

Issue Number 4

Of the Newsletter of the Felixstowe Allotment Association
www.felixstoweallotments.co.uk
Edited and designed by Peter Constable

DOWN TO EARTH



visitors and between the two locations raised just under £1,100 for cancer charities. Well done all.

In September we return to the winter meetings at OFCA held on the fourth Thursday of most months. The speakers we hope will be interesting regardless of topic not always allotment related.

The Newsletter holds names and dates for your diary and the

I'm writing this looking at my desert plot at Cowpasture wondering how on earth we will crop anything this year. Maurice Barber cannot recall a drier year in his fifty plus years cultivating.

You add the extremely high temperatures to the lack of moisture and we start debating buying drought resistant vegetables and different types of plants to bring food to the table. Today, as you can see from the picture, I did actually find a few things to harvest but not in any quantity, thanks to other factors including black fly, moles, rats and rabbits. One wonders why we put ourselves through it.

On a different note I'm delighted to say we have sorted

the hut at Cowpasture and both here and at a Ferry Road we now have full time access to fully serviced toilets.

In June we marked the opening of the new hut with a welcome visit from the Mayor

Councillor Sharon Harkin and her deputy Councillor Mick Richardson. (see below). Both remain supporters of

the allotment ethos and the mini communities we have at the five sites across town.

On the same day we also held the open day for the National Garden Scheme, in conjunction with Gill Tempest who opened her garden in Beatrice Avenue. Thanks to your help, generosity and gift of time, we welcomed over fifty

NEWS NEWS



Felixstowe ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION

article about our evening visit to Home Farm Nacton was a result of the March meeting.

Likewise, within this Newsletter will be an invitation to purchase Kings seeds at a 50% discount, along with seed potatoes from a local supplier. The shop at Cowpasture will be the focal point of these orders, save Kings seeds which will post direct to your home. We will notify you as soon as the catalogues etc are delivered to us.

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Our Visit to Home Farm, Nacton

Following the very

successful and interesting talk given at the March Meeting, Andrew Williams, a director of Home Farm Nacton, (HFN), invited us to visit the headquarters of this enterprise.

In late June, 31 members and a guest climbed aboard a huge trailer with Andrew driving an equally huge tractor, we chugged across the wilds of Nacton and beyond. We looked at some of standing crops and learnt about some of the challenges faced when growing vegetables for sale in this modern world.

HFN is a trust set up to grow primarily vegetables on land that was once the Prettyman Estate at Nacton. Additional pockets of land in and around Nacton are also now used around Bucklesham. The current work force stands at about 45 and supply the major supermarkets including Sainsbury's, Tesco and others.

The crops are mostly organic and those green credentials are followed to the letter with plenty of scrutiny during the growing period. You can see from one photograph huge numbers of bought in young plants, baby leeks in the millions from Lincolnshire and cauliflowers from Holland. I now have a few of each growing on my allotment! These living plants have to be planted BY HAND within a few days of delivery or they die.

The leeks arrive with an extra £400 costs associated with Brexit, adding to the tens of thousands spent since we left the EU.

We stopped to admire a vast field of Red Baron onions, the housewives favourite, only



Andrew Williams with a few of the FAA members aboard the huge trailer at Home Farm, Nacton, during the FAA visit in June

accepted if three fit neatly into a nylon sleeve bag. Too big, then the supermarkets reject them. The onion seed was planted with a cereal crop which held the light land in place until the onions were rooted and established. At that point the cereal plants were 'sprayed off' leaving the onions to fully develop.

The amount of watering required for these multiple acres of plants is huge and frequent, vast quantities on potatoes, onions, leeks etc. Bore holes and reservoirs are vital. Additionally, the EU funded 'Kingsfleet project' sees reclaimed surface water once draining naturally back into the river Deben, now captured and pumped back inland from Kingsfleet marshes. HFN have at Bucklesham their own pumps that receive this water and moves it on further.

We trundled off into a

massive field of early potatoes, Maris Peer, started under fleece in order to reach an early (higher) market price. We learnt that some UK outlets this year have been selling new potatoes from Israel - crazy!

HFN are contracted by Sainsbury to grow their luxury new potato 'Perline'. Sadly, this year the three daily lorry loads ordered each morning has been steadily dropping with just two boxes requested the week we visited. It means the crop stays in the ground and cannot be sold to another UK outlet and is a simple example of the cut backs that are being seen across all shopping platforms this year. Keep an eye on your spuds! Luxury or otherwise.

We also viewed a large field of carrots being harvested by a third party for their own washing and packing factory in Leicestershire. Home Farm provide the land and grow on



Andrew Williams demonstrating one of the Robotti automated machines that can weed day and night unmanned, controlled by GPS, lasers and a clever computer program

behalf of this national company who supply many other supermarkets with carrots .

This growing process also extended to a Belgium grower who had hired land at Nacton to grow Flax. Once cut it would be taken back to Belgium and finished into Linen. It's a crop used and needed more and more to meet modern fashion needs.

Sugar beet was also discussed, some countries are converting it into bio fuel. The price of sugar may rise. Silver Spoon suppliers may see an increase in the value of their crops in order to keep our UK teeth sweet.

Linked to the examples above, the costs born by HFN are growing hugely. Fuel and fertilisers let alone staff costs, partially linked to Brexit losses of seasonal staff. So, to help, new automated machines are being developed. Look at the

diesel machine, weeding day and night controlled by GPS , lasers and a clever computer program. The revolving blades get within millimetres of each plant. The cabbage field we looked at was perfect. The coleslaw cabbages of all colours were huge, so big at 10k they could be harvested by machine. Not possible yet for cauliflowers but watch this space. The next generation of machines will be solar powered, we saw one small example as we travelled home.

The evening drew to a close with a welcome cup of tea and coffee, with most of us accepting free leek and cauliflower plants. I've never seen so much activity at Cowpasture as we planted our freebies the following day. Most of mine are still alive but watering has been crucial to keep them going.

To close, we enjoyed the

evening immensely. I thank Andrew Williams for his time, given freely by a very busy man.

Neville

Forthcoming FAA Speaker Evenings

At the Old Felixstowe
Community Association
Meeting Room,
Church Road, at 7.30pm

22 September 2022 -

Derek Peters - *'Herrings'*

27 October 2022 -

Chris Parfitt - *'Butan'*

24 November 2022 -

Alan Baker -

'Plants with Mettle'

26 January 2023

Matthew Tanton-Brown

'Compost and Composting'

23 February 2023

Dick Daniels - *'Coastwatch'*

23 March 2023 -

AGM Cheese and Wine

27 April 2023 TBC

I did suggest to Chairman Nev that he could include a 'Spot the Raindrop' competition in this Newsletter... along the lines of 'Spot the Ball' run in the Sunday papers a few decades back when players' moustaches were as long as their shorts. As much merriment as this might provide, the only problems, as he pointed out, were that it's been so long since we had rain none of us would be able to remember what it actually looked like, and we'd probably need to borrow the new Webb Space Telescope to find any drops here in East Suffolk.

Without wishing to sound Black Cap, it is getting a bit serious.

One challenging year we (and our farming brethren) can shrug off, but if this year is indicative of summers to come, we're going to have to think long and hard about how we keep our plots healthy and productive. I'm not certain I'd want to have to lug gallons of water on an unrelentingly regular basis to maintain crops in the way I've done (so far) this summer. For that matter, I'm not certain either that the Town Council will allow us unlimited water usage – particularly as they've already declared a Climate Emergency at the Town Hall. Carrying water is a chore that falls unevenly on ploholders, too, depending on how far their allotment is from the nearest tap.

I've been giving this subject a lot of thought while I've been keeping my watering cans company in recent weeks. I don't for one moment claim to have the right answers, but here's a few things I will/won't be doing next year ...

The best way to avoid having to spend excess time watering is to firstly invest in the soil itself. A healthy soil, enriched with humus, needs less added water as it retains moisture like a sponge. Soil scientists have found that putting down two bucketfuls of well rotted compost or manure per square metre will increase the

moisture content by the equivalent of a crop's water requirements for two weeks. The second step is a mulch (at least 3" deep) of similar organic material, to lock moisture in and reduce loss through evaporation. Also avoid digging after mid spring, so winter rainfall isn't brought to the surface, to be stolen by sun and wind. In a drought, No Dig is King!

Secondly, grow crops that don't have an excessive thirst or which are susceptible to high temperatures.

MONTY SAYS

A solution to the problem?

Leeks, once puddled in, send down deep roots and are generally resilient. Likewise roots such as carrot, beetroot and parsnip can survive dry periods once established. French beans have surprisingly frugal requirements for water – and unlike their running cousins, don't throw their unset flowers to the ground in a hissy once the temperature rises. Outdoor tomatoes only need watering once the trusses have set – sweetcorn is the same. Cabbage and calabrese are far better choices than cauliflower and Brussels sprout, which have a tendency to run to seed. The best, and by far easiest to grow leafy veg is spinach beet, which positively revels in dry heat. Certain varieties of potato, including the blight-resistant Sarpo range and Desiree are more successful when rainfall is low.

Unfortunately, traditional Northern Hemisphere favourites such as summer and autumn peas may be off the menu, not because of the dryness but the heat, which (like Mr and Mrs Monty) they just can't tolerate.

Planting crops further apart may also be beneficial, since the increased spacing allows them to spread their roots out for moisture. Against this, planting more closely creates shade, which reduces evaporation and allows plants to make greater use of the same quantity of added water.

Keep splashing on the Factor 50 sunblock and always wear a wide-brimmed hat! Happy gardening!

The History of One Shed on Cowpasture Allotments

1939 Outbreak of WW2.

We heard it on the radio in our semi detached cottage in Billericay. I was nearly five years old. A sister nearly three and

my youngest sister newly born. Within a month or so our Anderson shelter was delivered in sections. My father dug an enormous hole at the end of

the garden. Lined it with concrete and assembled the shelter in the hole. Then covered it with a deep layer of dirt. He probably thought that the

Luftwaffe would not see it that way. He made wire netting 'beds' and fitted them in the shelter. Just finished he was called up into the RAF and we saw little of him until the war was over.

I remember being in it during air raids. When it rained the 'floor' was covered in some four inches or so of water and dead worms floated about in it.

Meantime Mum planted cabbages on top of the shelter and, being something of a paint addict, used whatever paint was available to paint the inside

of the shelter. It went through many colourful transformations during the five years that she single handedly looked after her young family.

Dad actually returned in early 1946 and unearthed the shelter. It became a chicken shed until, in 1974 my wife and I moved to Felixstowe and took the shelter with us. It became our shed on Cowpasture allotments. It is still there, on plot 115 and still in use. Here it is.

I used to have three, ten-rod allotments, but now, being 87, have reduced it to just one -

number 116... so I can still see our old shelter on the neighbouring plot!

Tony Taylor



Nev's News continued from page 1

The Allotment Association works with Felixstowe Town Council to help run the five sites and to discuss issues as they arise, or to head off difficulties before they impact on the tenants.

At Cowpasture we have seen a number of new tenants and also access to smaller plots which has seen increase in vehicular traffic leading to more road repairs. The speed humps annoyed a few but the majority appreciated our desire to slow vehicles down. Additionally, we have seen examples of frustration around the single entrance gate, with some being forced to reverse for considerable distances causing damage to both vehicles and allotment fences.

So, I would welcome your views. Should we consider a one way system at Cowpasture?

Driving in would be an immediate right turn FOR ALL, with only left turns thereafter, in order to reach your park spot and with no reversing. I wouldn't include cyclists in this change, should it eventually happen.

To close, the year will be memorable for a variety of reasons, but as I plan for the forthcoming growing season, I may take into account water shortages and ways to reduce the impact of watering. The use of water, especially hoses, may reduce like it or not and we might have to grow differently in order to grow at all.

Neville

PS: The spuds planted with fish heads proved to be a success, next year malt vinegar will be added.



The specially made cake for the opening of the New Hut at Cowpasture in June



The FAA Shop at Cowpasture

- Compost** 60 litres £6
- Chicken Pellets** 4kg £4
- Bonemeal** 3kg £3.50
- Fish/Blood/Bone** 3kg £3
- Growmore** 3kg £4.50
- Potato Enricher** 3kg £4.50
- Fine or Large Mesh** £1.50
or £2 per metre
- Bamboo Canes** £10 for 12
- Fleece** 35g £1 per metre
- Garden Lime** 3kg £2
or £7.50 per bag
- Paper Potato Bags** £1.50
for two
- Plastic Pipe for hoops** 50p
per metre

Prices are subject to fluctuation.

*The shop is open
9am - 12.30pm
most Saturdays of the year*

New Members

Railway Hill
Mark Farrow
Graham Cook

Ferry Road
Jill White

Cowpasture
Lilian Eagles
Paul Jenkins
Penelope Unwin
John Folkard



The Mayor about to cut the cake at the official Opening of the New Hut at Cowpasture in June

Seed and Potato Orders 2022/23

Seed Orders once again will take advantage of the 50% discount offered by Kings Seeds. The Order Form is Blue, and the catalogue will be the standard issue, but the discount is for vegetables and flower seeds only.

The discounted price is now clearly shown on the Kings Order Form.

Please follow their instructions with the discounted price only, being added to the FAA Membership Form.

The Blue Form includes the £2.20 fee to enable your seeds to be sent direct to your home.

Please pay careful attention to the Membership Renewal Form as it also incorporates a summary of

the Potato and Onion Order from a local supplier.

This year the completed Order and Membership Forms can be sent to the Treasurer together with your payment of choice, or if

assistance is required bring them to the Cowpasture shop on a Saturday morning where a payment can also be taken using the

recently acquired SumUp card reader.

Please note the **final date** to submit all Seed & Potato Orders is **20th October.**

*Guy Pearse -
Treasurer and Seed Order
Co-ordinator*

