

# Winter Solstice

## Newsletter 2014



### In this issue –

From the Chair  
Next events  
AGM Report  
Field update  
A sense of Place  
Willow Day  
Water update  
Poly tunnel news  
EGC Calendar

### Calendar Dates

Jan 3<sup>rd</sup> 11am Monthly meeting shed  
Jan 7<sup>th</sup> Review evening  
Jan 17<sup>th</sup> Orchard day & Wassail  
Feb 7<sup>th</sup> 11am Monthly meeting shed  
Mar 7<sup>th</sup> 11am Monthly meeting shed

### From the Chair...

as the year draws to a close, it's time to reflect on all that has been achieved on the field in 2014 – no doubt something will be forgotten but here's some personal "standouts" from me.... pond, poly tunnels, bees, broad beans, raspberries, willow, orchard organisation, hedge maintenance, awesome onion crop, beautifully maintained beds, supportive and understanding companionship....Hope all members have a restful time over Christmas and a healthy 2015. May your seasonal meal be truly seasonal!

Jan

### Next events

3rd January – Monthly meeting in the shed

6th January – Evening review meeting. A chance for members to air their views. This meeting has been called in response to requests from some members to have more time to consider certain things such as financial sustainability, optimum membership levels and our online presence.

Saturday 17th January – Orchard work-day, followed at 2.30, by Wassail. Wassail is the tradition of "awakening" the trees in the orchard and encouraging them to produce a good crop, by lighting a fire, making a lot of noise and drinking cider! It's fun!

## **AGM and Open Day**

The 27th September brought fine weather (unlike last year) which enabled us to hold our AGM outside. The small, but thankfully quorate, group of members who attended the AGM ensured that all was in order for our annual submission to the Financial Services Authority and that as ever due diligence is being done to ensure that we function “properly”.

Richard Tomkins stood down as treasurer and his long commitment to the job was recognised and thanked by those present. Jake Neal was elected as the new treasurer. David Mezzetti continues as Secretary and Jan Howe as Chair.

Once the business of the AGM was over we began the enjoyable task of preparing for Open Day, which always seems to show the field at its best, with a beautiful display of produce by the shed, and an abundant table of homemade cakes. The Open Day gives us the opportunity to chat with visitors and appreciate the field through different eyes. It's great to know that as a result of the day we have new members and that local residents have an understanding of what goes on!

Jan

## **Field update.**

The latest and most exciting development is the arrival and building of our new poly tunnel. Many thanks to Jake for all his organisation and hard work on this project. For more information about the poly tunnel see the article later in the newsletter.

Most of the growing area has been put to bed for the Winter: Either sown with green manure or composted, manured and covered with mypex. However, we have already started planting for next year – two beds of broad beans and one of garlic.

There are still crops to be harvested; red kale (hoping it will be as good a crop as it was last winter), brussel sprouts, a few leeks left, parsnips, and the chard, which just seems to go on and on! And of course, lots of lovely salads in the poly tunnel. We are hoping for some cauliflower and purple sprouting in the New Year (lots of leaf at the moment but still no flower!) There are still some squash and lots of onions in the shed.

We have been pruning the currants and have planted some hardwood cuttings in a bed in the Garden. We are in the process of cutting back the perimeter hedge to encourage it to thicken out.

In the Garden, Liz has taken cuttings of the lavender. The strawberries have been cut back and beds are being prepared for sowing herbs in the spring.

Before Christmas we will be cutting back the willow and using the cuttings to extend the willow bed in the orchard area. The plan is to use our willow for structures, such as hoops and for weaving baskets.

Many thanks to the crop planning group who have come up with a growing plan for next year. The plan is informed by the produce research carried out by Liz Owen (thank you Liz) and by members' input to the Veg Questionnaire (thanks to those of you who replied to this).

Writing this report makes me realize how organised we are - most of the beds prepared for Winter; water storing up in the pond for next summer; our new polytunnel being erected; pruning; planting; planning... We are doing really well and I recommend that we all give ourselves a pat on the back for a successful and rewarding 2014 on our field!

Lana

## **'A Sense of Place' The Field: Crosslands, 14th October 2014**

"To know fully even one field or one land is a lifetime's experience. In the world of poetic experience it is depth that counts, not width. A gap in a hedge, a smooth rock surfacing a narrow lane, a view of a woody meadow, the stream at the junction of four small fields - these are as much as a man can fully experience." Patrick Kavanagh, Irish poet, 1904-1967.

These three sentences, first encountered in 2005, struck a chord for me that has resonated ever since, and so it was felicitous that Nigel chose to quote them in his introduction to A Sense of Place. Indeed his whole talk was rich with poets' and prose writers' insights into the changing life of the land, fields in particular, and human beings' often turbulent history and relation to it. A flavour of this is reflected in the handout he made for us and which accompanies this newsletter, while the particular fascinating history of our own patch is given in a pamphlet kindly lent by Andy Bragg and copied: The Ancient Farms of Shillingford St George and Shillingford Abbott. However all this written history stops short of the wonderful coming together, in 2008, of Andy's vision for his land's organic farming with a group of Exeter citizens' hope of finding a place for growing collaboratively and sustainably: the origin of Exeter Growers' Co-operative.

After this rich account of history and context Nigel invited each participant to say what the field meant or evoked for them, and these are some of the illuminating responses I recall:

Company, companionship;

Humility – I feel both significant and insignificant at the same time;

A sense of the changing seasons;

A place for meditation, for a meditative kind of working;

A windy place;

A healing place - it's a place that takes care of you and there's something about the shape of the land that wraps itself around you. Magic!

"Spring oak green" should replace "olive green" as the name of that wonderful colour.

We were also asked to think about sounds on the field; some responses were: "traffic," "wind," "buzzards," "swallows and house martens," "woodpeckers," "song-birds in spring."

After that we dispersed as we went to look for "something that specially appeals, or that you haven't seen before." This quest was a fascinating process, both the searching and the sharing with each other and learning about what we had found. Some examples were: spindle berries, bright pink; caterpillar of a moth; madder and common speedwell; leaves to scrunch as much as look at; rabbit poo; large earthworm; mushroom.

If there had been more time we would have tried to find a "smallest thing" and also to examine our favourite square metre.

However there had to be a finale with music – of a very special kind!

Nigel had brought with him some wonderful recordings of music played on 13 flutes, each made from the wood of a different native tree. And so the afternoon ended with oak-flute music heard under the branches of our own largest oak in our eastern hedge.

Thank you first to Nigel, also to Andy and David for the conversation beforehand with Nigel and myself. And a heartfelt thanks to all who took part and made it a day to remember.

Margaret



## Willow Day 13th December 2014

Our willow is growing vigorously. In March 2012 we planted a selection of different varieties to the north of the small poly tunnel. This is our “bank” from which we have taken cuttings and grown more willow in an area in the orchard.

Willow can be used for structures - such as fences or plant supports - for weaving baskets, and also as a wind break - as we have used it to the west of our growing area.

On Saturday 13 December; a lovely sunny day, Deggie Belton, a local willow expert, who has planted a lot of willow at West Town Farm, came to advise us about pruning, sorting and storing our willow. We pruned the willow down to the base, sorted it by size and Deggie showed us how to tie our bundles with a secure and rather beautiful knot using thin lengths of willow.

We have extended the willow bed in the orchard and Chrissy has seeded yellow rattle, a wildflower, around the new section as an experiment to see if it suppresses encroaching grasses.

Working with the willow has made me aware of all the different and vibrant colours it comes in, purple, rusty red, lime green ... a really beautiful material.

The harvested willow is now drying in the shed. Willow needs to dry out and shrink a bit - for at least 6 weeks – before it can be worked. We are hoping that Deggie will run a basket weaving workshop for us at the field sometime in the spring.



*Thank you to Lucy for organising this really enjoyable and productive day.*

Lana

## Poly Tunnel News

### A brief history

At the inception of the field it was proposed that there be three poly tunnels. One where we have one now, and a further two alongside. Accordingly planning permission was applied for and obtained(2011). It soon became apparent to the members at that time, that the proposed additional tunnels would mar the lovely view from the Hut towards Shillingford St. George. When I joined EGC, one of the first things I became involved with was helping David Mezzeti, to put in a new planning application to resite proposed the poly tunnels along the North hedge line. Planning was approved Jan 2014. A period of contemplation followed.

Fast forward to October, when in Bloom stated their wish to a poly tunnel up and functioning this Winter. After discussion it was agreed that it would be more economic to buy and erect both tunnels at the same time. A spur to this decision was that we could not continue growing tomatos in the current tunnel. A slight hurdle to be overcome was the empty piggy bank, we had no funds! Funding was resolved by several members offering an interest free loan over 5 years.

The materials duly arrived after various false alarms at the road side gate at 3pm at the end of November. Due to heroic efforts by Jenny, Nicola and others we were able to transport the 1100kgs of materials across the field without bothering our normal ever obliging, and cheerful tractor driver Mike.

Over a weekend with the aid of a hired digger all 36 foundation pits were dug. Actually setting the foundation post & plates, required considerably more labour, in very muddy ground.

As of now all of the metal frames are up and work continues with the doors, frames and rails. Deadline for completion is February, but with luck we will be finished with the construction before then.

This poly tunnel will more than double our protected growing area, extending our growing season and the variety of crops we can produce. Initially, in order to repay funders, some of these crops will have to be sold.



*Thanks to Richard for some photos documenting the new poly tunnel preparations this Winter!*

## Water update

The pond is filling well, assisted by generous contributions from above.

Unfortunately in September we discovered two drowned animals in the pond, so it is now covered with a fine mesh net, to prevent

such a thing occurring again. Thanks to In Bloom for donating the netting material and a considerable part of the labour to get this done.



Late pond news.

Frost has caused the poly pipe joint on the stand pipe to separate, and in the subsequent thaw, we have lost a considerable amount of water. We will have to take steps to avoid this in the future.

Jake

## EGC Calendar

This Winter we produced the first EGC calendar to raise funds for the EGC and to also highlight the beauty of this place. This was a bit of an impromptu idea and so a little test run. The photos taken featured the field and were by our arty-eyed members. Handily my brother works for a company with a printing press so very kindly printed them for us at cost price. We printed fifty in the end and think they're almost all sold! We're hoping that we'll repeat the idea next year with more photos from friends and members so keep your eyes peeled and your camera handy for any magnificent monthly shots! Huge thanks to all who contributed photos; it was very tricky to choose! And many thanks to Liz H. for all your help and time co-organising/sorting etc.!

Vicky

### ***Final note...***

As a relatively new member after reading all these articles and missing being up on the field- has been a while for me, it puts me in mind of a quote I read in a book recently advocating the need for us all to be outside. I like it so thought I would share it!

"People think of the mind as being located in the head, but the latest findings in physiology suggest that the mind doesn't really dwell in the brain but travels the whole body on caravans of enzyme, busily making sense of the compound wonders we catalogue as touch, taste, smell, hearing, vision" (Diane Ackerman, 1990, "A Natural History of the Senses")

... And what a great place the field is to explore those senses!

All the best to all,

Vicky

### ***A final final note...***

The more observant amongst our readers will have noticed the Winter Solstice has been and gone for over a month. The lateness of publication is entirely due to me (Jake Neal), and so I offer my apologies to all, especially those who worked hard to meet the deadline.

Jake