

BRIDPORT and DISTRICT ALLOTMENTS SOCIETY

Newsletter

Spring 2014



Lynne Atkinson inspects the damage at Skilling

After the Storms

Many Bridport allotment holders are assessing the damage caused by the persistent violent storms and rainfall over the winter months. Lynne and Brian Atkinson visited their plot at **Skilling** in mid-February to find that the greenhouse had been destroyed for the second time in three years. Lynne says: "In 2012 it flooded but we managed to repair it - this time who knows? A neighbour's shed has also been wrecked, and it's very soggy under foot. I wonder when we will be able to work the ground. But, we enjoy a challenge!"

From **Burton Bradstock**, David Barnikel writes, "In spite of this long spell of bad weather the allotments have not been flooded but, as I imagine with most gardens and allotments, the ground is too saturated to work on at present.

"Of the area for six plots leased to us by the National Trust two have been very effectively worked and I gather that three more have been leased for the coming season once rotavated.

"We expect to hold our next bi-annual 'get-together' at the back end of March.

This Newsletter carries a number of stories from other organisations and individuals, demonstrating the wealth of Bridport's community gardening activities.

Community Allotment News

During the winter the Community Allotment members only meet once a month to keep things ticking over but this year we have been well and truly beaten by the weather. Luckily our site isn't prone to flooding, but there's been enough to keep the soil permanently soggy and each time a meeting was due (except for the November one) it has been pouring. The weekly meetings are due to start on Thursday 6 March, so let's hope that it clears up soon.

Last December the Community Orchard and Allotment were asked by BADAS to give a talk to your members at Mountfield. A team of five nervous speakers came and delivered our first presentation which seemed to go down well – especially Jim's bees! We are, of course, extremely grateful to the Allotments Society for the £50 donation towards our bee hives and thanks to everyone involved for the warm welcome (*Meeting report, page 3*).

Our main project for the new season is to improve our flat beds by edging them with recycled scaffolding boards. This will keep the edges neat and stop the grass encroaching. We have been fortunate enough to receive a generous grant from Palmers Brewery Community Fund to enable this work to be done. The grant also covers a couple of Community Orchard projects and we are all grateful to Palmers for helping these projects to get under way.

This year our raised beds will be fully utilised by members growing their own choice of vegetables and I have purchased an interesting selection of more unusual things for the traditional beds and the polytunnel. The seed potatoes are busy chitting in my spare bedroom and I shall soon be pressing the heated propagator into service to start off the early crops.

All we need now is a bit of settled weather – come on Jet Stream, move! – and the 2014 season will be able to start in earnest.

Jenn Baker

Next Allotments Society Meeting

Thursday 6 March 2014, 7.00 pm

at Mountfield (Town Council offices) (in the Marriage Room).

Raffle of a Groves' gift voucher on the evening.

Guest speaker will be Becky Groves talking about Herbs.

Help clear land for WW1 Memorial Wildflower Meadow

Lower Walditch Lane boasts the very unusually named 'Jellyfields Nature Reserve' - three hectares of grass, woodland, a stream and a small pond. No one seems to know where the name came from, but a few weird and wonderful notions were put forward by the journalist Jonathan Hudston a few years ago, including the idea that since "jelly" is old slang for a pretty girlfriend the fields here might have been a spot where courting couples met!

A more down to earth suggestion, which sounds closer to the truth in this winter of non-stop rain and floods, is that it got its name quite simply because it's muddy and slippery... like jelly!

Whatever the reason for its name, Jellyfields is going to be buzzing with activity and energy in the next few weeks.



This year marks the centenary of the start of the Great War. **Bridport Heritage Forum** - a group of local volunteers - has organised a series of events and projects to mark the anniversary, and one of them is about to take off at Jellyfields.

The swathe of land sweeping down to the tree line at the lower entrance is being cleared and re-sown to form a Wild Flower Memorial Meadow - a lasting tribute to all the people of the Bridport area who were involved in the events of a hundred years ago - at home and overseas.

Once the rain stops... the site will be cut down and an army of volunteers will be on hand [we hope!] armed with rakes and wheelbarrows, to clear the site and make ready for rotavating and sowing.

Here comes the sting at the end of the article! Could you and your family and friends be part of that volunteer group? If enough people turn up on site, it could be cleared in a morning. Which morning? I can hear people ask. Well . . . it depends on the weather.

At the moment it's too wet underfoot to start anything, but the moment it dries up, the action will begin.

The Editor has volunteered to pass on a starting date - as soon as we know it - and if some members of the Allotments Society could lend a hand, the Forum and the local community would be very grateful for the support.

Even if you can't be there for the clearing, I do hope you'll visit Jellyfields in the summer and enjoy the beauty and peace of the meadow.

Sheila Meaney, Bridport Heritage Forum

Raising a Polytunnel for St Mary's School

When a retiring market gardener offered his polytunnel free to a good cause, Sarah Wilberforce and Robert Golden jumped at the chance to bring home-grown fruit and vegetables to St Mary's School. The school has a small allotment and polytunnel, but these require some work to rejuvenate them and the new bigger tunnel will increase production.

On Sunday 2 March families, staff at the school, and volunteers from the community are invited to the "Raising our Polytunnel" event from 11.00 until 3.00, with free lunch provided. Clearing the ground, erecting the polytunnel, constructing doors, moving raised beds and rebuilding the fence and shed are the first steps.

The commitment to grow local food, provide a supply of healthy fruit and vegetables to the children, and get them involved in growing their lunch requires continuing support.

Without the enthusiastic goodwill of the Head, Helen Farmer and the parent Governor, Ian Corke, the project could not have gone ahead. Amanda Downes, the cook at the school, and Lindsey Pritchard, who is in charge of the garden, will steer the early stages of setting the crops up. As soon as possible, a freelance gardener will be employed to get it going.

To begin with we are inviting all BADAS allotment holders to lend a hand and be part of this celebration, weather permitting, on that Sunday. If you are able to support please contact us on admin@transitiontownbridport.co.uk.

The money to set the garden up and run has initially come from Communities Living Sustainably, funded by Big Lottery, and Magna Housing. Robert Golden, who created the Home in Bridport project, is working on a film of the history and culture of the Skilling estate in Bridport, and has been running photographic workshops on Saturdays in the Children's centre. He is showing the film at Bridport Arts Centre in May.

Sarah Wilberforce, a member of Transition Town Bridport, has done much of the organisation of the gardening initiative. She says "We are working to build a future for Bridport where we are not dependent on imported foods and fossil fuels, and if our children can learn to grow their own food the town will become far more resilient to future changes".

The anonymous donor of the polytunnel has expressed delight that his resource will continue to be used to teach children how to grow their own food.

Sarah Wilberforce

The Orchard's Story

A most interesting and well-attended evening was enjoyed by members at the Society's meeting on Thursday 12 December at Mountfield, when a talk on the history and activities of the Bridport Community Orchard Group (BCOG) was given by Jill Lloyd, Gill Massey, Susan Readman, Jenn Baker, and Jim Binning.

Jill Lloyd gave a brief outline of the history of BCOG and how it grew out of the 2006 District Local Plan which declared that the space should be a public green space in perpetuity – having objected to plans such as building on it or using it as a car park! Help was given in forming the group in 2008 from many quarters including, amongst many others, Bridport Town Council, the Bridport Environment Group (an influential local community group with an interest in environmental and planning issues), and David Squirrel who helped in setting up the heritage orchard. Hedges were planted and 14 allotments provided (including a community allotment) which are let by BTC. The Round Table have donated a shed and Bridport Lions, Waitrose, and the WI have all helped to raise funds.

Jenn Baker now manages the Community Allotment which has twelve 1-metre square raised beds and is available to all. There are level gravel paths suitable for wheelchair users. There is a polytunnel, soft fruit and a grape vine. The first open day was held in 2013 with mini-tours, a talk on herbal remedies and plant sales. There was a food and drink stall and helped by the good weather over £70 was raised!

Susan Readman spoke about the herb bed which contains a mixture of culinary herbs and those for herbal remedies – many of which are very insect and bee friendly. The soil is poor and thin, and requires improvement – but this makes it very suitable for “Mediterranean” herbs (including sage, thyme, and oregano) which are particularly bee friendly. Herbs not usually encountered are hyssop and lovage which are good for salads as are burnet, fennel, borage and comfrey – again all bee friendly. Angelica would be a good choice to grow and soapwort would be very interesting (*historically used as a soap – Ed*) as would culinary pelargoniums, and rose and violets, which can be used in cakes. The herb bed is an ongoing project, and it is hoped to be able to offer bouquets garni in the future as well as encouragement with growing herbs in window boxes.

The wildlife area was established with the help of Nick Gray from the Dorset Wildlife Trust. These areas encourage biodiverse habitats which are particularly helpful to insects. The hedges are flourishing and will be layered in the autumn with further native species

being introduced. The soil is very rich in the orchard – which is good for fruit trees and for grass, but not for native wild flower species which prefer impoverished soils. This can be rectified by planting yellow rattle which is semi parasitic on grass and weakens it.

The pond was started in 2009 with puddled clay but it wasn't successful as it leaked. It now has a pond liner and since filling in 2011 has newts, frogs plus other wildlife and is used for dipping days - which are very successful.

BTC now owns Jubilee Green which the group are now helping to manage. The Bridport Lions gave their help and fruit and oak trees plus bulbs have now all been planted.



Jim Binning, Jill Lloyd and Jenn Baker, speakers at the Society's winter meeting last December

Jim Binning described his experiences with the orchard's bees - which he introduced after attending a bee keeping course in 2012. The hive was installed in July 2012 with a 10 foot separation from the adjacent path. When leaving the hive the bees tend to fly upwards and thus are not a problem to pedestrians. Although July is later in the year than ideal to start a new colony particularly in a poor summer - they have flourished. The method used is sustainable bee keeping – their function is mainly for pollination – not honey production, although there could be honey available in a good year. The hive is not the normal commercial sort as it is a top bar type and much easier to construct. The £50 grant that BADAS supplied was gratefully received and is approximately the sum required to pay for the materials. Jim said that he had not encountered a problem with the various diseases that have produced such a reduction in bee numbers – and this raises the interesting question that as sustainable methods may lead to less stress to the bees, does this give them increased resistance to disease?

Brian Atkinson



Bridport Seed Swap

This was the first year the seed swap ran as an independent event and a great success it was too.

The seed swap was held on the morning of Saturday 15 February at the Ropemakers. Geraldine the publican made us very welcome and provided us with the perfect space for very productive conversation and swapping!

More than 40 people attended over the space of the two hours. Some came by, simply intrigued as to what a seed swap entailed whilst others came with a specific wish list.

As all manner of seeds were contributed from linseed to angelica, spaghetti squash to sunflowers, amazingly most people did find something that was useful and of interest to them.

It was indeed a very happy sociable morning to share with fellow gardeners. Do look out for the seed swap which will take place in February next year.

Eileen Haste

Bridport's Potato Day

Bridport's third Annual Potato Day was held on Saturday 11 January in a new venue, the United Church Hall, off East Street.

Once again Pennard Plants arrived with an amazing selection of seed potatoes as well as onion sets, garlic, rhubarb, fruit trees, Heritage seeds and much more. Well before the official opening time at 10 a.m. the hall was full of eager gardeners, some regulars and some who had never grown a spud before.

The great thing about Chris and Mike from Pennard is their vast knowledge of all things growing and the friendly and easy way they share it, so hopefully there are now lots of confident new veggie growers.

The cafe, manned by volunteers, was always busy, selling delicious home-made cakes and soup, all

donated. Our chosen charity this year for Pennard's donation was Dorset Wildlife Trust and we were pleased to pass £140 to them. We also invited the ViewFrom's charity for this year, who supply Water Survival Boxes, to be there with us, and they collected £150 in donations plus £100 profit from the cafe.

Grow Your Own (3 May)

The 4th annual 'Grow your own' veggie giveaway stall will be outside the Arts Centre on Saturday 3 May, when we will be hoping for lots of donations of spare veggie plants please. We will again have a donation box for Water Survival.

Jude Hopkins



Potato Day at the United Church Hall

Bridport and District Allotments Society

Membership of the Bridport & District Allotments Society costs £2 per annum. Our Membership Secretary/Treasurer Mandy Rathbone will be pleased to receive your subscriptions. Please contact Mandy on [REDACTED] or send her an email at [REDACTED]

Receiving the newsletter by email: If any member who currently receives the newsletter/minutes of meetings through the letterbox could receive them by email (and save us delivery cost/time), please contact Lynne Atkinson - [REDACTED] (Email recipients get the pictures in colour!)

Newsletter contributions welcome: if you have any items you would like to see included in future issues of our Newsletter (which comes out quarterly) or if there are subjects you would like us to cover, please contact the Editor, Charles Wild, [REDACTED]; or email entries to [REDACTED]. Contributions to the next edition (articles, news items and/or photographs) are welcome at any time, but by **10 May 2014** please. Many thanks for contributions this time - please keep them coming.