

Cripley Meadow Newsletter August 2009

Working parties

Sun 2 Aug 10.30am-12.30

Weds 5 Aug 6-8pm

We will be mostly on the island but also doing some work around the site. Bring gloves, wheelbarrows, rakes, secateurs, spades and forks.

We published a newsletter on the Island for the Jericho Street Fair and thought members who did not visit might like to have this, slightly amended, version.

Cripley Island

Orchard

with Big Lottery funding



From Cripley Island to Port Meadow Cripley Island is a small island adjacent to, and only accessible through, Cripley Meadow Allotments. It is part of our Allotment lease to develop as an orchard. We have Big Lottery 'Local Food' funding for this work.

Cripley Island, like much of Cripley Meadow, is surrounded by crack willow, most of which had not been pollarded for decades. Willows had damaged the banks and plots and blocked the watercourses in

Fiddlers Drain, Fiddlers and Castle Mill Stream.

March 2008 by Fiddlers Stream



The March pollarding was part of a programme of regeneration as advised by Parks Tree Officer. It has brought in much needed light. Pollarded willows can live hundreds of years and are home to an impressive insect population.



We have kept all the healthy native trees on the island. As the orchard develops other trees, like hazel and birch, will be coppiced on a 7 year cycle and harvested and logs, bird and bee boxes will provide wildlife habitats.

We will use this wood for pea and bean sticks and also harvest willow whips as we will be able to maintain some of the pollarded trees ourselves.

The Mid Shires Orchard group is working with us to select some 60+ local fruit varieties. This will help restore the local cultural heritage of fruit varieties. There were 3 old apple trees on the island, which we believe were planted by Fred Quatermaine when the island was previously cultivated as allotments. Two were dead from a lack of light and care when we took it on but the other is being nurtured to better health.

The Orchard will give Cripley Island a vibrant new lease of life and will be accessible to local schools for visits, and to the wider community on Apple and Orchard Open Days. St Clare's, The Cherwell School and St Barnabas have worked with us. Our largest pumpkin was the centrepiece at Phil and Jim's harvest festival! Developing Cripley Island orchard is a commitment to a sustainable future and to the short route from 'plot to pot'.

We are working towards making Cripley Island Orchard into a managed, heritage orchard with native coppicing that will be for our members; available to the local community for booked visits by local groups and schools; and wildlife for many, many years.

Over 220hrs of member's voluntary work on working parties has been logged to date. Here are some of their activities.

In March 2009 the willows on Fiddlers and Castle Mill Stream were pollarded. These are low so we can help pollard them. We are grateful for the help of the OCC Tree Officer who decided which trees on the island were too damaged and unsuitable. These were removed which meant light returned for the healthy native trees.

April 2009 Raking willow twigs



May 2009 Moving woodchip



June 2009

Sylva Trees build two new bridges from locally sourced and milled wood. Eugene an ex member of Cripsey Meadow helped Phil, the owner of Sylva trees, with the construction.



The next stage is to establish the paths, cultivate the planting glades and choose fruit trees. We aim to include suitable apples native to Oxfordshire. Possibilities are Eynsham Dumpling, Blenheim Orange, Deddington Pippin, Eynsham Dumplin, Bampton Fairing, North Aston, Aynho Junction Pippin, Hanwell Souring, Oxford Beauty, Oxford Conquest, Oxford Hoard and Oxford Yeoman to name a few. **If you have a suggestion please let us know.** For more information and photographs visit www.cripseymeadow.org.uk We also invited all to

Cripsey Meadow Open Day Sunday 16 August 11am-3pm

We did this last year for the first time. Allotments are now 'really cool' and in demand. Open Day is a simple affair. We open the gates and committee members give out information sheets and maps. We ask plot holders to be on their plot if they wish and if they are willing to have visitors (even for just some of the time) to put up a sign to

welcome them on. A simple OPEN or open gate is enough. We ask visitors to keep to the main paths unless invited on. They can see plots from the paths anyway. All visitors reported their delight in touring the plots and especially talking to plot holders. We put spare vegetables out for sale on The Green. This year finds earned from events will all be used for apple trees and the Orchard development. We will provide some drinks. If you can do join us and share your plot with others.

Jericho Street Fair



We had two stalls this year selling plants, seedlings, fresh veg., flowers and homemade cakes and took £248. £30 of this went on stall fees. Many more members contributed and bought and it was a great day for gossiping. The wheelbarrow crammed with fresh lettuce attracted much attention as did John's 'dig your own potatoes' from the bucket. The committee as always gave freely of their time to make this possible and there was a lot of interest in the Orchard.

AUDIT

We are still managing a waiting list and trying to make sure we are using our resources well. The stated 75% cultivation level for plots has helped clarify expectations as there is no longer as slack in the system for unused land that can be cultivated. If you are having difficulty managing your plot please talk to a committee member. If we can help we will. The next Audit is

September 6. All plots must be accessible from 11-2 for visits by the committee.

We are all, understandably, a bit territorial about our plots and some members were upset by the audit letters.... as were other members who are after more space and can still see it not being used! It is a bit like being between the devil and the deep blue sea but we are all supported by the rules. It is a hard line to tread fairly but we do our best.

Reclamation

Like all associations in the city we have been asked by OCC Parks to submit plans for any disused land which is presently fenced off to the south. Waiting lists across the city are now a real problem and Parks are trying to ensure allotment provision is used wisely and well. Our disused area is still probably the biggest bit of reclamation in the city on a working site. There is not much money in the city pot so we will have to wait and see if it can be afforded. . It is hard now to think that 5 years ago we were the most neglected and overgrown site in the city. We have come a long way. We now work on 'a season' to get a plot up and working given that no plots are as extreme as they were in the past. Some more difficult areas are given 2 seasons ...but not if this was created by lack of cultivation by the member!

Gaby Topliss did a great job managing her first audit. It is a big and difficult job. The committee all work voluntarily for the site and members and it would be good if (some very few) members took a little time to reflect before they responded. If you had a letter and were feeling badly done

by, try walking around the site and seeing your plot as others see it.

The Mower

We are, by necessity, ambivalent about members using the mower as our insurance simply does not cover personal use. The association owns the mower and you make a donation to use it which covers maintenance and petrol. You use it at your own risk and taking account of the info supplied re safety, in so far as the law allows this! If you cannot accept this responsibility please do not ask to use it.

Plot numbers are still not complete. Please number your plot.



Paths

Paths should now should have been identified and cut. 'Your' path is the one on the left when you are standing looking out from the shed end. The path remains your responsibility even if it is outside your fence (if you have one). Please make sure paths, fences and headlands are not a nuisance to your neighbours by allowing weeds to grow and go to seed.

Compost bins and green waste

If you have not got a compost bin, we hope you have plans for one. They are a wonderful way of recycling goodness to the soil and keeping up your soil levels. Perennial weeds should not be added but be thoroughly dried and then burnt but most other material, if chopped, can be composted.

Green waste is now regularly arriving on Plot 84 courtesy of Arcadian Living and you can use it to supplement and heat up your compost bins if you do not have grass to cutor use it as mulch. As it composts you will still be able to use it and it the rest will gradually raise the level of this too low plot. This plot must not be used for dumping weeds.

Recycling and skips

We got a general rubbish skip on site this week (23/07). It is by the association shed. The metal skip has also been emptied and replaced. Everyone has got much better at keeping this to metal only. Consequently this is our 4th free metal skip. Please recycle and use Redbridge as much as you can so the skip is only used for stuff which has to go to landfill. We can use crocks and rocks so put cleaned rubble by the shed. You can leave it out the rain on your plot to wash off your soil. Stuff that can be burned or composted should be managed on site. No rubbish can be brought in from off site. The committee consider this to be a serious misuse of membership and members will receive a warning notice to quit if dumping is observed.

Soil and manure

There is a bit of unused screened soil by the shed which is now available for general use. Sometime we will be buying in another load of manure for use by all. It is impossible to buy in anything other than a nominal amount given the amount needed to raise a plot. This manure will go onto St John's plot 58. The leaf mould disappeared very quickly and another batch is not due 'til the spring. A lot of members are now buying in additional soil, manure and

compost as we will never be able to support raising all the levels. We are flood plain and like 6 other sites in the city need to work with this as best we can. If you have already benefitted from additional material please leave it for members who have not. Please do not park on green waste plots. There is a parking place adjacent to plot 54. And you can now use the car park which is the greenest option if you are not delivering material(s). We are trying to put up more signs so that members are reminded of what is where. There is a site plan with numbers on the notice board if you get confused. We are still touting for more wood chip (and we will benefit from this if and when they clear the disused area). We will apply for OCC green waste as usual over the winter.



Birds and bees etc

This month it has been the heron, green woodpeckers, long tailed tits, bull finches and goldfinches and the return of thrushes to the site that we have heard about most. This is the second toad I have seen on my plot this year. Toads and frogs were once common but this has not been so for about 15 years. All signs I hope if the returning and growing biodiversity of good gardening practice. This toad was in the artichoke bed and the prior ones under the potato black plastic. The fox can be seen most days sunning on the island and the badgers are using the gates... but have no wood chip to keep them

occupied. Please try leaving a last bit of wood chip on the green waste sites as the badgers grub this up rather than getting into your plot for the slugs and snails. There is no way we can keep them out so have to go for damage limitation. The muntjak has already had one bed of my sweetcorn!

Diane (plot 151 beekeeper) has recovered from the illness which delayed the arrival of the bees. It means she missed taking delivery of the planned swarm of bees and she does not want an unplanned swarm with no info re heritage so it is likely it will now be next April before this gets underway. We will keep you informed. Incidentally many members have commented that there do seem to be more bees and butterflies about this year.

Sylva Trees and wood

Phil made our island bridges and can let you have details of wood products he can deliver to the site. He is a local tree man with a wood yard just along the canal. He feels he will be able to give you 'a good price for any wood cutting to order'. He mills all his own wood from locally sourced materials and is going to make the association some tables for The Green.



Cripley Island Orchard

The island is available to all members for **quiet walks....** taking careful note of the risk assessment at the entrance. As with the site as a whole, children must always be

directly supervised by their parents. They must never be allowed on the island alone. Jamie (Plot 63) is going to make us another notice board for the entrance so that we can develop a map and update you on things of interest and progress. John Lansbury (plot 101) I hope will do the painting... so you all know it is not the fairies!!! It is really good to have so many people who help and support one another and the site.



The Big Lunch on 19 July

Was small given the weather of extreme rain and shine, often within minutes of one another! However great food, including allotment grown chilled pea soup, zucchini and garlic soup, mixed leaves and flowers salad, (the nasturtiums and borage were colourful and spicy, and the home brewed strawberry beer tasted of strawberries (Sam has the recipe) This project was the idea of Tim Smit (of the Eden Project) to get groups and neighbours lunching together across the country with food they had grown, cooked or created themselves. We felt we did our bit for the cause and had a good lunch. It made us look forward to Lunch on the Green so make sure this is in your diaries for September 27. By then we shall have some emergency gazebos so we can cope with a variation in the weather. We are investing in a couple of gazebos as temporary shelter for events and also investigating some structure/sculptures for the future of The Green.

Mystery ladder

A member reported the following
'Leaving plot Late Last night I found a Ladder propped up against the inside of the fence by the gate It was chained to a dustbin with a Lock. It looked Like an easy access in/out of the site. There was another member there in her car who drew my attention to it and we agreed we should remove it someplace.

I undid the combination Lock and chained it to the notice board instead. If it is still a problem or it gets put back I thought I should let you know. We thought it might be a member who had lost their key and took an extraordinary step! If you recognise the combination lock of 4303 or 3403 ...please thank these members for not letting your own predicament lead to damage for other members.

What to do (plant, sow, harvest) in July and August

is on the web site and notice board. The July weather was apparently the wettest since 1888 and certainly a bit wet for summer gardening ...but the growing rate is phenomenal!