



STAA Newsletter Mar 2018

Winter is still upon us. Time to plan your growing season and many of you will be looking forward to the yearly allotment competitions. Anyone taking on a new allotment will automatically be judged for the prestigious Best Newcomer cup. The **judging** will be taking place sometime from June 30th through to 8th July. We are also looking at having this year's allotment **barbeque** on Sunday 22nd July – location to be confirmed. We are looking for people with expertise/materials to build a brick BBQ at Tilmore – see inside.

This year there is the first '**Seed and Plant Swap**' planned for June at Tilmore – see on for details. We will all want to get involved with that - there is going to be tea and cake! Contact **Julie Yardley** for full details and what you can do to help with this. Julie has lots of written details about this fabulous event that she is desperate to email out to everyone. (Tilmore 44 julie.yardley7@icloud.com)

For anyone who makes copious notes about their growing adventures there is an interesting project that can use all that data - University of Sheffield research project – details further on. Thanks to Helen Freeston for sending that.

Please do continue to check out the website – it has daffodils now. Many thanks to David Mogg for keeping the website updated with minutes, great recipes and other information.

<https://sheetandtilmore.weebly.com/the-committee.html>

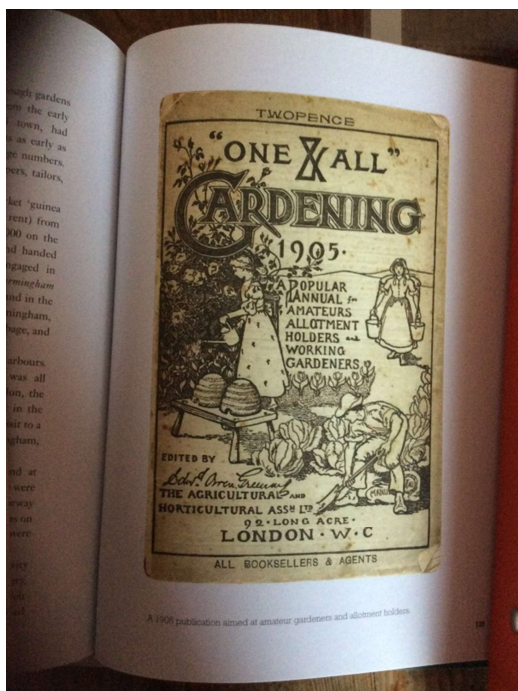
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A Brief History of the Origins of Allotments

Vanessa Harvey



Allotments are a familiar sight today in towns, cities and rural villages, often tucked into pockets of land alongside railway lines or between factories, or even large open fields. It would be difficult to find a community without its allotments but this hasn't always been so. Wind the clock back one hundred and fifty years and you would be hard pressed to find an allotment anywhere.

The first allotment site as we would recognise them today was established over two hundred years ago. In 1809 a six acre site at Great Somerford, Wiltshire, was made available after the local vicar used his royal connections to persuade King George III to spare some of his parish from the Inclosure Acts.

The far-sighted reverend's actions preceded the statutory provision of allotment sites by more than a century. The 1925 Allotments Act required local authorities to consider the need for allotments in town planning and decreed that

any land purchased could not be converted into other use without ministerial permission. Up till then any laws passed include get-out clauses, such as councils could sell allotment land "if they were of the opinion" that it was no longer needed.

The struggle for land as a means of survival for poor families originates as far back as 1066. Centuries of land enclosures, restrictions on wages and reduction of poor relief along with increasing mechanisation of the agricultural industries led to much suffering amongst the rural population and in the autumn of 1830 riots raged across southern Britain (The Swing Riots) when starving, landless farm workers smashed up the threshing machines which were taking their winter work away.

These riots could be seen as the cause of changes which led to the creation of allotments, as the subsequent Great Reform Act, 1832, led to one in six men getting the vote and by 1884 the Third Reform Act enfranchised 60% of adult males. The landmark Allotments Acts in the 1880s obliged local authorities to provide allotments if any six registered voters requested them and allotment sites started to blossom in cities as well as rural areas.

By the late 19th century there were more than 250, 000 allotment plots nationwide.





SEED and PLANT SWAP

Sunday 27th May from 10am til noon.

Tilmore Allotments

Please bring one or more of the following
to make this event a success:

Healthy seeds

Healthy plants

Homemade cake or biscuits

Tea and coffee will be served.

Please contact Julie Yardley
(Tilmore 44 julie.yardley7@icloud.com)
for more details.

CALLING ALL KEEN BUILDERS AND HANDY PEOPLE

We have been given permission to construct two brick
built barbecues at Tilmore and are looking for anyone
who can help build them, or have any bricks or
materials to contribute.

This will be a brilliant facility which will be available to
members all year round and every year for the annual
bbq. We have the funds to purchase the necessary
materials and now need the expertise. If you can
help, please contact Vanessa at vcharvey@icloud.com
or any committee member.



Editors note: we can dream. . .



Allotment gardener in eviction threat for 'only growing nettles to make soup'

A gardener claims he is being threatened with
eviction from his beloved plot for growing
nettles rather than "conventional" vegetables.

He faces being turfed out of the plot he has
tended to for ten years because of his choice
of vegetables and because he has left it
"messy".

**It appears from first glance that the plot is
not cultivated, but it is developed specifically
to include wildlife friendly features.**

A lot of people say it looks messy. "I
encourage what grows there to grow but I
also encourage it for the birds, bees and
butterflies. All I wanted really is to be left
alone to enjoy my allotment. I'm not trying to
cause trouble."

He claims he has been "harassed" to leave
and has received a number of "non-
cultivation" letters, stating his produce is "not
up to an acceptable standard".

On his plot, Mr Mellor also has a pond and a
100lb beehive with a colony of more than
20,000 bees to encourage wildlife to the area.

"The move will effectively mean destroying
years of work and destroying the natural
habitat of all the wildlife using my plots."

The great-grandfather claims he should
not have to be growing just tidy rows of
vegetables and instead wants to continue
growing nettles, which he takes home and
makes into soup.





Staying Alive (Memoirs from a Novice)

I read recently that an Allotment Secretary had been found dead in a shed – she had been strangled with a mower chord. After musing over the fact that they must have had electricity or a generator up there and how handy would that be for us weaker ones who find petrol mowers a bit tedious and heavy – I read on and discovered it had been some sort of personal slight due to a power struggle within. Rather alarmingly it would seem the Secretary had not taken this individual's concerns seriously enough and he had therefore decided, the only way forward was to get her out of the picture. With this in mind I have made some hasty alterations to my original newsletter.

Well I have never seen my allotment looking so neat and tidy as it did earlier this year when it was covered with a lovely blanket of white snow. Not a weed in sight. Even better - the ground was so frozen that I couldn't do a thing except sit and appreciate it. Then have a cup of tea. Once again, in January I was kicking my heels a bit, thinking I had all the time in the world and now it's march again and I haven't got any of my seeds in and am in a (the usual) panic having no idea where the year has gone. And of course, the snow has been awful and it's been really terrible trying to get up there and if the Council, having done their first inspection, send any of us letters about the state of our plots then I personally, will have something to say about it.

I intended to get my early potatoes in at the end of Feb but that never happened, and now, with the weather we've had, it still hasn't happened. Speaking to a local farmer I found that none of the farmers have got their earlies in either. It is the latest in living memory that the early potatoes around here have gone in. Usually our local farmers are able to compete with the Jersey Royals but that won't happen this year. There is a part of me liking very much the suggestion of using a thermometer to check that the ground temperature is absolutely right before planting onions. The other part of me is gleefully imagining this person counting the tea bags in a box of 240 to make sure they haven't been robbed. And what a good idea that is as you can never be too careful and I certainly would not want my onions being too cold and thinking its winter and going straight to seed (that makes sense and explains a few things about last year's onions) and I will be buying a thermometer, counting tea bags and weighing the sugar from this moment on.

This time of year there is much competition around the runner bean trench – and some people are being rather secretive about it all. Layers of this and that: lush manure, fresh kitchen waste, special ingredients. There has even been hushed talk of road kill being included. I am never sure whether encouraging runners to produce even more beans is a good idea (absolutely right – the more the better) – though it may explain where our deer went. I am sure I saw a hoof sticking out of a runner bean trench. And I personally will be digging up that person's runner bean trench to check it's not a deer in there and if it *is* Bambi, will be alerting the Police and leading a posse of like-minded people to drive this terrible person off their plot.

Some of my brassicas got club root last year – notably the sprouts – they just didn't come to anything at all, although the broccoli next to them were fine – it seems to be very localised. I've got resistant this time. The amazing bargain from Kings Seeds – if you like cabbage it's a fabulous deal. One person who always has wonderful cabbages and the like, digs a big hole, fills it with compost and then plants their brassicas in that. They don't ever get club root doing it that way. I've been trying to make the ground hard and flat before





planting them, as recommended in all the books but it doesn't seem to stop them falling over, I still have to stake them even doing that. And clearly I am doing something very, very wrong.

It's nice to be winning the War on Weeds right now. I love the way you can dig or weed a bit, go back 2 weeks later and it still looks weed free. I heard a harrowing story of someone who dug out a dock root, it was so big and so annoying that in anger and as a warning to other docks, he nailed it to his shed door. There it stayed, for a whole year, was all shriveled up and looked very, very dead. Out of interest he put it back in the ground and – you guessed it – it grew! I used to put everything onto my compost heap but now there are things I just take to the tip. And if you want to dump all your perennial weeds and stones onto my plot then I would welcome the opportunity to clear them all away for you.

Having access to a bucket and a field of very digestively active sheep, I have discovered that sheep/rabbit/goat pooh doesn't need to be matured – you can use it on the plot immediately. Rather handy although rather labour intensive and even I shudder at the thought of shoveling it into my car. I have found such a lot of free manure around but collecting it yourself is the hard part.

I am really nurturing my garlic this year because although last year they all looked quite good, when I pulled them up there was nothing there – they had all rotted in the ground. It would seem they absolutely hate to be water logged. That sort of thing is so disheartening after 6 months of keeping them weed free, watering and feeding them, singing and encouragement. I even took my guitar up there and sang to them. Actually, perhaps that was the problem. And I will never even consider singing on my plot again – it is clearly a really stupid and annoying thing to do. And I certainly won't be singing or dancing round my fire pit again and irritating anyone with my cheeriness.

So it would seem garlic doesn't need to be watered unless it's a real dry month but keep them well hoed and weed free. For the best possible crop it is best planted before xmas – but can be planted from november to april. Garlic is best from a supplier, not a shop as those have been treated and won't grow. Apparently don't worry about any flowers as they won't affect bulb growth – although that kind of goes against logic as the energy for the flower must come from somewhere. And what do I know? Because that's what I was told by someone who knows these things so it must be true.

I usually get rust every year with leeks and garlic – this I read was to do with humidity which makes sense as we've had a lot of that in the last 2 years. I have tried spacing them out more but it doesn't seem to get rid of it completely. It's a fungus and not planting in the same place for 3 years will help as well. I have read and read about when to harvest garlic and it still makes no sense to me. Something about uncovering the bulb and it splitting slightly is when you harvest. And the fact I don't get that is because I am stupid because it was really clearly explained to me.

I got very confused last year as all my potato labels blew off in the wind. All I do know is that my King Edwards did not store well – mine went quite mushy – I guess I didn't catch the blight early enough. A mushy potato is a disgustingly squishy and smelly potato.





It is that time of year when any sort of heavy vehicle at the allotments can cause quite a bit of damage. I should share the apologies the committee have received from people who had deliveries and then been really embarrassed at how much the trucks have churned up the ground. It is just one of those things and when it happened because of my manure delivery I kept really quiet about it and didn't admit to anything.

An interesting observation in the form of a complaint has come from a plotholder witnessing someone weeding and throwing the clods of earth – weeds still attached – over their shoulder into the top car park at Tilmore. Said person had their back to the carpark and was therefore showing a complete lack of concern about where their weeds landed. I shan't mention names, obviously, but the list will now be quite small based on how far you think someone could throw a bit of turf (grinning face). Now I have seen people with barrow loads of clods of weeds, placing them onto the paths in the holes and even being thanked for doing so – and it is true to say that after a couple of weeks they melt back into the path. I can only assume the concern is over whether they are 'placed' or 'chucked'. Although it is fair to say that the random chucking of any weeds anywhere onto the car park area right now would probably be just as effective in filling a hole as a careful placement (see previous paragraph).

The Potato fair was heavenly. Ratte! Sarpo Mira – organic. Lots and lots and I got far too many to try out. Ah well. There were also onions, broad beans, heritage seeds and all kinds of craft and planting stuff. Happily, and thanks to the gang at Adhurst, it is looking like it will be an annual event.



Potatoes were purchased by the tuber, rather than weight - a bit odd as a big potato can be cut up as long as each section contains a sprout point. If you got there early, which I did, you picked out all the great big tubers leaving all the little ones for the late comers. And I will be looking into that as it's totally not fair that the early people got all the biggies.



Have a wonderful Easter everyone and

Happy Allotmenting!





Justin Lees Paintings
<https://www.justinleespaintings.com/>



Justin is a fine art graduate who has taught art and design for over 20 years. His work is constantly evolving, his inspiration coming from the world around him. His artwork is such a wonderful reminder, of the incredible beauty of the countryside around us.

Justin is a plotholder at Tilmore.

Allotment recorders

Volunteers are needed to complete diaries for a year's worth of allotment activity to assist with a University of Sheffield research project.

Data will help investigate the ways allotments are used, how people manage their crops and how often they visit their plot, as well as uses of pesticides, fertilizers and homemade compost.

Volunteers at all levels of experience, ability and growing style are most welcomed.

myharvest.org.uk/2017/12/calling-all-growers
email: mcdobsonl@shef.ac.uk





Best way to dig

rhs.org.uk/digging-techniques

The ideal posture and technique to adopt when digging has been revealed by new research from the RHS and Coventry University.

Motion-capture equipment, usually used in making animated films, mapped the movement of gardeners while they were digging. This was recorded by high-resolution infra-red cameras and the data analysed by a computer programme developed at the university.

Bad posture was characterised by excessive forward bending, stretching limbs and uncontrolled movement. Loads in the lumbar region of the back could be increased by as much as half through bad posture, and almost doubled in the shoulder areas.

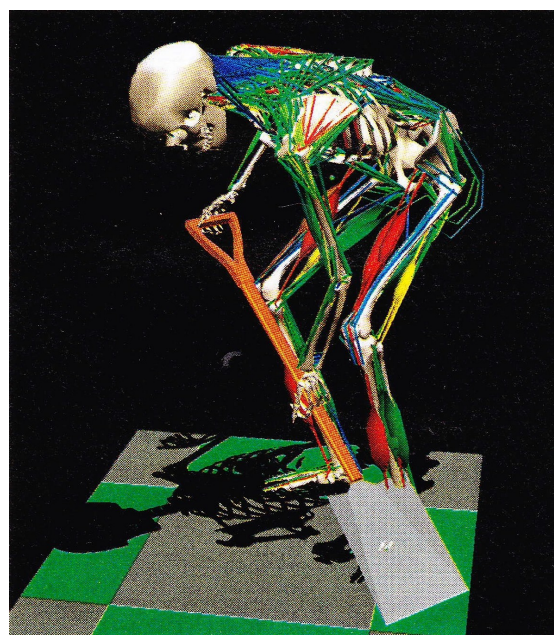
Researchers found that good gardening practice, using a regular and repetitive technique rather than erratic movements, was associated with more knee bending, and as a result minimal back bend. This method is therefore recommended.

Paul Alexander, RHS Head of Horticultural and Environmental Science, said, 'Digging is a common gardening practice - whether for planting trees or preparing a vegetable patch - yet we tend to rely on common sense, which can lead to gardeners complaining of aches and pains. Our findings will help ensure amateurs and professionals stay digging for longer, avoiding injury, and improving efficiency.'

THE FUTURE


In the image below, **red** indicates areas of stress.

RHS-funded research continues with studies into the optimum size and style of spade.



Thanks to Helen Freeston for sending me this for the newsletter.





The Peace of Wild Things

BY WENDELL BERRY

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake rests
in his beauty on the water,
and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief.
I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light.
For a time I rest in the grace of the world,
and am free.

Thanks to Kathy Dilkes for sending this wonderful poem.