

# Cripley Meadow

## Newsletter August 2020

**Covid update – The Green is now open to members** at your own risk. Remember government guidelines **limit gatherings to 6 people so no big gatherings, parties etc please!** Other communal areas (Orchards, Island) remain closed.

### Orchard working party

Our trial of a pre-booked Working Party went well, and we had 13 people working across both orchards. There is still much more to do. Here are some of the group.



Many thanks to Ilias Kounatidis (in blue on the right) Plot 3 who stepped forward to join the Committee and has been co-opted as our Orchard Lead. Ilias has been a member for 10 years and grew up in Greece with fruit trees. He has to restrain his dad when he visits from doing other people's trees! Ilias was already hard at work at this working party. Anna Benn has looked after the espaliers for 4 years now. Thanks Anna, they look wonderful.

We are working with Oxford University to inhibit the rapidly growing bindweed in the wire along the badger run in well watered runoff from containers.

We are not yet able to have members just turn up to WPs as we did before but the orchards need about 40+ hours to summer prune. **We will have another orchard WP 10.30 to 12.30 on Sunday August 16<sup>th</sup>. As before please email Wendy to book in as we need to limit numbers.** If you have them a wheelbarrow, loppers secateurs lump /sledgehammers and a spade would be useful. It easier if you bring your own but we do have some to borrow that should then be sanitised. We have ordered more tree guards, ties, and stakes.

The trees are being kept small to facilitate picking and allow for mowing between as benefits their dwarf stock.

All members **MUST** respect other members space and crops. Members must never be on others plot paths (whether fenced or not) and should never use anyone else's plots paths unless given permission from the member who is present at the time.

**In September and October we will book in some communal fruit picking days.** It is probable that group sizes will still need to be limited? Fruit picking days do not qualify as working party days as members directly benefit from attendance.

### Rule refreshers ...

**Please respect members' fruit on boundaries, headlands etc and do not pick communal fruit other than at picking events.**

**Members must get permission from the Committee before buying/installing/replacing any structure on their plot - shed, greenhouse, polytunnel etc.**

**Vehicles must not park on green verges.**

**Obituary - John Sivell** Committee member, Vice chair and Orchard



lead 2007-2013, died peacefully at Isis House, on 22nd July. The photo shows John (sitting on the ladder with a hat) with a working party group of willow strippers. August 2010.

John joined CMAA in 2006 and took one of our newly cleared plots. A year later he joined the committee... he said he "could not watch me move so much rubbish" and promptly joined in. This was before we firmly established working parties. John visited the site and his old plot and mine for the last time last year... thanks to Wendy and Godfrey and Dot Stone who took over his plot. Godfrey made John videos of the plot which were apparently much used in his last months when he could have no visitors.

John was born on the Isle of Wight but he had a very full life, travelled extensively around the world and was a highly respected naturalist and horticulturalist, experienced in so many fields. He was a huge support to the Association, working with Wendy on developing Cripley

Island and clearing the South Field alongside Tony Clear. Links to more info and photos of John's contribution to CMAA, can be found on the [Orchards page](#) of our website, or you can go straight to the leaflets produced at the time here – [2008](#), [2009](#), [2010](#), [2011](#), [2012](#).

Some years ago John wrote about The "Stories of My Life" which is about his early life and extensive world travels between 1964 and 1968. He was born on the Isle of Wight and was a cowman, a paratrooper, and a forestry worker before deciding with some mates to go travelling. This included driving to India in a 1952 Austin Hereford, with a plan sell the car and take a ship to Australia or New Zealand. He moved to Oxford before the trip as there was good money to be made in car factories. They set off in 1964 and his book tells of adventures in India, Malaysia, Singapore Thailand, Bangkok, Vietnam. In Western Australia, he was a road ganger, in Darwin he painted a corrugated tin roof with reflective paint in terrible heat, and he was a laundry man for roughneck workers on the island of East Timor. He travelled a lot in the Indonesian islands during a time of great turmoil. He was a store man in Djakarta where he was attacked and nearly died from stab wounds. In Sumatra he was known as a *pengaliling dunia* (world traveller). His sister and family nursed him through hepatitis one Christmas in Singapore before he went onto Hong Kong, Laos, Cambodia and Japan where he was a waiter in a basemen bar and an English conversation teacher. He says at the end of each chapter ... but 'that's another story' and indeed it was. If anyone would like to read it I have a copy. His later work in farming, estates, and garden management were equally varied. And he was generous with his knowledge and time and a particularly good friend. His funeral

will be at the Oxford Crematorium on Weds 12<sup>th</sup> August at 15.00.

**Member's visitors** should use the Walton Well Road Car Park unless they are helping with heavy transport. We have had a number of visitors on site recently parking on green spaces.

Please meet all visitors at the gate - everyone likes to be helpful, but it seriously compromises our security if members respond to requests to let people (let alone people in cars) into the gate; please ask them to contact the plot holder.

New evidence seems to be presented daily that supports the link between **gardening and better health and wellbeing**. Recent research by the RHS and Exeter University analysed data from 8,000 people that specifically compared the behaviour of people with access to a garden to those without and other reports support the role of gardening as a public health resort.

We have **new members**, and we hear and see them looking at the many ways to grow. Their plots look marvellous and sometimes promise great results for little effort. My experience is that you need to put some work in to get food for your table and some basic, proven gardening methods are a good starting point to then explore what is the best method for you.

Most importantly, you will not always succeed but try not to be disheartened as failure is a necessary part of learning and one of the joys of growing. I am still at it after 40+years. My now not so new new plot neighbour, Tracy, is introducing me to Chinese vegetables and ways of growing!

**More people are expressing concern about food security and plot enquiries locally and nationally are growing** as more people want some space to grow for their table. It is certainly not the time to ease off using fully designated land for food. Latterly the British have spent a smaller proportion of our income on food than we ever did before but there is a hidden cost to this – vulnerability. It only takes one link of a chain to break and the system breaks. Consolidation of suppliers and international supply chains has created a less robust system and this year home growers, market gardeners and even farmers have found getting hold of seeds difficult this year. There are also further problems with farm workers, and it is possible we are going to see significant price hikes over the next year.



We now have a lot of burgeoning activity with new members and small plots that have transformed a previous compost and unused area into a new hive of activity. If you have a new plot we have often handed it over covered. Bringing new areas into production and getting the soil in good heart is not accomplished overnight but it is still possible to sow stuff, especially if you took on a plot that was a previous compost pile. If you have inherited poorly cultivated soil you might instead decide to make use of the late season to add to fertility and further clear the soil if there was grass and weed underneath. It 'burns off' well in hot weather (solarisation can kill quite a bit of weed root as well) If not cut it as close as possible and cover with a thick layer of cardboard (local bike shops often has large sheets) and

cover with as much manure - from our shop on site or a local farmer - as you can afford. Add a layer of grass clipping (there has been some on the green this year) and roll the plastic back on top and **secure very firmly**. By the Spring, the worms will have done their part and the soil below the plastic should be much more fertile, deeper, and easier to work. This slower process is less effort than digging, particularly when the ground is so much harder. If you want to see some return for your land there is just time to plant squashes, pumpkins and a couple of courgettes and outdoor cucumbers that were started in pots between the fabric rows. Apart from watering, that is it. No additional cultivation at all.

**The old saying, 'One year's weed - seven years' seed,'** contains more truth than myth, as most gardeners soon learn. Weeds (some native and some introduced) are remarkably adapted to conditions in the area where they grow, usually much more so than the imported, cultured vegetables we prize so highly for food. Weed seeds may remain viable for those seven (or more) years when conditions are not right for their growth. Then, brought to the surface by tilling and uninhibited by sod, shade, or other factors, they germinate and take water, nutrients, sunlight, and space from vegetable plants. If the weeds are winning and spreading seeds, please get the hoe going. This will deal with 80% of them quickly particularly if used regularly when small. This will save you and your neighbours from sharing weed seed. A sharp hoe is far more effective and easier to use and saves time so that you can then pull out the few survivors before they set seed. I am forever digging out thistle and grass from any cultivated soil ready for new sowing or planting is perfect for inherited blown seed.

Our audit lead, Tia Sedley, is stepping down from the Committee.

Audit is a difficult job – thanks are due to Tia for taking on the audit mantle and for her commitment to making the site a fair, safe and productive place for all.

### **Water and weather**

The present [site map on the website](#) identifies the communal water butts. **W** are river filled by pump, **W** are rain harvested. Please do not cross plot paths to access them unless the member is present and has given you permission; we have distributed water storage across the site as much as possible. With increased individual use of water butts we are making good progress. We may be able to turn the shed on plot 70 into a rain harvester with an extended roof and large water butts to collect winter rain for the many new small-plot holders.

**Do water wisely.** Water in the coolest part of the day...morning or evening when the plants can take up more water as there is less evaporation. Keep installing water butts and multiple interconnected ones if you can. Don't water little and often. Don't water when it is really warm unless it is to save a plant that is wilting. Water well and build up your soil structure and you will have to do it less frequently.

### **Trading shop update**

Our allotment 'shop' will continue to open by appointment Contact Sarah on [sarahjehome@aol.com](mailto:sarahjehome@aol.com) or text 07960 352787. Reply may be delayed if Sarah is away.

**Bonfires** We have had no release from the City Council for fires on site **but** we have had **lots of woodchip** which goes very quickly. Phil and his team are back at work and we will be meeting soon to work out how to

catch up the backlog of tree work that was not done last winter.

The tomatoes are now well underway and my butter beans are extraordinary! I dug a trough about a spit deep, watered it, filled it with wet compost and watered again before sowing so that they would germinate as the risk of frost was over. I have not watered them since. I am now using any available compost to mulch again, particularly after rain so it keeps in the moisture. I have nicotiana across the plots as it attracts whitefly (keeping them away from my brassicas, which are always under environmesh, and prone to whitefly building up). Nicotiana either overwinters or self seeds so it is an easy beneficial flower. I can usually say the same for marigolds but this year not a one has self seeded!

What I have noticed this year more than ever that my **herb bed** is full the greatest variety of insects. I have a flower border and flower patches across the plot but none that compare with this activity. I let herbs flower as it does not seem to reduce their potency.



One of **CMAAs event shelters** is presently resident

at the back of my plot. It was a bit of a squeeze but members of the committee are using it for socially-distanced meetings. It makes a good spot for drying my onions when showers are forecast!

**August 10<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> is National Allotment week.** I have just put copies of their NAS members magazine in the notice board boxes.

Stay safe and well  
Good gardening to all  
Wendy