The second major point, was that independent of the particular type of self-management adopted, the key factor in the financial side of allotment management is the rent income. In the present climate, there is unlikely to be any "new" money – other than that the tenants themselves can generate through grant applications and fund-raising. In general, taking on more responsibilities equates to a greater retention of rent income. He pointed to our own Pitshanger allotments as a good example of what can be achieved. The Council leases out the land to Pitshanger Allotment Association and they retain the rent income – result minimal trouble to the Council and a well-run site with contented tenants. Other arrangements such as the newly introduced Local Management scheme in Ealing may not go as far as this but the same basic principle holds.

His third point related to the problem of dealing with small sites that are too small to support a local allotment association capable of implementing self-management - a major factor in Ealing where about half our tenants garden on such plots. The ideal solution is for a Local Allotment Federation to take over the management of all Council sites and to run them collectively. This system has been adopted with great success in other parts of the country – particularly in the north-west. Perhaps something, we should at least start thinking about.

His final point, which he was very careful to emphasise, was the importance of always keeping your final goal in mind. There are many different ways of running allotments and the important thing is not to get too bogged down in arguing the finer points of their relative merits. The whole point of the exercise is to ensure that the maximum number of people on your allotment site, or set of sites, can garden happily with the minimum



disruption. The best thing sometimes is to make a start and be prepared to make necessary changes as they arise.

For more information see: Richard Wiltshire and Deborah Burn. “*Growing in the Community*”. London, Local Government Association, 2008 and Richard Wiltshire, “*A Place to Grow*”. London, Local Government Association, 2010. Both downloadable free from www.nsalg.org.uk/allotment-info/allotments-management/

Ealing in Bloom – Allotments



Many of you will know about the annual Ealing in Bloom (EIB) competition and the excellent work it does in promoting the general attractiveness of Ealing as a place to live and work in. Like me, until fairly recently at least, fewer of you perhaps were as familiar with the fact that it also encompasses allotments.

The fact only really came home to me when, out of the blue, I was asked to act as judge in the Allotments section. My first reaction, never having judged anything remotely horticultural before, was that it must be either a joke or at

least a mistake. No, I was assured, you are an Allotment Site Manager so you should know what to look for and if you don't, we are sure that you will learn on the job. Thinking it over, the idea ticked two boxes for me; I was curious to see what went on at other allotment sites in Ealing and to get some idea of what could be realistically achieved on my own site. Never having even entered an allotment show, I was also interested to learn what motivated people to enter the competition in the first place.

I am very glad that I did agree to take on the job. I learned a lot about all these things. Under the excellent tutelage of Henryk Pycz – H to everybody in the Ealing allotment world - I soon picked up the bare essentials of the job. E-in-B provide a set of well-defined judging criteria and we soon developed a system under which I suggested my assessment under the different criteria, looked at H who then simply raised an eyebrow if I suggested too an outrageous an assessment. Thankfully, we got through this stage fairly quickly and I think I can assure entrants that none of them suffered to any significant extent from my lack of experience.

Having started with a fairly quizzical approach to the competition as far as allotments are concerned, I must admit to becoming a total convert. Why enter – either as an individual plot holder or as a site manager entering his/her site? As a plot holder, the best answer as I see it, assuming it is just not for the perfectly acceptable reason of wanting to win, is that it focuses your attention on different aspects of organising your plot. Have you got a good balance of plants? Have you really thought about crop rotation, composting etc.? Are you on top of the weeds/pests? Does the plot look good? From the point of view of a Site



Manager, the reasons for encouraging plot-holders on their site to enter are even more compelling. One thing every Site Manager soon learns is that “rubbish attracts rubbish”. The converse of this is that “good practice spreads”. If one plot looks particularly well-tended and attractive, odds on its neighbours look pretty reasonable as well.

One thing that came across very clearly in visiting plots last year, was that some of our sites have an extremely pleasant atmosphere. It is not that every plot is well-tended. In practice this is an impossible dream. It is just that on entering the site it feels well-cared for. The entrance is welcoming, the main paths are well looked after, there are benches and communal areas. We are extremely fortunate in Ealing to have a large number of allotment sites. As a borough, we are very green and it is important that we remember that we have a duty to local residents to make sure that the areas where we are allowed to garden add to the general attractiveness of the borough as a whole

Converted, or at least tempted to enter? There are four categories to choose between; large plot, small plot, large site and small site. Further details and entry forms can be downloaded from www.ealingallotmentspartnership.co.uk/images/entry_form.pdf

Patrick Williams (Brentham)

Growing Wellbeing in Ealing

MindFood, a social enterprise aiming to help people recover from mental health problems through growing and selling food, is in the process of opening a new sensory market garden in Ealing. The organisation was set-up by local Acton resident Ciaran Biggins to provide an alternative intervention for people experiencing mental ill health. MindFood were based out in Amersham for their first two years but wanting a growing space closer to the community of people that they support in Ealing and surrounding boroughs, have recently moved to the Cleveley Crescent allotment site near Hanger Lane tube station.



The new set-up at Cleveley Crescent



Selling the Produce

They are shortly launching their new six week “Growing Wellbeing” course. The course is intended for people who might be experiencing common mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. It focuses on five evidence-based actions which promote personal



wellbeing – Connect, Learn, Be Active, Take Notice, and Give. The course is designed to be a fun balance of learning how to grow a wide range of fruit and vegetables whilst becoming more mindful of ways to improve our wellbeing. Their produce is sold throughout the local area; at Acton market in the summer and through the Edible Ealing veg box scheme. Ciaran, their founder and organiser, is also keen to supply restaurants in the local area who buy into the idea of locally-produced food that has a story of supporting vulnerable people in the local area behind it.

MindFood has shown impressive results in its first two years with 92% of people who have been through one of their programmes feeling happier and calmer, 89% of people feeling less socially isolated, and 71% of people feeling more optimistic about the future. These results are backed up by national research carried about by the mental health charity Mind who found that 7 out of 10 people experienced significant increases in mental wellbeing by the time they left an ecotherapy project. Following the success of their first two years, Ciaran is trying to encourage local public services to look at gardening as a viable form of treatment for people with mental health issues and something he would eventually hope to see prescribed on the NHS.

If you might be interested in volunteering, joining the growing wellbeing course or helping with their produce sales contact Ciaran Biggins at ciaranbiggins@mindfood.org.uk or on 07809 732286. Visit www.mindfood.org.uk for more information on MindFood.

Alium Leaf miner

Never heard of it? I am afraid you soon will. RHS rated it as the seventh highest in its list of top gardening pest for 2014 – second only to slugs and snails if the list is restricted to those targeting vegetables. It was first reported in the UK in 2002 but has only become a problem on Ealing allotments over the last year or two. You may well have already have suffered its depredations without realising it. If your onions stems were twisted and distorted last year or more obviously your leeks started to go floppy this winter, you almost certainly have. It is already around on some sites and the signs are that it will be a fact of life for all of us over the next couple of years.

The grubs of the leaf miner fly burrow into the body of the plant. They are hard to spot but the small reddish brown cocoons they form when they pupate (opposite) are more obvious and can easily be seen embedded in the outer layers of leeks in particular. The major damage to infected plants is indirect; due to rot introduced by secondary fungal infections. This is what causes leeks in particular to flop over, For more details go to the links given below. The really bad news is that the pest affects all aliums; onions, shallots, leeks and garlic and that there are no control pesticides available to gardeners. RHS suggests growing aliums under horticultural





fleece or micromesh as protection. The practicality of this is another question, Another approach is to delay planting out onions and leeks until periods when the fly is less active.

www.rhs.org.uk/Advice/Profile?PID=643

www.gardenfocused.co.uk/fruitarticles/pest-disease/allium-leaf-miner.php

Site Profile

Acton Gardening Association Sites – from Michael Wale, the Hon. Sec.

The Acton Gardening Association has four different sites; the main one opposite the King Fahad Academy in Bromyard Avenue W3, a smaller adjoining the Virgian Health Club further down Bromyard Avenue, another large one opposite the Vale estate in Uxbridge Road and a very small one of twelve plots behind the now developed almshouses opposite Acton park.

All the sites suffer from one thing in common. We are on private land. Previously it was owned by the City livery company the Goldsmiths, who were left the land in the midst of the 1600's by a blacksmith named Perryn born in Bromyard, Herefordshire, who rose to become a Sheriff of the City of London, and left all the land we now garden "for the good people of Acton".

As an allotment tenant on private land, we have no rights, which is what we found to our costs in the early years of the millennium. The Goldsmiths decided to rid themselves of the land we occupied giving the Park Club, who arrived from Chiswick, a long-term lease. They immediately issued us with three months notice to clear our sites. Then started a year-long negotiation, which took up most of my time, as I realised we were fighting a full-time legal machine. Eventually, we settled and received a lease with a year's notice of eviction if needed. Those were hard days. The lessons learned were many. But the main one is that if your site is threatened keep gardening. Don't give up. There is a feeling inside you that tells you there is no future. This is wrong. And it is that feeling developers want to inject in you. A scorched-earth policy. Deserted, unkempt sites are perfect for takeover.

There is always danger around the corner, as we discovered two years ago when our little walled-in site behind the old almshouses was sold, we found out at the last moment, for £150,000 to a local developer David Perry. This site has no planning permission and no access road, just a path behind a block of Peabody flats. So far we have been allowed to keep it, but with no guaranteed future. So that's how we exist, however all the news is not bad and having come through two major operations successfully myself in the last growing season my annual speech at our AGM relayed the message "Be Positive"

We have over 100 plot holders and our half plot scheme is very popular. We have two youth schemes. One with Active Acton and the other with the King Fahad academy whose students use their plot as part of the baccalaureate, We started a highly successful Open Day, where a personality attends, Barney Haughton the organic chef from Bristol cooks anything harvested from the plots around him, and Paolo of Franchi seeds plays his accordion. One of our members is also a violinist, who appears at the Proms, and takes part in a string quartet. It always worries me to see her working her plot with no gloves on!

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Barney and Paolo in action at a recent Open Day



In the last two years, we have also started an annual art show at the W3 Gallery in Acton based on paintings translating the theme “Grow your Own”.

So another growing season starts we’re in good humour and hope. I just hope that I can look after my own plot better than last year!

Michael Wale’s book about the battle to save Acton Gardening Association’s allotments and the characters who garden them “View from a Shed” is available from Amazon

Around the Associations

Framfield

Framfield Allotments will be 100 years old on July 6th! We are marking the occasion in a number of ways. We are transforming a scruffy unused former car parking area behind the kitchens into a garden, to be used by plot holders’ families and school visits. We have received a grant of £2000 from Heathrow Communities Together to fund this. We recently had a work day to landscape and fence the area, and plant some fruit trees. As shown opposite even a chicken got involved in tree planting! We are having two events to celebrate our birthday, both funded by a grant from the Bubble Springtime Community Fund.



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We are hosting a return visit from the Mikron Theatre Company on June 23rd. Our summer social/birthday party will be on July 5th. Froglife will be joining us to provide children's activities, and the Searchlight Trading Hut will bring a mobile Trading Hut to us (a first for them). We are in talks with some local musicians to provide live music on the day. Contact secretary@framfield-allotments.org.uk for further details of these events.

Friends of Ascott



One of the workdays last Autumn was spent pulling down a dilapidated structure at the Orchard. This means that we are now ready to get started on the extension of our meeting place shelter. Although some of us have on occasion referred to this structure as 'The Pavillion', the term 'shelter' seems to be in more common use. Hopefully once the work is complete the grander title will be the more fitting of the two. We plan to establish a nature area and a new wild-life pond on future workdays.

Ealing Dean Allotments Association

It has been a busy start to the year for us at Northfields Allotments on Northfields Avenue, with three volunteer days already. On the first two we decided to tackle the hedge around the site. It was planted around 1832 (when the plots were laid out) and in some places looks pretty good for its age. However, the length of the hedge that runs alongside Northfields Avenue and around the corner into Mattock lane was full of litter. People seem to think it is a great idea to lob their drinks cans, fast food containers and any other detritus they have over our fence and into the hedge.

We knew the hedge had not been maintained for some time, perhaps not for decades, but the answer came when we found a crisp packet with a sale price of 3p on it. That's probably from the 1970s. Then we struck archaeological gold and found, stuffed in an old dip tank, a copy of the Daily Mirror newspaper from 2nd March 1954. To put that into perspective rationing was still in place. Its Washington reporter wrote that: "President Eisenhower this week will ask Congress to ease American trade policies to help Britain and other American Allies." But most importantly, in austerity Britain, you could buy a shed for just £7 with a wood frame and strong asbestos walls. That



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would be the same asbestos we're all carefully trying to remove from the site! If you're interested in old tools you can see some of the other treasures we found here: www.ealingdean.co.uk/found-hedge In the end (over two volunteer sessions) we removed enough rubbish to fill a skip. Plus, some two tonnes of metal was removed for recycling. So, that's around 300m of hedge done - only another 700m to go.

The other big job for us is levelling the 400m path that runs the whole length of the site, which we have named The Long Walk. Again, after many years of neglect it has a deep rut down the centre, which becomes pretty treacherous when wet. I'm reasonably nimble on my feet, but even I've slipped and fallen a couple of times. I've watched some of our older plot holders gingerly walking along and silently prayed that they kept their footing. Another big incentive to sort out the path is our open day. There was no way we could let visitors on to the site with a dangerous path. So, two tonnes of sand, 50 rolls of turf, one large bag of grass seed and 18 volunteers later and we have a path to be proud of.

It is always reassuring to see that our ploholders, and people on our waiting list, love the site as much as the committee members and give their time so generously. So, it seems only fair to give a little something back. After every volunteer session we have a BBQ lunch. Yes, we even had a BBQ in February. It is so nice to bring everyone together to thank them and share a decent sausage and a bit of salad. Some volunteers have also started to bring along a few beers or wine. I'm sure passers-by must think we are a strange (but friendly) lot holding BBQ's in the winter. But, we work hard and we deserve it!

Northfield's Allotments are definitely looking the tidiest they've been in a long time. The hedge is clearer and the paths are straighter. We also have 100% occupancy – although we still don't quite have 100% cultivation. So, we felt it was time to open our gates and show our neighbours what a treasure is on their doorstep. Our open day will be on Saturday 15th August. Everyone is invited – you'd be most welcome to come and have a look round and check on our progress.