

The PLOT so Far

Newsletter of the South Harpenden Allotments and Gardens Society Spring 2019

From the Chairman



Welcome to this the first on line edition of 'The Plot So Far'. Over the last two years many of you have used the internet to renew your membership and pay your annual plot rental charges and this has made the administration easier for our Treasurer and our Database Manager. There will still be a small number of printed copies available for the members who do not have internet facilities and a hard copy is included with the paperwork for new members joining the allotment Society.

2018 started badly when Lin Norman died, but we have many of our members to thanks for contributing to the memorial bench that was erected in her memory. Please take time to visit and sit on this very comfortable seat overlooking the pond and the site towards Southdown shops and the railway.

2019 is our Golden Jubilee year and we are working on several ideas to mark another milestone in the history of SHAGS

Thank you for your continued support and here's to a healthy and prosperous 2019 growing season.

Mike Cobley

SHAGS: 50 years old and still going strong.....

2019 is a very special year for SHAGS as we celebrate 50 years of allotmenting. We do have plans to mark this anniversary in events later in the year, but I thought I'd take a look at the origins of the Society and how it has developed over the fifty years since it was formed.

There have been allotments in Harpenden since the 1850's when Sir John Lawes, the founder of the Rothamsted experimental station, set aside land for local villagers. He even had a club room and "store", although the photographs suggest a grander building than our own.

Other allotment sites were gradually opened in Harpenden, notably the Piggotshill Lane site, all of which were managed by the Harpenden Urban District Council as it was then. AGM's and rent collection were conducted in Southdown Methodist Hall.

Fast forward to the early 60's when housing and other development in the town began to put pressure on the "allotment community". For instance the Cravells Rd site was built on. In 1964 the "Harpenden Gardens and Allotment Society" was formed with representative both from the Council and the Society, who by then saw Ted Allen as Chair.

Turbulent times appear to follow in the mid-60's as first Grove School was opened adjacent to Piggotshill site and further housing developments and the plan for the refuse disposal site at Dark Lane caused the Committee of the time to consult with the National Association of Allotments for advice.

Following advice from the Association the AGM in 1965 called for plots to be run by the Society and a guarantee of tenure, however not enough people attended the AGM for a vote to be held; then, as now, AGM's are not so well attended.

In 1967 the refuse disposal site was indeed built plus Sherwoods Rise housing; however, the Society received the remaining land fenced off and most notably the Shop was built. This did mean that some Piggotshill plot holders were obliged to move to the Aldwickbury site.

Finally, in November 1968 the new building was handed over and agreement to reached to rename the Society; and "South Harpenden Allotments and Garden Society" as we know it came into being.

In addition to the Piggotshill and Aldwickbury sites the Society also included the Topstreet Way, Churchfield and Sibley Avenue sites and in 1973, after an invitation from the Council added Harpenden Rise to their portfolio of sites.

In 1980 Cross Lane and the now closed Heath Close sites were added, however areas such as the Carpenters Arms garden site and part of Churchfield were taken for development.

Notable milestones such as the opening of a further building the Ted Allen room was completed in 1983, in 1991 the Society's own competition was started and continues to this day and in 1999 the first edition of the "PlotSoFar" was distributed.

It was during these early years that names such as Ted Allen, as mentioned above, Percy Bradbury, George Turner and Derek Green all served on the Committee in various roles, several as Chair and individually contributed much to drive the Society forward. They are still remembered by trophies, a plot or in the case of Ted Allen, the meeting room.

As the Society moved into the 21st century a growing trend saw more women on the Committee and in 2002 Chris Wilson became the first female Chair succeeding Derek Green.

Chris was followed by Joe Payne, Clennell Collingwood and David Edgington. By this time the Society had well and truly moved into the digital age by developing its own website and member database.

In 2007 it was decided to take a stall at the Harpenden Farmers market and surplus produce was sold there. This took a lot of coordination and its success owed much to the efforts of Lin Norman, Angela and Malcolm Lingwood and Irene Boogerman to name but a few.

In 2009 the Society celebrated 40 years with a garden fête on the Aldwickbury site. Opened by the mayor it included games, a photographic competition and food stalls.

The AGM of 2012 marked a further change of Chair as Lin Norman was elected.....and I as Secretary, having been co-opted by David Edgington in December 2011. I nearly didn't make it to the Committee however, as another committee member objected to me becoming Secretary and a Trustee until I was elected at an AGM.

Under Lin Norman's stewardship progress continued as first the Council passed total responsibility for the management of all sites, which now included Oakley Road to Society, a new Termination procedure was developed, the Rules were completely brought up to date to reflect current practice and a new policy was developed to allow Sheds and later Polytunnels.

Lin also championed the annual Society competition, which for many years has been managed by Chris Wilson, almost single-handedly, and expanded it to introduce new categories and more prizes. We now have a celebratory evening

each year in the Town Hall where all prize-winners are invited to receive their reward from the mayor in front of family and other recipients.

Lin stood down in 2017 and sadly passed away in 2018 and a commemorative bench was erected outside the Ted Allen Room.

Mike Cobley took over as Chair in 2017 and has already worked with the Council to secure a new working relationship which sees financial support and HTC labour provided to improve the sites still further and this in addition to the annual grant the Society receives.

We now look forward to celebrating this first 50 years of the Society and go on hopefully to the next.

A more detailed history of the Society can be found on the SHAGS website, written and researched by Richard White with later additions by John Molson.

Roger Glanville

Bonfire November the 5th 2018

Pigeons were circling untidily over houses in Piggotts Hill, unlike sparrows that fly in their thousands with precision in the evenings. One pigeon flaps about, another does a vee sign then they both catch up with the others like naughty children. I look at a vast pile of dry material to tidy our plots before the winter, collected and heaped up for our annual bonfire fire. This is always piled together only days before, preventing small animals taking cover and hibernating underneath. A couple of hoses are laid ready in case of mishaps!

As it gets dark a line of oil lamps on sticks light the way to plot 60. Mums and Dads with their



small children gather as our leader applies his long lighted taper to some special mixtures in the centre. In a few minutes the fire burns fiercely and we all enjoy the warmth as the guy flares up and disappears into the flames. Local fireworks began to entertain us as we chat to each other around

the paths near the fire. A good mild and dry evening.

Next day the fire is reduced to a pile of hot ashes, metal items including nails go for recycling and the remaining ash is spread over the plot. As our plots are left for the winter, a jay perches on an apple tree, the green woodpecker swoops low over the plots and five Magpies play on a far plot. This area we all enjoy is a true nature reserve which we must retain for the future.

Joe Payne

Treasurer's report

At our AGM in May 2018 it was agreed that we would increase our plot rents from 1st April 2019 from £5.00 per pole to £6.00 per pole, bringing the average plot of 5 poles to £30.00 per year. This is the first increase since April 2014 and works out at 58p per week for a 5 pole plot which includes water and use of our machinery, we hope you still consider it good value. We reluctantly took this step due to the rising costs of our basic overheads over the past five years. To ensure we remain in good financial health we need to make sure our rent income covers all our running costs as we have a duty maintain all our eight sites in order. We totally rely on volunteers to carry out work on our sites and we are grateful to plot holders who offer extra help. Our thanks go to our site reps who do a tremendous job. All your efforts contribute to the wellbeing of our Society.

We are grateful for the support of Harpenden Town Council in the form of a yearly grant. Last year we received £3000.00 and we always aim to use this money to improve the facilities on our sites. In 2018 our Aldwickbury site had a new shed and we have paid for smaller projects on other sites, again with the help of volunteers. The society also contributed towards the cost of the memorial bench for our late Chair Lin Norman, together with the generous donations.

I have been a plot holder at Piggotshill since 2004 and Treasurer since 2013 and have worked with some lovely people over the years, including Lin Norman who encouraged me to stand as treasure. Our allotment committee who meet on a monthly basis works on behalf of all our plot holder. With your continued help and support we hope that 2019 will be a bumper year for our allotment community.

Carole Pamphlett
Treasurer

Going for Gold

As last year's judge I have been asked to give you some tips on how to achieve a gold award. If you go to the S.H.A.G.S website Chris Wilson (the previous judge of at the past 12 years) gives advice on how we judge, what you need to grow and the need to think about soil conservation. One of the targets I set myself before I applied to be a judge was to get a gold award. I have got golds before but I just needed to do it one more time.

My planting time varies according to when we are going on holiday. I have usually planted most things by mid May, but I keep my fingers crossed there is no late frost which could devastate it all. I find that a diary is useful as a reference. I keep a record of when I start things off, when they are planted out, any protection used, what the weather was like, what survived, what I needed to replace and how much I produced. I also draw out my crop rotation plan.

When planting I pack things in tight as my philosophy is the more plants I put in the less space for weeds! I have a 5 pole plot so have to rotate the crops probably one and a half times a year, e.g. When the broad beans come out I might put in leeks etc. Think where your paths will go so you reduce the time you are walking on the soil. I have taken out my grass paths as I could never get them to look good, and replaced them with wood chip. This was one of the best things I have done.

Try and attract beneficial insects to the plot by growing some flowers or erect an insect hotel. Companion planting, (e.g. french marigolds round the runner beans), can reduce the use of insecticides. Sheeps wool round the beans could reduce the use of slug pellets. Think about mulching to try and conserve the moisture in the ground and enrich the soil with manure or compost, preferably from your own compost bins. Netting is also useful in protecting fruit and vegetables from all sorts of bugs and birds This must be bird friendly. I do wonder how much longer it is going to take to judge a plot when people are having to use so much more netting or enviromesh?

These are a few suggestions for those people who want to achieve an award. Unfortunately you can have the best of plans on what to do but luck/nature has to be kind to you. Last year the weather was a disaster! It was so disappointing seeing scorched grass, drooping plants and runner beans that refused to set but encouraging in how many of you still got awards.

All the best for 2019, Linda Gahagan

Is it worth chitting potatoes before planting?

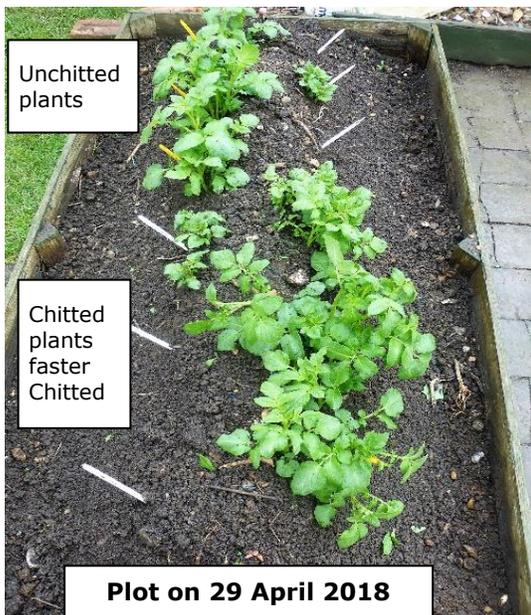
Chitting potatoes means encouraging the seed potato tubers to sprout (i.e. produce short shoots) before planting. The idea is that shoots emerge faster than from unchitted tubers and the more advanced plants ultimately are ready to harvest earlier and, hopefully, produce higher yields. Chitting is achieved by putting seed tubers, with most 'eyes' upright, in a light, cool but frost-free place at about 10 °C. Some light is essential to avoid white, elongated shoots and temperature, like porridge, must be not too hot (too much growth) or too cold (risk of tubers freezing). I found placing tubers in a tray right next to a north-facing window worked well for chitting with unchitted ones kept in our domestic fridge at about 5 °C (some protracted discussions and bribery was required, which made Brexit negotiations look like a 'walk in the park')

Maris Bard (1st early potato): 1st April 2018
 (= day of planting)
 (chitting started 15 January 2018)



Unchitted Maris

Chitted Maris



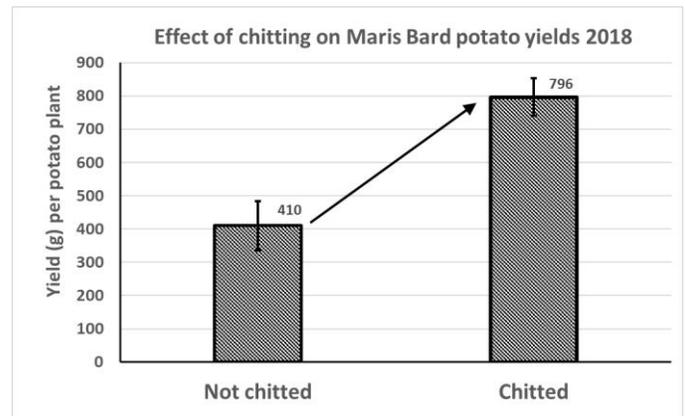
Unchitted plants

Chitted plants faster Chitted

Plot on 29 April 2018

The Maris Bard first early potatoes were planted on 1 April 2018 in a bed under a plastic cloche. Foliage had emerged from all the chitted tubers by 19 April. In contrast, no foliage was visible from unchitted tubers on this date. The more rapid emergence from chitted tubers is obvious in the photo above, taken 4 weeks after planting (white sticks mark unchitted tubers; yellow sticks chitted). The bed was watered occasionally.

Potatoes from 'chitted' plants were ready to harvest at end June/early July whereas 'unchitted' ones were not ready until 10 to 16 days later in mid-July. Average yields of tubers per plant are shown in the figure below.



- Potato yields were almost doubled by chitting the seed tubers – from 410 g/plant to 796 g/plant. This difference was statistically significant - LSD ($P \leq 0.05$) = 207.5.
- These yields equate with an increase from 21.5 to 41.7 t/ha – a good commercial yield for first early potatoes.
- Chitting was also used with my second early (Marfona) and maincrop (Picasso) potatoes. In contrast to the first early Maris Bard, the benefits to chitting were much smaller and not statistically significant. Unchitted/Chitted potato yields: Marfona 985/1121 g/plant (14% increase); Picasso 747/821 (10% increase)
- These differences may have been influenced by the dry summer conditions. The rapidly emerging chitted Maris Bards may have been able to better utilise any residual soil moisture before the hot/dry summer conditions set in. In contrast, the stressful hot/dry conditions may have limited the benefit of chitting with the later planted Marfona and Picasso. Picasso in particular yielded very poorly for a maincrop potato.

Conclusions: Chitting seed tubers of the first early potato, Maris Bard, resulted in an earlier harvest (by about 2 weeks) and a very substantially higher yield (almost doubled compared with no chitting). Chitting had less benefit with second early (Marfona) and maincrop (Picasso) potatoes. These results may have been affected by the weather conditions of a cold, late spring followed by exceptionally hot/dry conditions.

Next year's experiment? A repeat of this year's experiment – but hoping for more 'average' weather.

Stephen Moss, Topstreet Way

From the Editor

A long time ago, when it was recognised that the society needed to get better at communicating with its members, it was decided to start this newsletter – in the beginning it came out twice a year, now it is yearly. Since then things have changed: ploholders get regular emails from the society and we have a website with lots of information. It feels to me that the need for an annual newsletter isn't there any more and I therefore propose to make this the last one. If you feel differently, please get in touch.

Irene Boogerman

Lin Norman's bench



SHAGS Office Bearers and Committee Members (As at March 2019)

Office	Name	Email	Tel. No.
Vice President	Dorothy Mills		
Chairman	Mike Cobley	mikecobley@hotmail.com	767782
Treasurer	Carole Pamphlett	carolepamphlett@hotmail.co.uk	email only
Secretary	Peter Hicks	allotsec@virginmedia.com	07943 176589
Deputy Chairman	Roger Glanville	rglanville@virginmedia.com	761912
Lettings Secretary	Jim Machin	allotlet@gmail.com	762856
Database Manager	Jim Machin	allotlet@gmail.com	762856
Communications Officer / Webmaster	Rod Cooley	rod.cooley@ntlworld.com	620682
Distribution [Shop] Manager	Roger Gillett	rogerdgillett@tiscali.co.uk	948420
Machinery Managers	Chris Overton Alan Stevenson	allotmach@gmail.com alanandjenny3@btinternet.com	765744 712921
Newsletter Editor	Irene Boogerman	irene.boogerman2@gmail.com	767695
Awards Officer	Linda Gahagan	lindamgahagan@gmail.com	765815

Site representatives

Site	Rep. Name	Email	Tel. No.
Piggotshill	Albert Callewaert	albertcallewaert@aol.com	767107
	Mike Cobley	mikecobley@hotmail.com	767782
Alwickbury	Fraser Gordon	frasermgordon4@gmail.com	07957 948011
	Hazel Upton	rguhu77@hotmail.com	712131
	Mark Sanders	mark.sanders@btinternet.com	07973 175425
Cross Lane	Roger White	white.roger@btinternet.com	762377
	Jenny Stevenson	alanandjenny3@btinternet.com	712921
	Dominic Houlihan	d.f.houlihan@abdn.ac.uk	07881 858618
Harpenden Rise	Marcia Dorey Roger Dorey	marciadorey@yahoo.co.uk	712250
Oakley Rd	Vacancy		
Sibley Ave.	Chris Wilson	adcwilson@virginmedia.com	767838
Topstreet Way	John Myers	john.myres1@ntlworld.com	0798 1142099
Churchfield	Keith Davison	k.davison@sky.com	07740 411455

The editor reserves the right to edit articles for content and length where necessary