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CHAS'S ROCK'N' ROLL ALLOTMENT



Picture: LUKE SANTILLI

FIRST off, believe it or not, I am going to open with the subject of slugs! Strange things are happening on my allotment. I removed the dead-slug-filled beer tub I told you about last week and decided to bury the contents. These slugs, by the way, were mostly 3in long and 1in wide. On a bare piece of unsown ground, I dug a spadeful out, tipped in the dead sozzled slugs and put the spadeful back, burying the bodies. Raking it over reasonably neat, I did a few allotment jobs and then went home. Next day on the way to inspecting the newly-filled beer tub, I passed by the slug grave. The grave had been dug up leaving just a bare hole! No sign of any dead, sozzled slugs. The hole was as clean as a whistle.

'What found my beer-pickled slugs delicious?'

What animal or thing did this? I am completely stumped. Obviously the smell attracted it in the first place. Pickled slugs in beer. Something had found this delicious.

Actually, I did have a sniff before I buried it. It didn't smell all that rotten like I expected, it was... well... it didn't actually stink. Well, I never thought so. Anyway, the hole it left was of pure clean dark brown soil and nothing else.

Whatever it was had eaten everything I had buried. Every morsel. I was on my own on the allotment that day and I don't mind admitting I felt slightly uneasy. I turned a full circle, peering. But I saw nothing. What can it be that likes the taste of beery slugs?

All my leeks are now in, 60 plants in trenches. Seven or eight inches tall now, I grew these from seed in a box. Before planting out, when knitting needle size. I reduced the roots by half and the tops by a third, dibbed a hole and just watered them in, giving them a little cuddle within the earth to

guide them upright. I'll earth 'em up as they grow.

So all being well, some nice leeks to look forward to in the winter. Doing things like this get you looking forward to winter. Like firing up the woodburning stove. Doing toast on it. Must be done! No toast like it.

All our seasons have major attractions. I have travelled a bit in my time and some countries' climates can be a bit samey but not ours. We sure get a bit of everything. Like our seasonal food. We should not eat out-of-season vegetables.

Brussels and leeks and parsnips are winter veg. Veg you look forward to when winter begins. (OK, you Brussels haters, button it!) You can get imported out-of-season vegetables but you

will lose that excitement of anticipating what each season brings if you ain't careful. Fruit too. Imported cherries in winter? No good. Ain't a patch on Kent cherries. Wait! They are worth waiting for.

But it ain't only our stuff. Israeli pomegranates come around in October. When I was a kid, it was the first thing I thought of come October. You can get pomegranates all year round now but most of 'em are pony. My onion sets are all ripened off. I wait until the tops lose all their greenery before I pull them. Then I lay them down on the ground, roots facing south for a few days, then bunch 'em up to store in the shed.

Bit disappointing this year although everybody is saying the

same. Not a good year for onions. Not as good as last year, but they should store OK.

Don't know if my mate on my old allotment has grown any this year. I ain't seen him for a while. He stopped growing 'em some time ago when he said to me, with a bit of a sad look in his eye, that his wife reckoned his onions ain't big enough. Well! What a horrible thing for a wife to say to a husband.

● *Chas & Dave: All About Us by Chas Hodges is out now (John Blake, £7.99). Forthcoming Chas & Dave gigs: Shanklin Theatre Isle of Wight, August 15; Princess Theatre Clacton, August 23; Orchard Dartford, September 6. An Audience With Chas Hodges, October 26, Corringham Hall*



Did you know? by Mitchell Symons

FIRST WORLD WAR PONDERABLES...

The heavy use of artillery at Verdun scattered the battlefield with so many mangled bodies that French troops called it the "Verdun meat-grinder"

In Britain during the war it was considered patriotic to kick dachshunds

What became the remote control was developed during the First World War by the German army. **On average, approximately 230 soldiers were killed for every hour of the First World War** Fourteen million people were killed, six million fewer than the number who died in the 'flu epidemic immediately afterwards

During the war, Britons could be fined for feeding pigeons

The years prior to the Great War were particularly unsettled and dangerous. More leaders, politicians and members of noble or royal families were assassinated in the first 14 years of the 20th century than in the previous 150 years

As the need for soldiers increased, the British Army lowered its enlistment standards and formed 'bantam units'; regiments composed of men who fell short of the army's minimum height requirement of 5ft 3ins. Some 'bantam soldiers' were as short as 4ft 10ins

More than 1.2 million horses and 50,000 dogs were killed on the Western Front.

A baboon named Jackie served in the South African army on the Western Front. Initially a mascot, Jackie was later given messenger and watch duties, as well as his own uniform, paybook and rations. Jackie's right leg was amputated after a shell blast in 1918. He was later promoted to corporal and was even given a medal for bravery. The first dog to become a Hollywood star, Rin Tin Tin, pictured, was found in a trench in France shortly before the end of the war. The German Shepherd puppy was adopted by an American serviceman and returned to the US where he starred in more than 20 films during the 1920s



At dawn on November 11, 1918, the armistice was signed. Almost 900 British and Empire soldiers were killed in the six hours between the signing and the ceasefire

The greatest single loss of life in the history of the British army occurred during the Battle of the Somme when the British suffered 60,000 casualties in one day. More British men were killed in that one battle than the US lost in the whole war

The trench network of the Western Front stretched approximately 25,000 miles from the English Channel to Switzerland. German trenches were built to last, they included bunk beds, water tanks and even doorbells

A survey of post-war Britain found 34 "thankful villages", towns or villages whose fighting men had all returned from the war

THIS WEEK'S IMPONDERABLE...

Who first described the First World War as "the war to end all wars"?

It was HG Wells who, in 1914, wrote a series of newspaper articles critical of Germany and its allies. These were later published as a collection in a book titled The War That Will End War. In its slightly altered form (the war to end war) this became one of the great catchphrases of the war. However, not everyone was as idealistic and hopeful as Wells and it was David Lloyd George, Britain's prime minister during the War, who said: "This war, like the next war, is a war to end war."

WISE WORDS ON WAR...

War does not determine who is right, only who is left (Bertrand Russell)

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"You cannot improve on perfection"
"All the staff are lovely and we love coming here"
"Excellent food"
"Each day a pleasure to come back to my room, beautiful and clean and fresh"

So many things to do, so to help you plan your holiday we can send you a copy of our 'Things to do and see during your stay'.



"I quite forgot in all this haste!" And Rupert pulls it from his waist.

Rupert

And The Blue Star
EPISODE 40

Sailor Sam stares at the little bear. "What d'you mean?" he demands. "How do you know? If Black Pedro hasn't got the ancient paper, where is it?" "It's here!" laughs Rupert. "I've got it myself! When I first heard Pedro coming I was scared I didn't know where to hide the paper, so I stuffed it in the only place I could think of. See, here it is!" And from under his jersey he pulls the precious, faded sheet. Sam seizes it and for some moments he cannot say a word.



Sam seizes it in disbelief. Then gazes, speechless with relief.

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