

FOURTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING: CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT 6th November 2015

Members and Friends,

It is really heartening to see you all here tonight .As Dave said, I am going to tell you about interesting things like, the vegetables. Can I assume that you too are interested in this?

I don't know about you but I sometimes get the impression that we belong to some strange secret cult: that we like to grow food, that comes out of the ground, yes and it's dirty!That people work, up there, voluntarily.....Is it such a subversive activity?

So , as well as addressing our success in producing food organically, this report will also highlight other aspects of how we are constantly attempting to achieve those Charitable Aims mentioned in the Secretary's report.

We have had a very successful growing season despite the cold and wet summer weather: perhaps because we grow a variety of vegetables which all thrive in different conditions: the tatties were happy and the French beans weren't! The weather was taxing in many ways- there were some lovely warm spring days which brought plants on and encouraged us gardeners out and then, it turned cold again and never warmed up until September, proving a challenge all round!

This weather was especially problematic for the onions. Many went to seed early.

The story of the onions illustrates an issue we struggle with at the field which is potatoes growing where they are not supposed to be. We grow onions through black mulching fabric to reduce the need for weeding. This proved an ideal nursery bed for volunteer potatoes missed in last year's lifting. They pushed up through the black membrane lifting it in a very sinister way ,destroying it and cutting out much needed light from the onions themselves .The reason volunteer potatoes are a problem is that we try to keep a responsible four or five year long plot rotation to avoid disease building up in the soil.

This year's single plot of potatoes has proved more than enough, because it was supplemented by volunteer crops amounting to over a ton in total. It was such a joyful scene at both the chief tattie lifting days when a good many families turned out to follow the old Fergie, driven by George Ness.

The main crop we are all eating now of pink blush Cara, red Sarpo Mira, purple Arran Victory and Record are all very tasty indeed. Some of you may know that Arran Victory was bred by Donald McKelvie in 1918 to celebrate the end of the First World War.

We grew more broad beans and peas than last year.....we like growing legumes as they fix nitrogen in the soil naturally. In fact, this summer 112 bags of peas and 78 bags of broad beans were sold on the stalls. We were helped to achieve this by netting and support structures bought with £1000 grant over two years awarded to us through John Small from the University of the Highlands and Islands at Perth College.

We grew an excellent variety of lettuce and edible flowers for our delightful salad bags- mostly harvested by Claire Ash. Jim Sutton made five successive sowings of three different varieties of lettuce. How's that for know how! And diligence.

We had an abundant supply of spinach from early on. This crop was entirely sown and tended to by Hari Angus- we owe you a big thank you Hari! Hari was also mainly responsible, with help from others such as Rosie Wright and Ginny for sowing, thinning and protecting the swedes from the incursion of rogue tatties. The resulting (Halloween lantern size) neeps are fantastic!

The brassica are excellent. 183 Bags of Kale were packed during the selling season alone, with plenty kale, Brussels, cabbage and broccoli to see us through the winter.

We were particularly pleased with the carrots and parsnips. We sowed many more this year. Those of you who know how difficult it is to sow these very fine seeds and how fine a tilth they require, will appreciate the labour intensive job done by all the rakers and John Small, Alistair Wylie and Elspeth for sowing. Sowing thinly meant little thinning or disturbance of the crop was required. We then erected our innovative crop protection barrier.....hoops covered with 0.6mm netting secured with bags of stones. This thwarted the dreaded carrot fly resulting in a bumper crop of unblemished roots.

Innovations this year have been globe artichokes planted by William Hogg, three asparagus beds inspired by William.....this is for those of us who can cope with delayed gratification. Other novelties have been excellent full height runner beans and miniature celeriac. Our fruit trees and bushes are now cropping generously, again protected from birds courtesy of UHI.

As you can tell from this report, we can become pretty obsessed with our growing efforts at the field. It is important to look beyond the productivity and beauty of the field itself and make contact with the wider membership and the community. We did hold a meeting at the end of January when members helped to critique how we had fared in addressing our Charitable Aims. We were delighted at the involvement shown. We have also issued two newsletters, the latter put together by a new volunteer, Alison S Campbell. Have you had a look at our Facebook pages which Sally Small keeps updated? If you ever want cheering up, just go onto the Facebook photo stream and look at the flower pictures. They are so beautiful. We sent 104 bunches of them down to the stalls. And then we have our website. Who has ventured to it? John Small also writes our Twitter news.

Sometimes an obsession needs an outlet or expression. This Ode was found pinned to the shed one September day. It amounts to a confession and I would be interested to know what you think the psychological profile of the author might be.

POEM : Ode To The Beetroot

The biggest event at Saint Jerome's Chapel this year was the felling of the mighty dying oak near the entrance. It cost us £1000 to be felled, cheesed, and the brash chipped for compost. Other Chapel trees were made safe so now we have peace of mind when the autumn winds blow. There is plenty wood to be taken away by those who can chop it, if you would like to give us a donation towards the cost of felling.

We funded three new large compost bins, made by Kenny Allan, a local joiner, to a design sourced by Sandy.

We also have a very smart new honesty stall which Robert Merriman kindly roofed over for us. It is proving to be very useful....and people are proving to be remarkably honest, the only thing they nicked was our banner and a neighbour's heron's head!

This year we engaged a hard working local gardener, Mike Winton to help with heavier field work and routine strimming. This has proved a worthwhile investment as it helps us preserve the backs and good will of our regular volunteers.

Our volunteers! We truly appreciate the efforts of every single one of you who have helped in any small or bigger way. I think Harry S Truman's comment applies here.

"It is remarkable how much you accomplish if you don't care who gets the credit."

Nevertheless I'd like to mention some including some new helpers John Moy, Lauren Merriman and Elaine Gillies. Joan Brookes and Robert Merriman took the produce down to the stalls sometimes which was a boon. Dougie, our youngest and a regular volunteer shows us that digging is child's play! Our regular volunteers however deserve special mention. Claire Ash, Ginny and Jim Sutton harvested for every stall. Val and Vicki Arnot consistently turned up at 8 am to pack those bags of veg. Lorna Walker gave her time freely at all the Saturday and Tuesday stalls. There are many regular customers who look forward to her banter and nutritional encouragement.

The field is becoming a social hub. There have been three lovely birthday parties there this year. Wild Sparks outdoor play scheme gather round our fire pit and the oak woods resound to children's voices. Increasingly, volunteers gather to chat and enjoy some excellent coffee in our new kitchen facilities. You are all welcome to use it as a picnic spot .

We were all set for our big social event of the year when sudden stormy wet weather enforced the cancellation of the Summerfest...which brings us neatly to our role in the Climate Change event held at Birnam Arts and organised by our member Jess Pepper. Sally took responsibility for our display and stall at this event which was admired by many of the participants.

That phrase "taking responsibility" might well echo what we are trying to achieve at the field. We want to reduce our reliance on food flown half way round the world sending more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere; we don't need to reject unconventionally sized vegetables, creating food waste mountains or get involved in competitive pricing to please shareholders. We want the links between field and fork to be as simple and direct as possible.

Importantly though, we want to keep alive the connection between what we harvest and sell at the stalls and how and where it grows. For example we hope that the 50 Primary children who planted out 200 leeks, 30 courgette plants and 3 rows of beans will have enjoyed themselves and learned something valuable. We don't see ourselves as a different kind of shop. Ideally we are hoping for a beneficial cycle of satisfying communal activity .I think we are already seeing a building up of confidence and know how, as we take responsibility for supplying at least part of our own food.

In doing this, we aim to work with nature to nurture this gift of the beautiful environment which is the field. So whilst we might be able to grow more vegetables at the field, we do not want to do so at the risk of over stretching the goodwill of those who work for the field. We want to get the

balance right whilst continuing to strive to reach all sections of our community. We think you, our members, understand that. You, as a community, support our vision.

I would like to thank all the members of the Board of Trustees for their hard work and support this year.

Indeed thank you all!.