

A.W.S.L.G. ALLOTMENT NEWS
ADDISCOMBE, WOODSIDE & SHIRLEY LEISURE GARDENS LTD
GLENTHORNE AVENUE, CROYDON. CR0 7EZ.
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CELEBRATING OUR 100 YEARS CENTENARY NEWSLETTER
1921 TO 2021

It is an honour for us to celebrate our one hundred years together, this is especially so following the last eighteen months of the Pandemic. During the Pandemic we have come to realise the importance of our allotment community for meeting both our health and social needs.

In 1921 there were a small group of individuals that were persistent in ensuring they acquired our present site for the community and it is only through the commitment of volunteers throughout these 100 years that our site is as it is today – a trading hut, the hall, the canteen, the drainage system, the toilets- we are thankful to all of them. We celebrate their efforts.

We all need to reflect on our own contribution to the site and community, some will rightly say I have played and done my part and we thank you too.

Now in 2021 the baton is passed to us to ensure the sustainability of the site for the next generations. We have to have a vision for the development of our site and community in the context of physical and social health, climate change, global warming and conservation, therefore, a **Suggestion** box will be mounted on the office wall, please aid us by putting your **Positive** suggestions re change, development of our site and community for committee to consider.

OUR CENTENARY CELEBRATION PROGRAMME

Saturday 28TH August **Hall** 2- 4 p.m. Submission of exhibits for the Annual Show

Sunday 29TH August **A Day of Celebration**

9-10.30 a.m. Hall - Submission of exhibits for Annual Show

11 a.m. Canteen Green - Stalls, Raffle and Tombola & Music

12 noon Canteen Green - BBQ

2 p.m. Hall - Opens for Viewing of exhibits and winners of each Class

2.15 p.m. Canteen - Afternoon Teas Served

3 p.m. Canteen Green - Centenary Unveiling

4 p.m. Canteen Green - Auction of Produce and Announcement of Raffle Winners

Monday 30TH August **A Day of Enjoyment, Relaxation and Hope for the Future**

11 a.m. Canteen Green - Stalls and music

12 noon Canteen Green -BBQ

2 p.m. Hall Green - Drinks and Unveiling of Mural

4 p.m. Our Vision for the future

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Gateway to a Haven

The original war allotment was on the land now occupied by Oasis Academy but in 1919 this area was earmarked for development. The committee was determined to buy a piece of land, with as low rents as possible and that all necessary work be conducted by volunteers. Those principles stand today.

One can only imagine the months of negotiation between the society, the owner and the council that followed but by 1921 the society owned the 24 acres it has today. It was decided to relist under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act of 1893 enabling it to issue shares to raise money for the deposit. The area bought was of two fields separated by a stream which had to be bridged in two places with railway sleepers. In addition, a cattle proof fence, 810ft long had to be erected. The first year's expenditure was very heavy but £600 of share capital was raised and fund-raising from the trading committee, whist drives and concerts left the society's financial position sound. Plots were let at 1s 3d per rod. In 1924 the first annual show was held; water was laid on over a large area of ground and new entrance gates were erected.

Over the next few years, water supply to plots increased and drainage was laid. The Annual shows continued to be popular and well supported. In 1932 the show was held on its own ground for the first time. In 1936 all plots were let and there was a waiting list. The income from rents for this year was £213 9s 6d and trading income was £186 5s 10d. In 1937 the new canteen hut was opened to general approval and the old canteen became the trading hut. Around these times Dave Hewett recalls when aged six, he accompanied his father and saw soot being delivered by a local chimney sweep on his horse and cart to a plot near the gates. Soot was a great slug deterrent. They then passed another horse and cart delivering manure.

In September 1939, the Second World War broke out. Whist drives were postponed, and the annual show cancelled. Air raids became a regular feature. Members were killed and houses damaged. Quite naturally the standard of upkeep on the plots dropped by a disinclination to be on the ground while flying bombs were around for months. The Society was in the national press as a massive search was made for an unexploded bomb on our grounds. A great deal of traffic took part in the digging of shafts, plots were disrupted and the number of lorries using the old sleeper bridges weakened it to such a degree that the bridge was replaced to the one which is in use today. In February 1947, a 2400 Hermann bomb was discovered and removed by the bomb disposal squad. The bomb was at the bottom of a 33ft shaft, nearby houses were evacuated. The siting and removal lasted for some weeks involving 24 German prisoners of war, 3 sergeants and 3 other ranks. This was believed to be the last unexploded bomb in Croydon. Major S Knight MBE and Lieutenant D H Mellor led the team. The latter afterwards saying in a typically understated way "it was a little bit tricky. Dangerous? Well, no more than usual."

In 1950 a supply of water from the new Poppy Lane was laid on and calor gas installed in the canteen. 1953 saw the end of rationing but there was still a shortage of food. The weather in 1956 was very disappointing, a notice was put up saying that "commenting on the weather was taboo". In 1957 our claim for the damage incurred in the bomb excavation was settled. By 1958 the trading centre sold onion sets for the first time. At that year's AGM the rent was increased to 17s 6d for a 10-rod plot, which was still amongst the lowest in the country. By comparison Council allotments rents were £4 17s 6d exclusive of water. The following year the Green Finger membership for non-members was started with a charge of 2/6d per year. This entitled them, as now, to buy goods from our trading centre.

Remember the Big Freeze of 1962/3? Due to the sub-zero temperatures cultivation of plots was started much later than normal but luckily the seed potatoes arrived late narrowly missing being frozen on route. The Society only achieved 4th place in the amenity's competition (the Stacey Cup). This was partly due to untidy plots, the roofs on the toilets needing replacing which meant that they were unfit for purpose. Contractors were paid to improve the area around the trading centre and also the car park. The following year saw 20 vacant plots with no one on the waiting list. Action had to be taken to improve the situation and in '65 a Gem cultivator was bought, and 16 plots were rotavated at the Society's expense. Soon more plots were being taken on. Mr Ted Sellman, after 35 years active career with the Society retired in 1966. During his spell as trading secretary the turnover increased from £305 to over £3,000.

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Gateway to a Haven continued

The '70s saw fresh interest in "growing your own" inspired by TV shows such as The Good Life. There was also a government review by Harry Thorpe OBE into redeveloping allotments from the traditional square veg' plot into Leisure Gardens, this spurred the committee on to reregistering to include Leisure Garden into the name we have today. The waiting list rose to 39, showing the ebbs and flows in demand. VAT was introduced in '73, the trading staff managed the transition with ease. More water supply was laid on, the canteen roof was repaired, and one electric fan allowed in the canteen, but this was soon found to be insufficient. Talk began of a new hospital being built nearby and the Society began to receive more enquires about selling off our land. The laying of the main road was completed with speed ramps. By July '75 the waiting list had increased to 86. Beekeeping was started with the surplus honey sold off to eager members. The old Nissen hut was demolished, and a new trading hut was built using a Kencast, precast construction which is still in use today.

Towards the end of this decade and into the 1980s the Society entered a land exchange with the London Borough of Lambeth to enable them to develop Shirley Oaks estate which entailed the construction of Primrose Lane. Heron Homes began to build the estate which is now known as Shirley Oaks Village. These two decades saw major capital expenditure conducted by the Society which was funded by the profit from the trading hut. Mowers were bought for use by plottolders. Lighting was gradually installed, the first being over the main gate from Glenthorne Avenue. The building of a new toilet block was started much to the relief of many! A social club was started with the necessary road being built and soon had 110 members. Dorothy Bull joined her father to continue running the trading centre, stalwarts both. The trading centre has always been a focal point of the Society's income, During the early years of the 1990s a great deal of work was conducted on the building itself and while the external work was completed around 1993, improvements internally continue to the present time. It supplies a huge quantity of horticultural needs supplemented by plants from the polytunnels. It is perhaps the heartbeat of the Society. Contrast this to the early days when the trading shed was next to the canteen and volunteers packed seeds in brown paper bags and Jeyes Fluid mixed with liquid manure was sold in old Tizer bottles.

Then towards a new century and with-it innovative ideas. The first of the polytunnels was erected behind the trading hut and with excellent care, plants were raised for sale making a profit in 2005 of £2,850. This activity still carries on today. Our profits enable us to conduct essential jobs throughout our grounds. A site office was opened on weekend mornings giving easy access for plottolders to raise any problems with committee members. For the past several years ponies had been allowed to graze on a patch of land alongside the social club, after an inspection of the ground it was found that drainage was too poor for this area to turned over into plots. An inspired idea for a wildlife meadow garden was mooted and there began many hours of hard work which is still ongoing by a team of volunteers along with expert guidance from our resident butterfly and moth expert. This has become a place of peace and tranquillity but more importantly was appointed as a Site of Nature Conservation, this accolade now covers our entire site.

Looking back over the last 100 years, the principles on which our founders based this community still stand firm. We own the land which gives security of tenure, there are low rents and volunteers continue to do the work. Very much may have changed, the car parks are essential, the horse and cart deliveries and the ponies have gone but demand for plots is still high, and its members have become multi-cultural reflecting today's society. Numerous challenges have been met but now we all face the biggest one in climate change. However, the principles of sustainability and conservation that bind us all here in our allotment haven have put us on the right path.

So just occasionally look around you and be grateful for the vision of those who laid the foundations for all that we enjoy today.

Our grateful thanks to Richard Rainey and Jean Reynolds for their exceptional work in producing this Celebration Newsletter, also to David Lay who has spent time over the last years researching our history and allowed extracts to be published.