

WNAAHS newsletter

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Christmas in the workhouse

Update from the Chairman

As the days of autumn shorten and as the air becomes cooler, our allotments move from a place of abundant growth to dormancy, decomposition and over-wintering. The vibrant greens of summer fade into tired, yellow and brown hues as the plants naturally die back. Once the harvest is over, our primary focus is on clearing away spent material. As winter approaches, our plots tend to look rather sad, with beds either empty or covered in mulch and black plastic, with only a few islands of green from over-wintering onions and winter brassicas. Sheds and greenhouses stand stark across our sites. Ideas for maintenance and improvements are put off to “when the weather gets better”.

However, traditionally, winter is a time of reflection and, with that in mind, I’d like to thank all those who have invested much of their own time over the last 12 months to ensure the smooth running of our 12 sites and the Trading Shed.

It is through the personal commitment of those on the Committee, the site convenors and representatives, and all those who do numerous “odd jobs” around the sites during the year, that the workload is spread and the costs of outside contractors are kept to a minimum.

Similarly, without all the work that Jo and Janet put into running the Shed and those who give up 2 hours on a Saturday or Sunday to help run it, or those who help offload the delivery lorries at often very short notice, the Society would lose its social hub, its source of much valuable information and the financial contribution that keeps members’ annual rents down.

We are always looking for additional volunteers, from Committee members with specific responsibilities, to those who are happy to maintain common areas on their sites such as central pathways and hedges. If you are able to give a helping hand, please have a word with your site convenor or representative, or contact us through our website at admin@wnahs.org.uk, and we will happily take up your kind offer of help.

In closing, I would like to wish you all a very happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year, and to enjoy the process of planning for the season ahead.

Chris Pearce

Reminders

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

From the Editor

I was 10 when I went with my family to see *Scrooge*, a bewildering, terrifying film full of plucky Cockneys and catchy tunes. Following closely on from *Oliver*, the overwhelming message from Hollywood was one of charity and love. These films were purveyors of hope – the destitute were homed and the sick were healed – redemption and food for all. A couple of years later my father would tell me that we had just lived through the most equitable time in British history, a comment I didn't understand then, but do now.

Now things have changed, swung back the other way and the poor and disabled are derided for their lack of ability to help themselves.

If we take a step back from the 1970s to the 1950s we find ourselves in a Britain recovering from WWII, but working together for the common good. In 1951, in part to reward the tired and ever-still plucky Brit, Herbert Morrison initiated the Festival of Britain, to celebrate the opening of a happier decade, (Evelyn Waugh). Michael Frayn wrote about it in his 1963 essay 'Festival': "Festival Britain was the Britain of the radical middle-classes, the do-gooders; the readers of the *News Chronicle*, the *Guardian*, and the *Observer*; the signers of petitions; the backbone of the B.B.C. In short, the Herbivores, or gentle ruminants, who look out from the

lush pastures which are their natural station in life with eyes full of sorrow for less fortunate creatures"

If we take a bigger step back we are in the time of Charles Dickens, *Scrooge* and *Oliver*. A time when horrendous class and health inequalities prevailed but a time when public charity and philanthropy also existed, albeit tied up with notions of individual reform, and of deserving and undeserving poor. At this time Boxing Day was

when the wealthy provided for their servants and community with a day's leave, a hearty meal or a gratuity box.

In my lifetime, no one I know has carried out charitable deeds on Boxing Day, I'm wondering whether we should now start, else acquiesce all in the era of the carnivore.

Emma McMullan
Editor
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Serving Christmas pudding
WNAHS newsletter



From the Membership Department

The figures in this report reflect the year-end position. Despite increasing demands on people's time and competition from other interests, demand for plots continues to exceed supply. This demonstrates the dedication of the society's officers, whose efforts ensure WNAHS operates effectively and maintains a strong public profile. Notably, following a constituent's complaint, Danny Chambers MP for Winchester corresponded with us, and our Chair's response addressed the concerns thoroughly, highlighted WNAHS's contributions to the community, and resulted in the MP expressing interest in our work and to be regularly informed via the WNAHS Newsletter.

Thank you to those plot holders who renewed using the correct billing reference numbers. It did help make processing easier and quicker.

Mike Moore
Membership Secretary
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SITE SUMMARY		December 2025				
Site	Plots	Taken	Vacant	Rods	Waiting List	Average Waiting Times (months), 5 year cycle
Park Road	268	264	2	1411.8	145	25
Edington Road	161	157	3	670	130	25
Cromwell Road West	21	19	2	93.5	25	7
Kingsley Place	29	26	3	115.5	6	13
Lisle Court	11	11	0	54.5	16	No offers
Paulet Place North	24	21	2	83.3	12	17
Paulet Place South	29	29	0	91	16	20
The Valley	34	33	1	148.5	22	11
Princes Place	13	12	1	57	15	4
Greenhill Avenue	12	12	0	52.5	49	29
Trussell Crescent	11	11	0	52.5	38	15
Firmstone Road	6	6	0	18	37	No offers
Unusable			4			
Total	619	601	14	2848.1	511	

Trading Shed Matters

Thank you to all our volunteers: helping in the shop and helping with the unloading of deliveries. Also thank you to all our customers – great to see you and share top tips as well as helping those new to allotmenteering.

Now is a good time of year to start planning for next year, particularly remembering what has gone well and what you would like to grow more of next year. The new season seeds are now in the shed, and we've selected quite a few for their disease or pest resistance to add to the tried and tested favourites.

Selecting Seed

F1 seeds have been specially bred to give enhanced properties from the parent plants. In flowering plants this can mean brighter or bigger blooms, for vegetables it often relates to disease resistance. Development of new plant varieties through F1 takes more time and research and therefore the seeds can be more expensive, however, that can be considered worth it for the results. Examples of F1 include those bred for cold resistance, such as carrot Eskimo F1 and cabbage Wintessa F1, tomatoes bred for blight resistance such as Cocktail Crush F1 and Honeymoon F1 or sweetcorn bred for uniformity to ensure good pollination of the cobs such as Early Bird F1 and Incredible F1. One of the downsides of F1 is that unfortunately seed saved from the plants will not be true to type, so

you will need to buy new seed each year to get the same results.

Open pollinated seeds tend to be cheaper, and as they usually won't mature all at the same time the harvest can be spread over a few weeks. Additionally you can save seeds for the following year, thereby saving further cost. Examples include cabbage April, cauliflower All The Year Round and tomato Gardener's Delight. Some plant species are less susceptible to disease, such as broad beans, so there are more options for open pollinated varieties than F1.

Crop Rotation

Crop rotation is another method to reduce the potential of pest and disease on your plant and to prevent the soil becoming exhausted by the same crop taking the same nutrients out of it each year. So as part of your planning for next year, consider where you will grow each crop. There are various methods on a 3, 5 or 7-year cycle, separating out particularly legumes, brassicas, potatoes and alliums with others such as root vegetables slotting in depending on how many rotations you are doing.

Tomatoes and potatoes are susceptible to blight, and the spores can remain in the soil for the following year, so it's a good idea to not grow these crops in the same soil each year. Alliums, such as leeks, onions and garlic may suffer

from onion rot, and if you do identify it, you don't want to plant alliums in the same area for at least 7 years as it remains in the soil for a long time.

Legumes, i.e. beans and peas, absorb nitrogen from the air and store it in nodules on their roots. When the crop is finished, cut off the stems at soil level leaving the roots behind, so the nitrogen stays in the soil. Traditionally legumes are followed by brassicas (or other leafy greens) in a crop rotation as they enjoy the additional nitrogen. However, it is questionable whether any nitrogen is going to remain in unplanted soil over winter, so to take advantage of this you really need to plant directly after the legumes have finished.

Another option to improve the nutrient content of the soil is to use a green manure – this is particularly of benefit over the winter months when otherwise the soil may be bare.

This may all sound very complicated with designated areas of the plot for each family of plants. However you don't have to be strict as this appears if you don't want to, and growing a hybrid of vegetables on the plot can bring other benefits in encouraging beneficial insects and reducing pests. In general, it is best to grow a variety of vegetables that you want to eat, and try not to grow the same type of vegetable in the same location each year.



Family Christmas – John Lewis Krimmel, Sketchbook 2, 1812–13

Jobs for Winter on the Plot

Winter is a great time to tend to the permanent crops on your plot, such as the soft fruits. The area around blackcurrants, red currant and gooseberry bushes should be weeded and mulched. Pruning the bushes and spraying with winter wash will aid in improving ventilation and reduce places for pests to overwinter. Note red currants and gooseberries fruit on older wood, so pruning is to a framework.

Blackcurrants fruit best on two-year-old wood, so a gradual renewal of older stems to the base will ensure you always have some younger stems.

Autumn fruiting raspberries should be cut down and the bed mulched. It's also a good time to remove any suckers that have strayed too far from the bed.

Strawberry beds can be tidied by removing excess runners and dead leaves.

For rhubarb plants, clear old leaves to the compost heap. If the rhubarb is congested or very large with an unproductive centre, now is the time to lift and divide. Use a sharp spade to slice the crown into sections, and then replant sections with a strong bud. Only mulch around the crown, not on

top, to prevent rot. For all soft fruit, a dressing of sulphate of potash in January will aid in flower production for eventual fruitful harvests next year.

Potato forms are now available for pre order. Delivery will be in early February as usual.

Please do remember that the Trading Shed will be closed around Christmas and New Year on December 27-28 and January 3-4. Look forward to seeing you in 2026.

Best wishes
Jo Townsend and Janet Thornton

Edington Road News

I was in despair about what to write for our Christmas article and then I got divine guidance!

I'm doing a little Bible study course on "Hope" and it occurred to me that this is a very apposite subject for any allotmentee or gardener.

- ~ Don't we spend our lives hoping that all will go well?
- ~ Hoping that our seeds will grow.
- ~ Hoping that the seedlings will be sturdy and not too leggy.
- ~ Hoping that they won't be attacked by pests or disease.
- ~ Hoping that they won't die of drought, over-watering or starvation.
- ~ Hoping that, when we plant them out, the birds and slugs won't eat them.
- ~ Hoping that the sun won't burn them up.
- ~ Hoping that the rain and the winds won't beat them down.

I had a pretty unsuccessful start to my gardening year. Despite having only a tiny garden that is already too full of plants and pots, I planted millions of seeds, some acquired legitimately, some nefariously. They failed. Exercising hope, I tried again. Another set of failures. And a third time, ever hopeful ... Hooray, moderate success!

Some people learn from their failures. I don't think I do. (I'm not even sure I learn from my successes.) I know I probably started too early. I'm just so enthusiastic about getting started.

When I left them too long in the greenhouse and they got spindly, I had to apologise to them and snuggle them deep down in a new pot.

Now, even before this year's flowers have died or been put to bed, the new season catalogues start sneaking through the letter box and into my inbox and even though I have a million daffodils and 99,999 tulips what do I do? Well, I do need some *iris reticulata*. And perhaps I'll give the *ranunculus* another try even though they've never grown in all the years I've planted them. But recently I entered a new world – dahlias.

Last year, having visited a local dahlia farm, I decided I should try growing a few dahlias. It was not the right time to buy so, in due course, I ordered eight tubers on special offer from a catalogue. I was outraged when my parcel came and one was like a

shriveled-up old parsnip.

Common sense told me this was not a healthy tuber so I made a vociferous complaint to the company, only to be met with stony silence. I cut my losses (it was only a couple of ££s after all) and focused on the ones I'd got. And what joy when they appeared in all their different sizes, shapes, colours.

Suddenly the world was full of dahlias. I found people growing them on their allotments. I admired them in the gardens I walked past on the footpath. I scrutinised and photographed the different varieties at Hillier's arboretum. I dead-headed *My Precious Darlings* every day, having learned, of course, that the round, fat solid ones are the beautiful new babies and the wet pointy ones are the spent flowers.

Even in my state of ignorance last year



Man eating



I was aware that there was such a thing as a pom-pom dahlia, maybe a dinner plate dahlia (although I didn't realise that was actually a proper name). But no, there are so many more: cactus, semi-cactus, collarette, waterlily, anemone, peony-flowered, single.

But even more adventure was in store when, over the past couple of weeks, I began to lift them and start the whole process of saving them over the winter. Suddenly I was in a world of cutting off stems, hosing the tubers (I couldn't bring myself to do that, despite the lifting

of the hosepipe ban. Water is too precious and I am too mean to spray so profligately) watching videos about cutting each tuber.

Then you discover Eyes, Crown Gall and Leafy Gall. Eyes are good, good, good. Gall is bad, bad, bad. And how to identify the Mother tuber.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. While it's been underground, if it has done its job properly, the little dahlia tuber will have grown lots more tubers which can be cut, along with a bit of the stem – and the all important Eye

– with the full expectation of making a completely new plant next year. Joy and jubilation!

Despite what those people on YouTube say about finding an eye at the top of each tuber where it connects with the neck, I have not found many eyes on my tubers (maybe I should have washed them!). But it's early days. Right now I'm waiting for them to dry out, standing then upside-down on windowsills, in the shed, in my greenhouse (slower process - have you ever heard of a greenhouse in the shade?!). I fully expect eyes to become apparent as the soil dries and I can brush more of it away with my eyeliner brush.

Then all I have to do is decide how I will store them – sawdust, vermiculite, old dry potting compost, old newspapers? And where? I'm worried that my greenhouse or shed might be too cold and damp for My Preciouses. Can I put them in an upstairs bedroom and just move them if I have a visitor? Or leave them there and explain to the visitor how crucial it is for them to be exactly there, blocking their route to the bathroom?

If I had known, when I bought these tubers last spring, how much angst they would cause me, would I have bought them with such blithe abandon?

Without a doubt!

Claire Cafrine

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Christmas dinner for 30 – 1820s

Park Road News

Autumn came early this year, with many trees shedding their leaves in late summer rather than late autumn. The result of a dry spring and a very hot, dry summer has encouraged trees to produce fruit and seeds early, as an insurance policy.

As long as we don't have repeated hot, dry summers, this coping mechanism will work, though birds and small animals which rely on seeds and berries may go hungry as winter goes on.

At the allotment we are able to water plants and trees when they are desperate for moisture, but plants which were well-established when the heat wave came had deep roots and survived with less water. Make sure you have at least one or two water butts on your plot if you have a shed, usually available from the trading shed.

When using a hose pipe, target individual plants rather than spraying the whole plot. Water is expensive now, and in short supply

over the summer, so please use it carefully.

When I started as convenor, back in the mists of time, the main plotholder excuse for leaving large areas of plot overgrown was that it was a habitat for slowworms and lizards. Nowadays, pollinators are the favourite excuse.

Of course, we need to encourage pollinators both for our own crops and bees, but also to support insects which might otherwise be



The Middlesex Hospital: a party in a ward,
WNAHS newsletter



at risk. There are so many attractive flowers to grow amongst your vegetables, many beneficial to your crops. If you can't find inspiration, then the helpful team at the trading shed will have suggestions. So plant specifically for insects, rather than letting an untidy swathe of weeds take over the plot.

Stone and orchard fruit both had a bumper year, which might mean next year will not be so prolific. If you have space, then winter is the ideal time to acquire a bare root fruit tree, on dwarf root stock please, to perhaps introduce a new variety to your plot. Pomona Fruits and Blackmoor Nurseries are both reliable firms.

Several plotholders asked me about their apple and pear trees as they had twigs and branches which had died and gone brown, as well as areas where there was weeping on the trunk.

These are signs of fire blight, a highly infectious bacterial disease which can kill fruit trees over time. To save your trees, and help to stop infecting neighbouring fruit trees, cut off the dead branches and burn or dispose of wrapped up in your domestic bin. Wipe pruning tools with methylated spirit after use.

Potato blight was fortunately absent this year to a large degree, but it's still wise to select blight-

resistant tomato varieties for outside planting as they can be struck down very quickly when it comes, unlike potatoes, which will survive if diseased foliage is swiftly removed.

Fewer slugs were seen over the summer. Maintaining neatly mown paths round a plot, whether strimmed or edged with wood, deters slugs. It also allows maximum space for growing, which is why the amount of grass on a plot should always be minimal.

The November rubbish pile got rid of a lot of unwanted metal, plastic and glass, thanks as usual to WCC. I watched a couple of new plotholders heaving old Mypex, which they had struggled to remove from under fruit bushes, onto the heap.

Mypex is a short-term aid to cover newly dug ground before planting, and warm the soil. Please don't use it a permanent weed suppressant, as weeds soon grow through it, and over the years it becomes anchored to the plot. It does no good to the fruit bushes, and you can use bark chip or mulch to deter weeds which is much better. If you have used it for this, please remove it before you are asked to.

Cardboard is very much a la mode as ground cover now. Use large pieces, preferably without

plastic labels or coloured printing, and soak it before covering with mulch, wood chippings or manure. Worms will find their way through the cardboard and process the growing medium, and excluding light will help keep weeds at bay.

We have managed to welcome quite a few new people from the waiting list, and dividing large plots has helped.

Consider whether you need, or are able to keep up, a big plot, and think about giving someone else a chance to grow, when you take an honest look at your plot. Plots cannot be passed on to family and they are not for life, but need to be constantly kept in good condition.

This summer and autumn have been difficult for me outside the allotment, so I am especially grateful to all the lovely people who have offered help, taken over mulch deliveries, taken a cat to the vet, helped with jobs on site such as pruning back bushes round the loo shed without being asked, and generally buoyed me with kind words.

I wish everyone a wonderful 2026 on their plots.

Maria Keniston

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