PRESENT:-

Marion Gerson (Vice President)                        Manor Allotment Site
Ken Asher                                              Highcliff Allotment Site
Bill Atherton                                          Archer Lane Allotment Site
Margaret Boulton                                       Ecclesall Allotment Site
Patrick Burns                                          Secretary
Julia Ennis                                            Highcliff Allotment Site
Terry Foster-Smith                                     Rodney Hill Allotment Site
Mrs Foster-Smith                                       
Janet Gregory                                          Crookes Quarry Allotment Site
Rob Hawkins                                            Hangingwater Allotment Site
John Howe                                               Woodseats Allotment Site
Claire Hughes                                          Ruslings Road Allotment Site
Bob Jarvis                                              Corker Bottom Allotment Site
Michael Jordan                                         Moss Way Allotment Site
Maggie Linford                                         Crookes Quarry Allotment Site
John Martin, Finchen Road Allotment Site
Janet Milton                                           Ruslings Road Allotment Site
Pete Morgan                                             Hangingwater Allotment Site
Pete Sides                                             Rodney Hill Allotment Site
Mrs. Sides                                             
Dave Thacker                                           Highcliff Allotment Site
Nicola Thacker                                         Highcliff Allotment Site
Phil Webster                                           High Wincobank Allotment Site

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE
There were no apologies for absence.

2. GARDENERS QUESTION TIME
A ‘Gardeners’ Question Time’ event was held, in which a Panel consisting of Bob Jarvis, Pete Morgan and Pete Sides answered questions put to them by those present at the meeting, as follows:-
Q. Why would compost made by the questioner have a sandy type of material and did the fact that it was infested with ants have a bearing on that?
A. The ants could take in the material and produce a chrystalline substance, which is the embryo of a nest. The key was to make the compost as hot as possible. This was possible with well rotted manure and sulphate of ammonia.

Q. The compost produced by Green Estate was, at present, £22 per metre. Was there a better time to buy it than now?
A. It would be better not to buy it because its origin would be unknown. It could contain germicides, which would affect even compost from horse mannure. It would be better to make your own compost.

Q. What could be done to avoid parsnip canker?
A. Moving the crop around or growing the parsnips in containers

Q. When should lime be used on the allotment?
A. If brassicas are small it could be due to a lack of lime in the soil. The best course is to carry out a ph test of the soil. Lime should be added during winter, by distributing it close to the ground, but not where potatoes are grown. Hydrated lime should be used at planting time, carbonated lime should be used as a dressing. It was worthwhile shopping around for the best value.

Q. The questioner’s damson tree was 4 years old and had hardly fruite last year. This year there was plenty of blossom. What was the likelihood of it producing a crop this year?
A. It takes a long time to establish a damson tree. Like all fruit trees it would be affected by frost. The best course was to grow one in a sheltered place.

Q. The questioner had an old pear tree which did not fruit or blossom last year. What could be the reason for that?
A. Cannon Hall had a large collection of pear trees. Two years ago none of them produced fruit, but they could fruit this year if there was no frost. Most fruit trees produce no fruit every three or four years and, usually, if there was no hard frost a pear tree would do badly next year. It would be useful to ensure that a pear tree took in iron. One way of doing this, used by a member of the Panel, was to hammer an iron nail into a tree, which would release iron oxide.

Q. Is there a cure for onion neck rot?
A. There is not. The best practice is to move the onions around. If grey mould appears on autumn onions, they should be dug up and dried off. If white ones did not crop, sometimes red ones would and growing from sets rather than from seed could work, provided they are heat treated.

Q. Is there a way of preventing allium beetle spread?
A. That was unknown.

Q. Is there a cure for rust on leeks?
A. Rust would be prevented by soaking them in methane D45. If rust appears they should be dug up immediately. Rust is an air borne virus. Different types of rust attack different plants. Many remedies for dealing with such problems were withdrawn by the E.U.

Q. What is the best way to grow onions?
A. Use the best quality of material to start with. Suron stores well. The key is to keep the soil firm. It should only be watered when required. Keeping the ground firm would lead to less bolting and they should be grown in sunny areas. Growing shallots would be a good alternative and some, such as jermor, would be vigorous. At the end of the season, they should be top dressed with sulphate of ammonia. The tops should not be pushed over, but should be allowed to fall naturally.

Q. Is it possible to deter rabbits?
A. Bury wire netting around plants or put wire netting outside raised bed, with netting on the top of the plants.

Q. Will anything grow in a wet patch of land?
A. Celery, spinach and celeriac. Celeriac is the most robust, provided that it is not put out when it is too cold, or it is grown in a polytunnel.

Q. What needs to be done, to win the Boulton Cup?
A. Plan for it, set your stall out with vegetables, flowers and fruit, something with the ‘wow’ factor and evidence of growing in succession. It was vital to plan a year ahead and to have a backup plan. The criteria for judging entries had been reduced from 20 vegetables to 15, There are 100 points to be considered by the judges, including compost, paths, special features and environmental factors.
Q. What is the best way to prevent sprouts from ‘blowing’?
A. The soil must be consolidated and firm in time for winter digging and there should not be too much nitrogen in the soil, or else the plant will create too much leaf, but if the sprouts are grown in the winter, some nitrogen should be added to the soil. The seedlings should be grown in a trench, firmed in and watered. They should be covered in netting and left until late in the year, around Christmas.

Q. Should plant plugs be used?
A. No. They can infest a garden. Plants should be grown from seed. Similarly, it is unwise to buy cheap manure, which is usually of poor quality. Umax is the best compost for seedlings, although it is peat based. It is not possible to transplant carrots and they are hard enough anyway, if grown from seed in a trench. They should be covered with fleece for most of the year and, to deter carrotfly, they should be grown beside onions, or with mothballs strewn across the area. Alternatively they should be sprayed with a garlic spray or a solution of 50 mill. per 2 gallons of Jeyes fluid. Brassicas can be treated with the same solution to deter white fly.

Q. What are the ingredients of John Innes 1 and 2 Compost?
A. They should be listed on the packet. A good peat-based compost is just as good. The best practice is to buy peat-based compost and add ingredients such as sand and vermiculate in equal parts to the peat. Alternatively Vitox q4 or seaweed feed could be added to the compost.

Q. Is it possible to keep garlic for as much as 2 years?
A. It would be possible if the garlic was kept in peat. A few years ago, coya compost was promoted widely as the alternative to peat, but it dries out too quickly. It should be mixed with peat.

Q. Which is the best manure?
A. Horse manure is hot, but cow and pig manure are cold. If that did not matter, each type is effective, but as a soil conditioner rather than as a feed. Chicken manure is too hot unless it is in liquid form. A liquid manure could be formed by putting horse or cow manure in a string bag and suspending it in a water butt. Alternatively, nettles or comfrey could be used in a similar way to form a liquid manure, at the rate of 1 parts per 25 parts of water and, ideally, suspended in a green mesh. The comfrey or nettles could then be used as a mulch.
around fruit bushes.

Q. What is the best way to grow tomatoes?
A. Preferably in straw bales. Late producing ones should be laid on the ground, so that they can take root.

Q. What are the benefits of using leaf mulch rather than horse manure?
A. Mulch keeps weeds out and water in. Manure is a fertiliser. Leaf mulch contains little nutrient. A straw mulch around brassicas and runner beans can be good. Water should be sprayed over the whole of the plant and not just close to the roots.

Q. Is the ‘no dig’ system worthwhile?
A. One member of the Panel is presently trying it this year. He rotovated the soil in the winter and is now leaving it, with a straw mulch. That should be good for brassicas as it prevents root fly from laying eggs and it holds moisture, which reduces the need for composting.