



**I WAS BEGINNING TO** *to think that the news of all the recent rain and its effect on the produce in the fields would have to be sent out in blazing hot sunshine – rather ironic, I thought! However, as I write this another day has dawned with grey skies and intermittent rain! It seems that short burst of real summery weather may have been as short-lived as the one in May. Still, it has given the growers, and everyone who has come to help out over the past week or so, the ideal conditions for getting on top of weeds and completing some well overdue planting jobs in the fields. For more news on how the crops*



*Pool of rainwater in one of the veg fields*

*are faring in this strange summer, see **Will's News from the Field** below, and read on for the **Fruit field news from Gareth**. Now that Abbie has left I'd like to introduce you to a new face on the project - someone you may meet at your next work morning. If you missed our **pole barn extension raising** or our **fantastic annual barn dance**, you can read about them here. As usual everything is captured in Tom's superb photos and of course there's lots more project news, and the usual sections for ads and notices at the back.*

*Ali, July 2012*

### **NEWS FROM THE FIELD** – by Will Johnson

If you hadn't already heard or noticed (or if you have been abroad or on the moon for the last few months) it is turning out to be a particularly tricky season for growing food. Apart from a week at the end of May (remember that? I do as I was cycling around the Kent coastal route) it has been cold, wet or dull almost every day of the late spring/early summer and quite often all three. June was the wettest and dullest since records began and it can't have been far off the coldest. Still, at least we didn't get a frost!

The effects of this weather are not felt so much now as over the winter and next spring: the potatoes are behind compared to last year (mainly due to low soil temperatures which can't warm up much if they're always slightly wet), yet the blight has come a lot quicker (because of the saturated, heavy air), and we can see signs of it in the leaves of some plants already. At this rate we could face having to make do with half the amount we are used to storing over winter. It is a similar story for a lot of other crops. The carrot main-crop went in a good two weeks later than planned – it was simply too wet to make beds and drill into them, and even then conditions weren't ideal – and due to the slugs eating about half the crop we needed to redrill the carrots, but it was the first week of July before we could drill a replacement. Without some sunshine these seedlings



*Mulching in late spring*



*Onions beginning to grow in late spring*

might not grow to much at all before they stop growing in the late autumn. It is looking bleak for sweetcorn, French beans and squash, all of them sitting in a particularly wet part of the land by the canal. It is quite simple: they need more sunshine! It's a shame because a crop like squash is so useful for us as once harvested it can be stored for months and brighten the winter shares. As it stands I'd predict we'll get very little from the whole crop, if any at all. Conversely it has been a good year for red shank (a fast growing, quick-to-seed, strong willed and ugly weed).

I picked 9 courgettes on Saturday, having not picked them for 4 days. 9 courgettes from 250 plants in the middle of July. Madness! Small shares were getting half a kilo each this time last year!

We haven't had much trouble with rabbits this year so far, but just to keep us on our toes the pigeons have revealed a taste for green lettuces and chard. They're not a patch on the slugs for diversity of diet though; slugs have eaten the following things this season in varying quantities, causing us varying amounts of stress: any kind of beans, lettuce, beetroot, swede, broccoli, sprouts, cabbages, kohlrabi, radish, fennel, courgettes, carrots, potatoes, peppers, aubergines. The list goes on. Thankfully most crops seem to have bounced back reasonably well. Slugs don't seem to like parsnips or



*Still smiling, during some weeding*

leeks though, which is nice.



*Early season share filler - delicious sugar snap peas*

All in all it has been and will continue to be a real test of character for anyone involved in the growing here, from staff through to regular volunteers through to once-in-a-while help. If the shares look a bit lean and mean in the coming months we will be the first to notice and all I can say is that we will learn a lot from this season, from the practicalities of how to cope with adverse weather, to learning to keep going (and smiling) even when we don't seem to be getting our just rewards from our hard work.



*The double polytunnel looking verdant in late May*

It has been very useful (to put it mildly) to have all the covered (polytunnel) space that we have in a season like this one, and thankfully we are just on the cusp of a lot of tomatoes and cucumbers. The sugar snap peas and the new potatoes once again filled an early season gap, and we are still picking an abundant crop of early carrots. We even have exotic things like aubergines, melons and sweet potatoes on the way. Through a bit of juggling we plan to maximise the tunnel space at the back end of the summer to fill in some of the holes left by crop shortages outside. I'm still fairly optimistic that the share will look reasonable if we can



be creative enough with the polytunnel space, but we appreciate your understanding if some crops are not as abundant as in previous years. Now, altogether: Bring on some sun!

Will, 18 July 2012

## **FRUIT FIELD** – by Gareth Davies

Those of you who have taken a walk around the fruit field recently will have directly experienced the soggy conditions. Since the last newsletter we have endured a run of wet cold weather, exceptional



*Hybrid berries ripening*



*Apples maturing in the fruit orchard*

even by English standards, and as a consequence our yield of farm fruit is likely to be lower than expected. This is because many of the trees and shrubs went into dormancy again or stopped growing after the brief hot week or so in spring (remember that?!) and/or the pollinators stopped flying in the cold conditions that followed. All told the fruit is coming later and in smaller quantities than in previous seasons.

Despite this we have produced a good (and long) crop of rhubarb which I hope those taking a share found creative uses for – in my case plenty of rhubarb and ginger jam. Currently our raspberries are beginning to yield and hopefully some summer sunshine will arrive in the next week or two to bring out the full flavour. Our hybrid berries have begun to mature and we have harvested mixed punnets of these with currants (red and black) which have not yielded so well this year. We are currently on the lookout for cherry plums and other similar fruit that should begin to come into season but the indications are that fruit set has been poor all over this year. If any members have surplus plum or damson from trees in their gardens please let us know and we would be happy to come around and help harvest them in return for a



*Raspberries for the fruit share*

portion! Our blackberries are coming on well and we hope for a reasonable harvest in coming months and some of our apples have a reasonable fruit set.

In the orchard we have started our workshares, with three now doing a volunteer slot every week, and have been weeding down the beds to keep the (mainly) couch grass down. We have also been re-staking the trees where necessary and generally keeping on top of the routine management tasks including light pruning of the cherries and plums at the start of summer. Over the coming months we will keep at this and put down fresh straw in the rows where they are looking bare on the ground and hopefully planting a lot more ground cover including strawberries and ground growing plants like mint which will yield in future years.

As already mentioned above, we are now putting out fruit shares and would welcome any help from members to supplement the top fruit (plums, pears, apples) by asking you to donate any surplus fruit you might have at home, which we are happy to help harvest. We

aim to supply fruit up to the end of November although we may be able to extend this to Christmas and beyond if we receive a lot of offers of fruit and can arrange adequate storage (which we are building!). Because of the tough fruit growing conditions this year we are in the end unsure how the supply will hold up over the season so we will be happy to review how the season has gone with those paying for a share at the AGM with an aim of making up the value in one way or another- for example with a payment holiday at the beginning of next season. If you are interested in a fruit share contact Ali to ask for a fruit share or fill in a leaflet when you pick up your veg and put it in her pigeon hole in the yurt.

Gareth, 18 July 2012

## **SITE DEVELOPMENTS** – by Tom Ingall

A big thank you to all those who came down over the last weekend of June to take part in 'stage two' of the pole barn raising! It went really well, not least due to the amazing luck we had with the weather over the weekend. Almost a year to the day since we completed 'stage one' we used a similar system to extend the barn to make a completed structure twice



*The first bay goes up*

the original size. Happily we'd received some finance through the local LEADER fund to build this extension and it meant that we were able to invest in new tin sheets and fit clear panels to allow light in through the roof. The reasoning behind the extra space is to create our own dedicated fruit and veg store for the winter months that can then be used to house events such as the annual barn dance in the summer months when it is empty. We still have quite a bit of work to do on the barn before we can start to think about storing our spuds and apples in there! Over the next couple of months we'll be planning a few more work weekends to try and get the walls put up and an entrance established in the far end. With the weather as it's been we've had a very clear lesson in the need for adequate drainage around the barn too, so that's also on the list!

## **SOCIALS** – by Caz Ingall

Hello! Well, the main socials focus this last quarter has most definitely got to be the **Canalside Barn Dance**, which happened on the 7th July. To say I was worried about the weather forecast on the day before is an understatement (!) but yet again we were amazingly lucky with a lovely dry evening, even the odd ray of sunshine, and a good turnout. We didn't



*The pole barn full of dancers and light!*

quite sell out of tickets this year, but I estimated there to be around 180 people at its peak, and a lovely energy was brought by all. Massive HOORAYS to our ceilidh band for the night, Melodic Evil, who carried on playing even through our power failure and kept us dancing till late into the night. And a special massive hooray to Ali who saved the day by bringing her

own generator from her boat up to the site when the one we'd hired stopped working - what would we have done without you?!

The winners of our 'best headgear' competition were Kath (for her truly amazing willow/vegetable crown creation) and to Katie and Hannah, for their beautifully crafted butterfly hats. Thank you to everyone that got the message about this part of the night and who made an effort! Next year we may go for full fancy dress, so be warned!! The open-mic session also showed up those many talented folk that are among our membership (and friends), thank you to everyone that got up and performed - I think everyone would agree though, that the stars of the show were Josh and Eleanor, who, at 10 and 7, played some stunning recorder pieces at the start of the session.

As always, it was amazing to see folks of all different ages running round the site, sitting round the fire, and stripping the willow together in our new, beautiful pole barn. The whole site looked beautiful - it really does feel more and more like it's coming together to make events like this so much more manageable - as it is now, the barn in particular is a perfect place for a good old hoe down!

HUGE THANK YOUS to everyone that came and helped set up, do shifts on the bar, light candles, clean the toilets, feed the fire, and clear up. *These events really are not possible without your invaluable input*, so thank you so much. A special extra thank you to Fan and George, both for their fabulous and delicious pancake making on the night, and for doing the lion's share of clearing up on Sunday morning.

Overall we raised around £500 which will go towards our Education Project (initially it was meant to go towards a prospective Care Farming Project, but this has been put on hold for the time being). All in all, it was another great night of fun, laughter, and a seriously good dance.

More social dates for your diary:

Friday 14th - Sunday 16th September - **Camping weekend** (more on that very soon)

Saturday 17th November - **Winter social**

For now, I am wishing you all a fine and lovely summer (when it arrives!) and look forward to seeing some of you on the farm in the coming weeks, Caz x

## **NEW ARRIVALS...**

I'd like to introduce you to **Paul Fryer**, who is now working regularly in the veg fields alongside Will. Although his background is in the building trade with a strong family tradition in this, he says that growing is where his heart is – he loves spending time on his allotment and, working at Canalside since April, he feels like he's landed his dream job! Hopefully you will get a chance to meet him at a work morning soon, if you haven't already!



*Paul, with wife Kim (centre), daughters, Hannah (L) and Katie (R), all wearing their stunning barn dance hat creations!*



*Our stall at the Peace Festival*

As always, we had our annual publicity stall at Leamington Peace Festival in June. Welcome to all the new members who signed up for a veg share or a 4 week trial at the event. And welcome to anyone else who has joined us since the last newsletter in April. We hope you're enjoying the new season's veg and look forward to meeting you soon at a project event or work morning, if you haven't yet come along to anything at the project site.

### **...AND DEPARTURES**

And as Abbie prepares to move on with her boat to York, ready to start her law degree, she sent this poem she has written to share with you all:

I value your friendship like good firewood.  
I might have said air, but in truth  
I could still breathe, if you weren't there,  
Only, I'd be colder.  
As I'm getting older,  
As diverse landscapes are cleared,  
And their butterflies stranded  
On shrinking islands  
In growing deserts  
Of inhospitable grain,  
I look around me,  
At where we've come together,  
And find it's in our differences  
That our greatest strength is,  
And though we all grow into  
Our own strange shapes,

The soil we give our leaves to  
Come the autumn is the same.  
May we tend to our friendship  
Like good firewood?  
Year on year, let the sun grow in to new  
shoots,  
May we bring in our gone seasons'  
Harvest of water and light  
To cure and store beneath a  
Strong and well-built roof.  
That it may warm us at our hearth,  
And feed us at our roots;  
May we gather at our fireplace  
In Faith and in Truth  
To celebrate our summers,  
And see our winters through.

### **EDUCATION PROJECT – by Ali Jeffery**

Our education project continues to do well, with several activities taking place since the last newsletter. In May we were pleased to welcome a group from Radford Semele Primary School, in what has become the annual visit for Reception class, supporting their learning about what plants need to grow and some investigation into how compost is made. We also welcomed Reception and Year 1 from St. Peter's Catholic Primary School in Leamington, with their teacher Mrs. Smith, for activities to go with their summer topic of 'Growing'. These visits were both enabled with the valuable support of Canalside members who volunteered to prepare the site and on the day of the visits, and Lucy Bishop who works alongside me in delivering the sessions. There are more visits planned in the autumn term, so please get in touch when I email dates out if you'd like to be involved.

A new departure has been visits for the local home education group, who already come for



monthly visits to Canalside and the wider farm led by Caz and Tom. In the early summer I led a session with the older children to explore what impact insecticides have on agricultural ecosystems and to look at how bees support the production of fruiting vegetables, and just last week the younger children considered the different roles that invertebrates have in relation to veg growing.



*The older children show a role play about pollination to the younger ones*

Another new activity has been participating in the sustainability event for Warwickshire and Coventry schools, run by the local councils and Action 21 at Coombe Abbey Country Park. I spent three days delivering sessions about organic farming and the effect of insecticides, for 15 different school groups. It was a full-on experience, but I felt that I enabled some of the accompanying staff to question what they knew about conventional agriculture and hopefully also gave the children a better understanding of the importance of organic farming methods for a resilient ecosystem.

## **THE SOCIAL AREA**

The willow tunnels in the social area continue to give children lots of inspiration for fun and games when they are at



*The willow tunnel complex*



*The new play equipment*

the project site. The most recent addition for children – some climbing and play equipment – was kindly donated by Jonny Walker, a friend of the project, and is already being well used. To minimise the likelihood of accidents, please take full responsibility for your children when they play on the equipment, and supervise as necessary.

If you or your child do need first aid, there is a first aid kit in the first cupboard in the geodome. Will is a qualified first aider and accidents should be recorded in the accident book which is kept in the yurt.

## **CANALSIDE COMMUNITY BEES UPDATE**

As you may remember from the last newsletter, Canalside Community Bees is a new, separate project which is running closely alongside Canalside Community Food. Here's the latest news from Kath Pasteur about the hives, which are near the Canalside Community Food fruit orchard:

The bee club now has 6 strong and healthy hives of bees, one of which is in the new Top Bar Hive (for more sustainable beekeeping). This is two more than we started with in spring, thanks to some swarm catching action. We have made a start on a wild flower garden around the apiary (slowed somewhat by the weather), and have been setting up a new bee



*Introducing a swarm to a top bar hive*

shed to keep our expanding equipment in.

Unfortunately this wet weather is not good for bees and honey production! When it rains the bees stay in the hive. This means they are not out gathering nectar to make honey. Moreover they eat up their existing stores. So we are not counting on much honey harvest this year.

You can still join the bee club and come along and see the bees or help out with other activities. We meet at the apiary which is at Canalside about once a fortnight. Visit our website to see what we have been up to and for details of how to join <http://canalsidecommunitybees.blogspot.co.uk/>

**MEMBERS' CORNER** Do you have any interesting projects, charity fund-raisers or other not-for-profit activities you'd like to promote to your fellow Canalsiders? If so, then this is the space for your free advert! Get in touch with Ali for advertising in future issues of the newsletter.

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Bruce Knight recommends 'The Crisis of Civilisation' - [www.crisisofcivilization.com](http://www.crisisofcivilization.com)

He says it's "an excellent on line documentary... well worth a watch and Canalside members will be particularly interested in the section on food production." He suggested that someone might like to organise a community screening. If you would be interested in making this happen, please get in touch with Ali to discuss dates and what infrastructure the project has to enable this.

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**SMALL ADS** Do you have any business or money-making ventures you'd like to advertise to other members of Canalside? Then this is the space for you. Please contact Ali for future adverts, and remember payment and content should be received before the copy deadline (21<sup>st</sup> October for the autumn newsletter) to assure your ad space.

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**Forest Schools** use the calmness and space of woodland to help children grow socially and emotionally while doing exciting, risky activities safely. There are now sessions in Leamington and Warwick. For more information contact the forest school practitioner, Keir Mitchell: 0781 3934597 / [keirmitchell@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:keirmitchell@yahoo.co.uk)

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Graham Williams 01926 431129 email: [grahamwilliams3@btinternet.com](mailto:grahamwilliams3@btinternet.com)

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