Dunchurch Allotments



By Paul Sanders

Allotment holders visiting their plot in late February would have noted the activity of soil excavators in the farmers field to the east of the site. The permanent pasture meadow normally reserved for sheep and hay production had been turned into a series of strip trenches set about randomly all across the ground. With a width of about 6ft and length of around 100ft, the curious excavations could be imagined as trial scrapes by an apprentice learning the ropes on his first backhoe machine. That is until you get up close and notice the precision, depth and differentiated character of the soil making up the numerous heaps. What is happening here is the pre-planning archeological investigation and survey which has to be carried out on land prior to development. Geophysical survey and trial trenching are the most common forms of survey for buried archaeological remains. If allotment holders were hopeful of an iron-age settlement, they were sadly disappointed. The archaeologist reported no significant finds.



Archeological trench

From a gardener's point of view, it was interesting to see the soil profile as it changed from a thin layer of dark organic rich earth to a sandy and stony subsoil. It is reasonable to surmise that the profile of the soil on the allotment gardens is similar, leading to the relatively free-draining terrain that we experience.

The Allotment Association's commemorative orchard has been in existence for around eight years with almost all trees having borne fruit. A couple of years ago the variety called Coul Blush snapped at the graft due to the weight of fruit on this young tree. This was replaced this winter along with another variety which was failing to thrive. The trees are almost all heritage varieties and many date back hundreds of years, for example, Bon Chrétien pears were known by the Romans, and in the 16th century were con-


Commemorative orchard

sidered 'the best pear of all'. A number of varieties were lost to the UK over the centuries and had to be sourced from places like the United States where they had been taken centuries earlier. The origin of some other varieties are from 'Wildings', a discarded core or dropped apple results in a tree with quality fruit. The provenance of our apple tree Nancy Lee was a hedgerow outside Blewbury on the edge of the ancient Woodway Road that leads to the Berkshire Downs.

With a bumper harvest in 2022 and a very cold winter, we await with interest the impact on the quantity and quality of fruit this season.



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