

Winchester New Allotment Holders Society Ltd

WNAHS newsletter

April 2026 issue

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Update from the Chairman

As I write this in mid-March, having been forced back from the allotment because of torrential rain, it seems strange to be turning my mind to the season ahead and the likelihood of periods of high temperature and possibility of water shortages.

For many of us, average annual temperatures in the south of England have increased by between 1-1.5oC during our lifetimes. Winter frost days used to be frequent, now they are relatively few. Typical summer high temperatures have increased by 3-4oC, with very hot days (>30oC), once rare, now occurring most years.

On the back of these higher average temperatures and, as a consequence, the atmosphere's ability to hold more moisture, there has been a clear move to wetter winters with increasingly intense rainfall and, in summer, from regular showers to longer dry spells.

While there are many benefits from these trends, there are also a number of downsides. One of the latter is the need to water our gardens and allotments more during the main summer growing months, while at the same time recognising that water is an increasingly expensive and scarce resource.

Given the fact that Southern Water has restricted water usage twice in recent years, it makes sense that, looking ahead to the coming season, we all "plan for the worst, while hoping for the best".

We should therefore all give thought as to how we can best harvest and hold any rainwater that does occur, how we can minimize evaporation from the soil through the addition of mulch, and make sure that we understand the optimal way of watering plants and how much water they actually need.

Over the next month or so we will put some more detailed advice on the website as how best to minimise water usage. In the meantime, you can buy water butts and watering cans from the Shed and, for those on the Park Road site, we have regular supplies of mulch from Apsley Farms. If other sites wish to arrange their own bulk deliveries from them, we can obviously provide contact details.

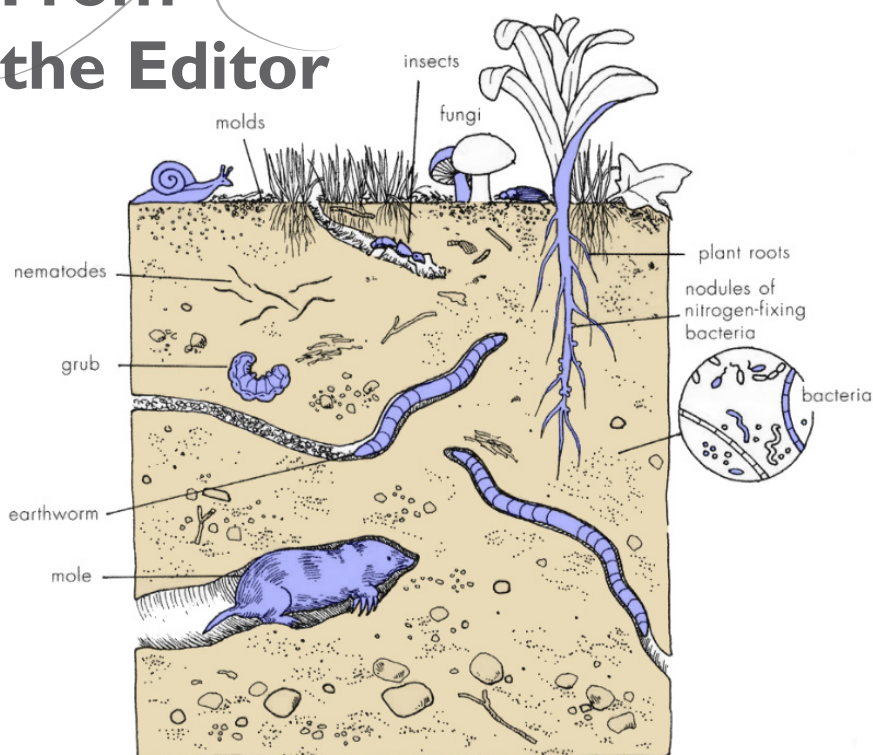
I wish you all a happy and successful growing season.

Chris Pearce
Chair – WNAHS

Reminders

Bonfires: Park Road from 1 October to 31 March
All other sites 1 October to 30 April

From the Editor



Flicking through a book of Maria's, *The Practical Gardener and Modern Horticulturalist*, I was amazed by the quantity of information on techniques that gardeners could use to overcome the length of the growing seasons or adverse ground and weather conditions, alongside descriptions of plants and when (and how) to plant them. Reading this I was struck by how, although I grew up with gardeners, gardening was never a communal activity but a mindful and solitary one, a break from the stress of work and family and an opportunity for people to heal and, be still in nature. There was no family gardening activity or skill sharing, no gardening classroom.

When I was very, very small (maybe the size of a marrow), my mother, following the advice of the esteemed Dr Spock (star

paediatrician of the 1950s), would wheel me into the back garden (in my Silver Cross pram) and park me under the trees. The neighbours commented on how I would lie gurgling, mesmerised by the swaying branches and the shapes my continually moving hands would make against them.

As I grew up, I took great comfort in patterns I could see in the tree branches through my bedroom window, watching them changing, morphing, until I fell asleep. Yet older still, I started to draw in a way that followed the tracking my eyes made tracing the shapes between the branches, not taught, just a deep memory of staring at shapes and the spaces between them.

Getting my first garden was wonderful, it even had a big tree at

the end, whose branches I could lie below and trace with my mind's eye. It was at this point though, that I realised I knew nothing. No one had taught me how to prune or when to deadhead. I didn't know about soil and what plants would thrive or die. I planted shrubs, which were attacked by bugs or grew rampantly into my neighbour's garden. I planted trees (because who doesn't love a tree) to provide shade and interest for me. But their shadows now block light to the people living around me ...

My lack of knowledge was tested further when I got an allotment – mulch? What's that? As I weeded and dug, planted and picked, I was always shocked by the number of weeds and the lack of produce – compost? What's that? But the most amazing thing about having an allotment is that people talk to you and share their knowledge. Plot holders have helped me grow into the gardener I might have been if nurtured in the art. The encyclopaedic power of the collective is wonderful.

Now, as the years of doing take their toil, my fingers are stiffening and losing their dexterity, but life has taught me that I don't make shapes and patterns with my hands in isolation, I make them collectively, with colleagues, family and other plot holders, and my role is to hold hands with the next generation, and pass down my tips and experience.

Emma McMullan

emmamcmullan@icloud.com

From the Membership Department

These figures reflect the position in mid-March. This time of year, typically sees a larger than usual change over, as plot holders make decisions about whether to continue or reduce their existing plot holdings. Another point to note is, although we show 14 vacant plots, some on the waiting list will have been made an offer and we are still processing their application, which does take time. As a result, the number of vacant plots shown may temporarily overstate true availability.

Demand for plots remains very healthy and all waiting lists are in double figures. In these uncertain times, the Society continues to provide Winchester residents with an opportunity to grow food sustainably, spend time outdoors and support their health and well-being.

Mike Moore

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phone: 07540 074146*

SITE SUMMARY		March 2026				
Site	Plots	Taken	Vacant	Rods	Waiting List	Waiting Time (m)
Park Road	268	265	1	1411.8	120	20
Edington Road	161	157	3	670	135	33
Cromwell Road West	22	21	1	93.5	18	19
Kingsley Place	28	25	3	114	8	10
Lisle Court	11	11	0	54.5	13	15
Paulet Place North	24	21	2	83.5	13	18
Paulet Place South	29	29	0	91	16	19
The Valley	34	34	0	148.5	20	17
Princes Place	13	11	2	57	17	10
Greenhill Avenue	13	13	0	52.5	45	53
Trussell Crescent	12	12	0	52.5	41	22
Firmstone Road	6	6	0	18	38	No offers
Totals	621	605	12	2846.8	484	



Trading Shed Matters

Introduction

It has been another busy year for the Trading Shed at Park Road, with Jo and Janet doing a great job making sure it provides a wide variety of products and good advice for you, the plot holders and members.

It must also be acknowledged, and thanks be given to all the team of volunteers who support Jo and Janet in the Shed and at delivery times – so, thank you team, to all of you, for your contributions and hard work.

There needs to be a special thank-you and recognition given to Janet, as she takes a well-earned step back from the running of the shed. She has been tireless in her work in the shed, making sure it is a worthwhile and friendly place to visit and get advice, and all those much needed bags of compost. Do not worry, she is still about – just not so often.

Best sellers in the shed this year have been the growbags and the chicken pellets – they proved very popular for those looking for bulk fertiliser as they are very competitively priced.

As it's year end it would be good to settle up any monies owing on the slate.

Forthcoming dates of note:
Becky, from Onpoint Sharpening

Services, will be at Park Road between 10-12 (Saturdays and Sundays) – to sharpen knives, and all tools, on the following dates:

- 9th May 2026
- 13th June 2026
- 11th July 2026
- 8th August 2026

She can be contacted, if need be, at: *On Point Sharpening Services* 07393600630. Or: onpointsharpening@outlook.com

Jobs & Tips

Things to consider for the forthcoming months – (March to May)

- Sowing onions and shallots from seed can produce much better results than from sets – but we do have sets in the Shed;
- Sow tomatoes indoors by the middle of the month ideally with some heat – we have all sizes of seed trays and seed compost in the shed – the Shed has a varied range of seeds, if something is not there please ask;
- Finish cutting back herbaceous perennial and seed heads;
- Spring-cleaning time, from your polytunnel or greenhouse and do not forget those tools & trays – the shed has all sorts of cleaning products to help with this;
- Get those potatoes in the ground – and, if you have not

already done so, please collect your potato orders;

- Hardening off seedlings outside under a piece of fleece at night will help the plants to adapt to outside – the shed stocks a good supply of fleeces and various ground coverings and nettings to help;
- Remember to cover your planted beds in case of that last frost. – and watch the weather forecast;
- May is a good time to start planting out those nurtured seedlings such as tomatoes, cucumbers, aubergines, peppers and chillies;
- After the last frost, plant out courgettes and Squash;
- Harvest and enjoy all that hard won produce.

Potato Ordering 2026 and beyond

- This did not go without a few hitches – so apologies to those who did not get exactly what they ordered – and thank you for those who swapped;
- Getting this all together takes a lot of arranging and hard work from Jo, Janet and the army of volunteers who weigh the potatoes and bag them up for the orders – it has been quite a high labour and paper loaded exercise – so next year Jo and I wish to change things a little and propose the following:
 - Jo and I will order the potatoes as usual from the

Scottish wholesalers;

- The team will bag and weigh the potatoes in 500g, 1-5 kg bags and mark them up with the variety and weight ;
- We will set a couple of days where the shed will open from 8-12 (weekends as usual) – where you can come and select your potatoes – dates to be agreed.

- so, no pre-ordering.
- If you wish to comment on this proposal then please let me know – on email –

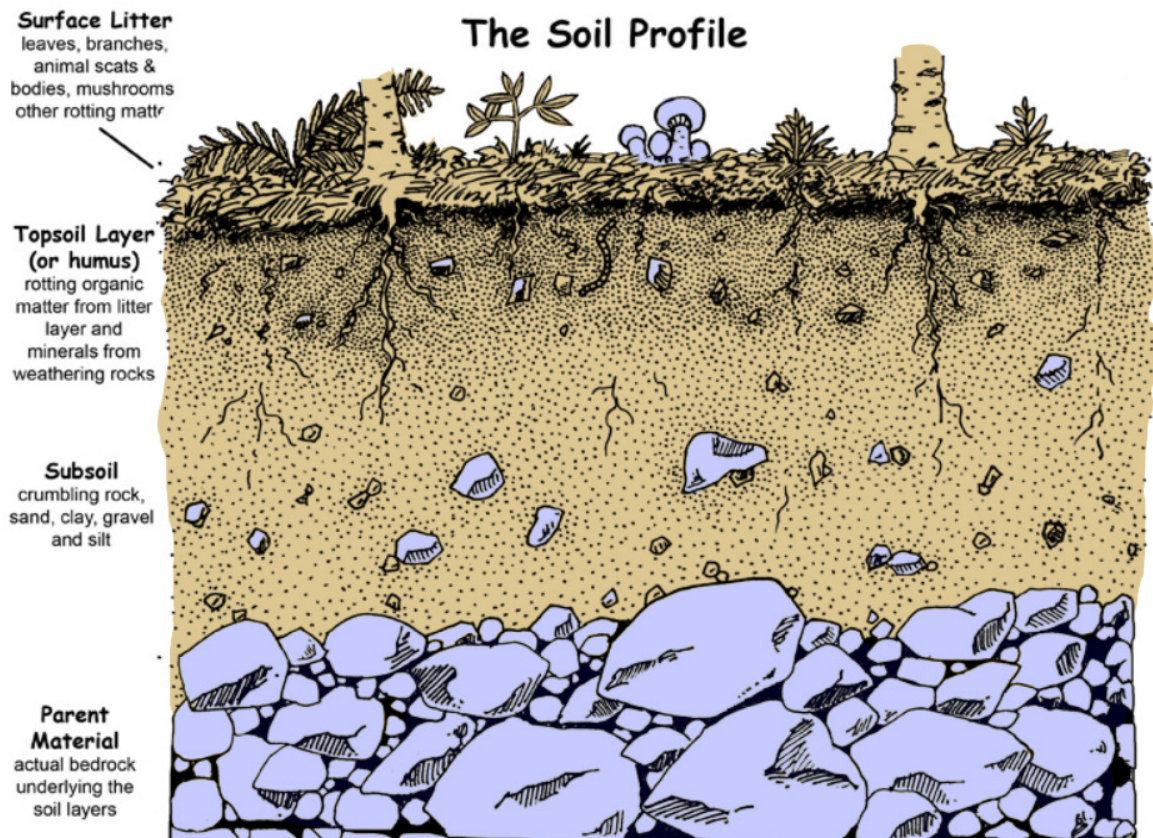
Andrew.cable@hotmail.co.uk or text on 07584898668 – thank you.

Also, I am very keen to hear any suggestions for things to be stocked in the shed – so, if you have an idea of something that might be useful, please let me or Jo know.

Finally, we are always looking for volunteers to help in the shed, so, if you are keen to help please let me or Jo know – the team are very friendly and keen to have more people to help – it can be as frequently as you wish. Please come in and have a chat.

Thank you for your ongoing support and custom .

Best wishes
Jo Townsend, Janet Thornton and Andrew Cable



Edington Road News

Growing Wellbeing

As the first signs of spring start to appear, and the sun makes its long-awaited return to our sky, allotments across the country return to life. Our beds are turned, and our seeds are sown. We begin to reconnect with familiar faces, and even get to meet some new ones too, all with their own plans for the season ahead. This return to spring is an act of renewal that somewhat reflects the way many of us feel at this time of year. As Mental Health Awareness Week (11th -17th May) invites us to reflect on wellbeing and connection, this year's theme is action, and allotments offer a reminder that mental health can be nurtured through what we do and how we do it. So if it has been a while since you have visited your plot, use the longer days and warming sunshine as an excuse to take action. Feeling a bit overwhelmed? Then ask for help and use the opportunity to connect to those around you.

Spring is a season of fresh starts. After the darker months have passed, having longer days and brighter mornings can lift our mood and energy levels. For many allotment holders, spring marks a return to routine and purpose.

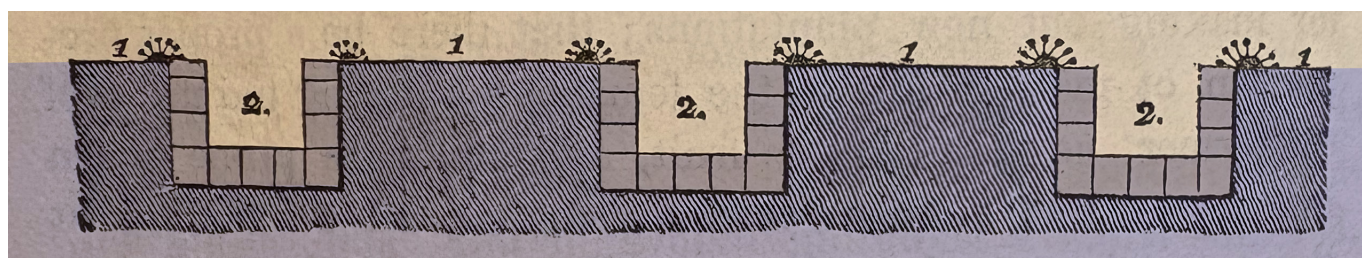
One of the most significant mental health benefits of allotments is their ability to provide structure without pressure. Unlike many aspects of modern life, gardening does not demand immediate results. Progress is measured in weeks and months rather than hours and days. This slower pace encourages patience and self-compassion, allowing people to reconnect with natural rhythms rather than constant deadlines. For individuals who feel overwhelmed or burnt out, this can be profoundly restorative.

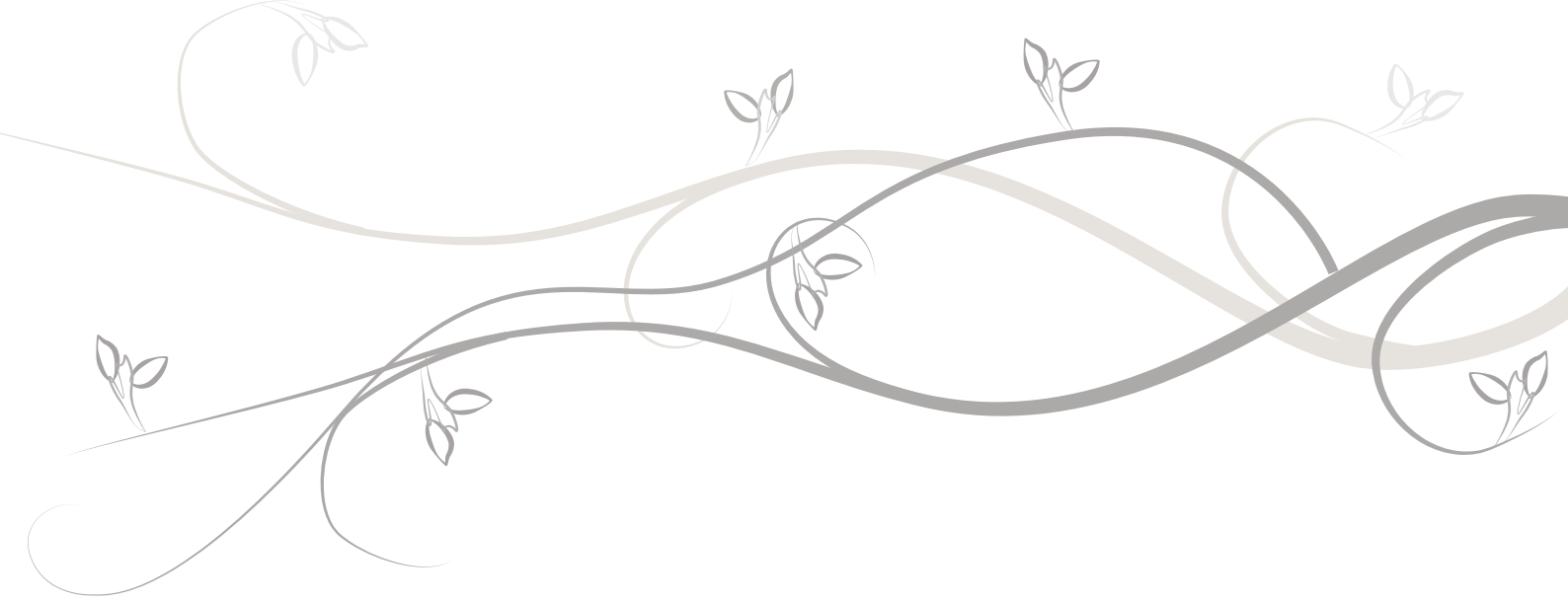
Importantly, allotments are rarely solitary places. While they allow for quiet reflection, they also foster community and

connection, both of which are vital for good mental health. A friendly chat across plots while sharing tips about seedlings or even swapping surplus produce can help combat loneliness and isolation. Allotments offer a low-pressure environment where conversation happens naturally and relationships develop over time.

There is also something affirming about growing our own food. In a world that can often feel increasingly uncertain, producing something tangible can help us create a sense of self-worth. Harvesting vegetables you've grown yourself reinforces the idea that care and patience can lead to positive outcomes. For those of us experiencing low confidence or feelings of helplessness, this can be a powerful reminder of our own capability and resilience.

Gentle movement such as digging, planting, and weeding supports both physical and mental health,





releasing endorphins and helping reduce stress. Unlike most types of exercise, allotment work is purposeful and adaptable, making it accessible to people of different ages and abilities. This inclusivity is one of the reasons allotments are such valuable community assets.

Allotments can function a little like our own mental health too. They require care, patience, and understanding that not every season will be a success. There will always be setbacks like frosts,

pest, and failed crops, but there will also be renewal. Each spring offers another chance to begin again. And in that simple, hopeful act, allotments continue to grow not just food, but our own wellbeing too.

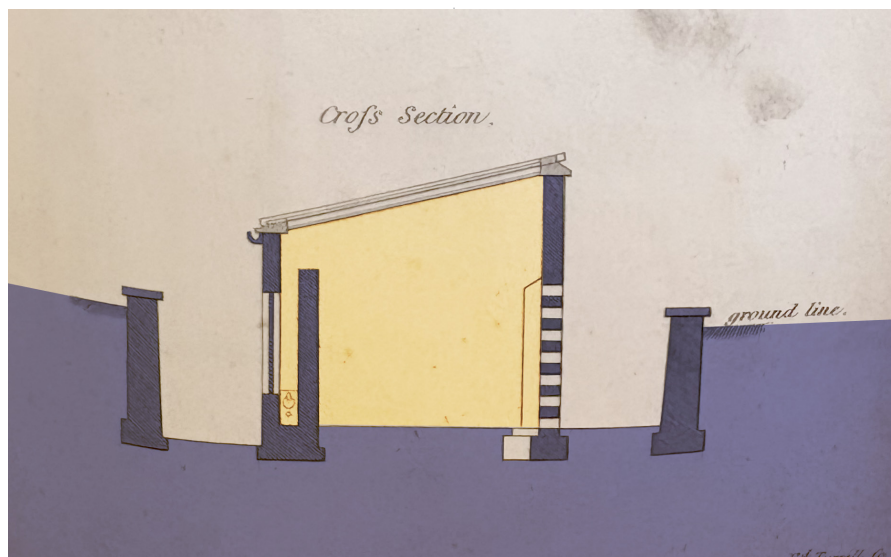
As we use this time for self-reflection, let's also be mindful of those around us. Keep paths clear, pick up rubbish, don't hog the tap and remember to refill the tank if you dip! Small measures we can all do to help make the lives of our allotment neighbours that

little bit easier. The community at Edington Road is one to be proud of – always welcoming and willing to help each other – a reminder that our allotment is as much about people as it is about what we grow.

To find out more about Mental Health Awareness Week, please visit www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Michelle Pluck

Park Road News



While sorting far too many books, accumulated over the years, I recently rediscovered a large book on gardening. My father bought it, at a country auction in the Scottish Borders, in a poor state in the nineteen sixties. Later we had it bound in leather, mainly to save it falling to pieces. The title is *The Practical Gardener and Modern Horticulturalist*, and although almost 200 years old, much inside is relevant and useful today. Charles McIntosh, the author, was gardener to the Earl of Braedalbane, who had estates in Scotland.

In the early nineteenth century, serious gardening happened in big country estates, mainly to provide food for large households in the absence of supermarkets, and also because labour and large quantities of horse manure were at hand. Peaches, apricots, grapes and even

pineapples were grown in glass houses. Hot beds and trenches were used to produce early crops, as they are today.

Biophilia, the innate love of nature and things grown, affects all of us, whether we grow or simply enjoy looking at trees and plants. When I ask new applicants for plots why they want a plot, the answers are varied, and I often have to explain what our rule-based society expects.

Most people want to grow fruit and vegetables which they know are organic. Other want to test their skills producing things difficult to find in the shops, or just difficult to grow. Some people have no growing space at home and simply want to plant things.

Newly retired people sometimes want a plot to fill time that was

lacking in their working life, and the chance to meet fellow spirits. Whatever the reason, an allotment provides exercise, fresh air, the opportunity to share knowledge and to develop patience watching things grow, and somewhere to relax mentally.

Our rules are designed to keep the allotment a safe place, so please read them, and keep your paths level, neat and edged, and don't let weeds seed and spread to neighbouring plots.

If you would like to erect a shed or greenhouse or polytunnel on your plot, please check the position with me or a site rep first, to check the size and position. Always plan to put a structure 18 inches/45 centimetres from a path which allows for loaded wheelbarrows to access paths easily.

Last year several ploholders asked me to look at their apple trees which had shrivelled twigs or branches. This is fire blight which affects both pears and apples. It is infectious, so please cut off affected dead twigs and branches, and disinfect tools afterwards. Don't compost the cuttings but burn or bin off site. If the main trunk is affected, then the tree will die.

Over the winter, many thanks to Alan Morgan, all 16 standpipes at Park Road have had stopcocks

fitted. Very occasionally, a tap cannot be turned off when faulty, and gushes water, so now it can be isolated without affecting the whole site. I'm glad to say it will also save me running back and forth to the main manhole by the road, when we need to change a tap.

After the heatwave last year, I hope everyone has installed waterbutts, and will keep their plots well mulched to retain as much moisture as possible over the summer, so we rely less on using the taps.

As I write, my window sills are packed with seed trays, the heated propagators doing their work and, alas, much pricking out still to do. It's an exciting time and I am looking forward to another growing season, and wish all plotholders success on their plots.

Maria Keniston
parkroadconvenor@outlook.com
07769 562493

Prize Competition for new Park Road plot holders

This year, I have organised a free bag of Apsley mulch for the new plotholder who is judged to have made the best progress with their plot by mid-August. A panel will inspect plots to see which plot has the best mix of planting, with neatly-maintained surrounding paths, and edges in order.



Notices

Making the Most of Every Drop

Most of us have felt the frustration of a dry spell just as our veggies are starting to take off. While we're all hoping for a less dry summer this year, the WNAHS is keen to ensure we're all well-prepared for whatever the Winchester weather throws at us.

To help us all grow more resilient crops this year, we are launching a Water Wisely campaign. This will be about sharing the best tips to keep your soil moist and your veggies happy – even when the sun is at its fiercest.

Keep an eye out for:

- A New Information Leaflet: A guide to collecting, conserving, and targeting your watering where it matters most. This will be available at the Trading Shed and our website.
- Site Posters: Quick-fire tips at every gate (including a few things you might not have tried yet!).
- Tap-Side Reminders: Just a gentle prompt to help us all be mindful of our collective usage.

We're all aware of the pressure on our local supply during a heatwave, so let's see if we can work together to keep the soil damp and the crops thriving.

Watch this space for more details.

Charlotte Williams, Jo Townsend and Lorene Latour

NEW BOTANY COURSE WHICH DARWIN STUDIED

Following the discovery of papers, fragile watercolours and ink sketches, which belonged to John Stevens Henslow, in a Cambridge archive, a new four week course in botany has been introduced in Cambridge.

Botany as a stand-alone subject is rarely found in degree courses in the UK, so this immersive programme aims to increase knowledge of plant form and diversity at the same time as honouring the work of Henslow.

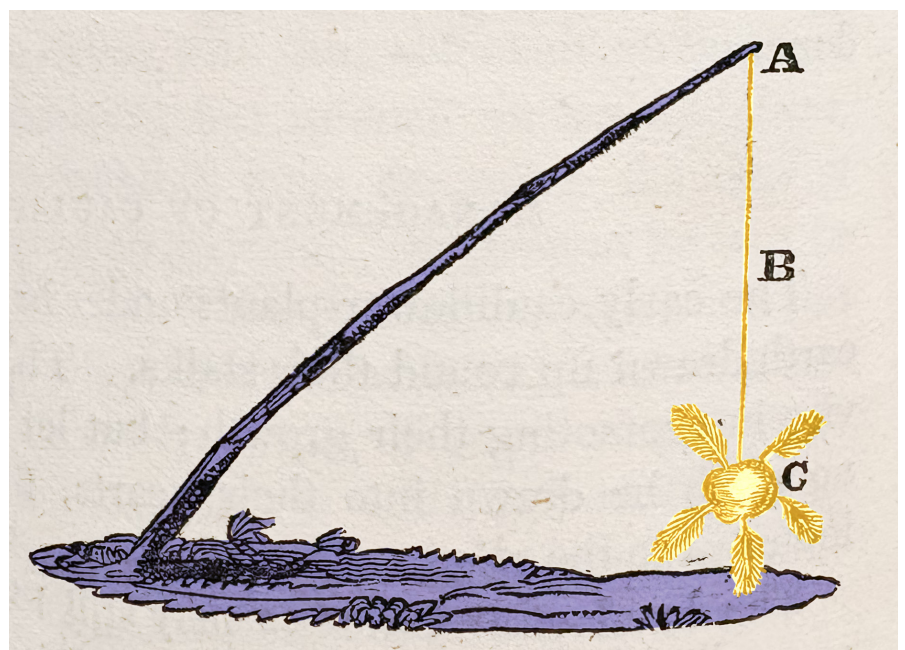
The drawings and plant material belonging to Professor John Stevens Henslow, (1796-1861)

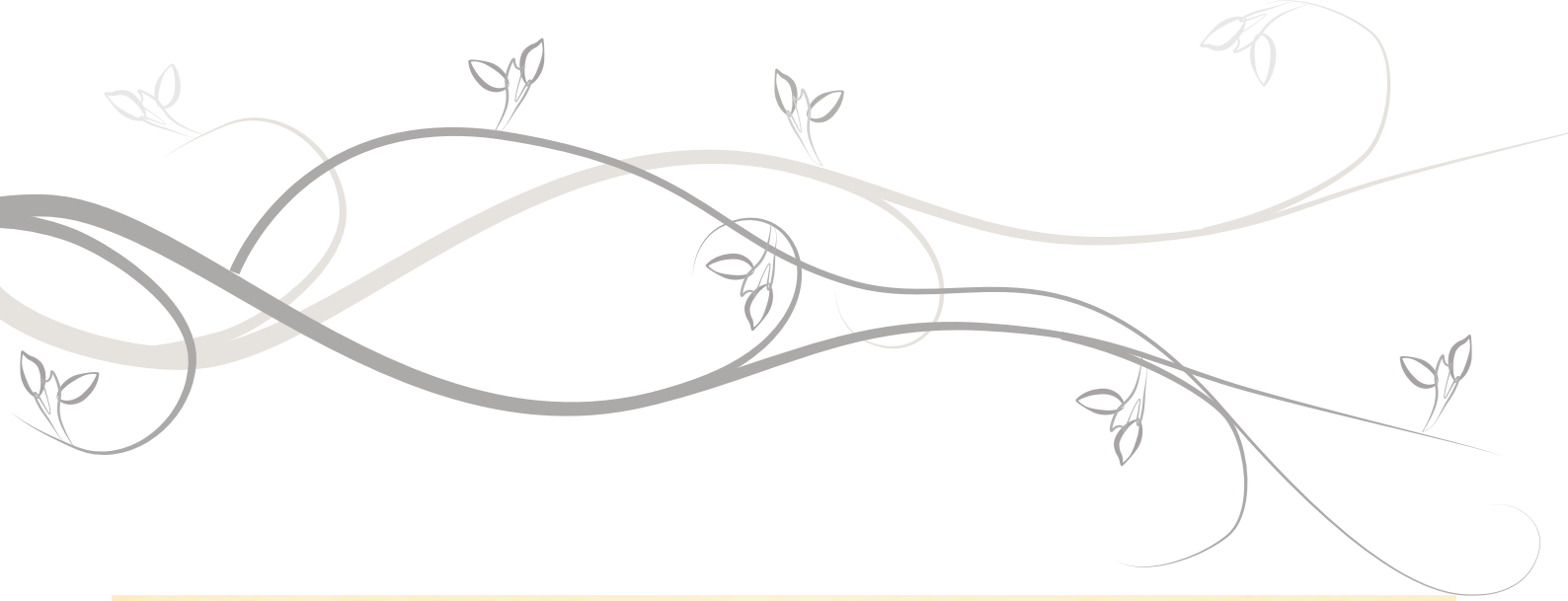
were part of the teaching from almost 200 years ago which so inspired Charles Darwin, that he took the course four times.

Henslow was a clergyman, and saw the plant world as evidence of the magnificence of God's creation. Darwin may well have developed his theory of evolution from these early studies of variation in plants. This course is being run by Cambridge University Botanical Garden.

For anyone interested in this course further details can be found here:

<https://www.botanic.cam.ac.uk/learning/certificate-in-botany/>





Images - all images have been altered by the editor

1. Page 1
 - Study of hands - Vincent Van Gogh
2. Page 2
 - Structure of soil 1
3. Page 5
 - Structure of soil 2
4. Page 6
 - Strawberry bed with brick gullies – The Practical Gardener and Modern Horticulturalist, Charles Macintosh
5. Page 7
 - Ice house – ditto
6. Page 8
 - Early forcing pit – ditto
7. Page 9
 - Border planting plan – ditto
8. Page 10
 - Bird scarer – ditto
9. Page 11
 - Dante's Dream at the Time of the Death of Beatrice – Study of Dante holding the Hand of Love – 1856 – Dante Gabriel Rossetti