

# THE PLOTHOLDER

ROYAL PADDOCKS ALLOTMENTS NEWSLETTER No.17 – MARCH 2004

Spring's round the corner, and for the first time in years the Paddocks has no vacant plots. In fact we have a waiting list of people eager to sink a spade into the soil. First inspection of the year showed a lot of good winter clearing being done by our new tenants (almost 50 of them), and a better look to the site all round. Allotments are definitely a 'must-have' again – but why on earth did they ever fall out of fashion?

**Talking of fashion**, it can be very intriguing, when we meet at the AGM, trying to recognise one another in non-gardening clothes, the mud washed off, the tan faded, the sun hat hung up for the winter, the kneelers unbuckled from the knees. Last November's annual meeting of Plottolders was a happy occasion, with a lot of progress to report, people to thank, a display of tenants' photographs as a record of the season, and star gardeners to receive prizes. Well attended too, thanks, maybe, to Alan Drake's letter in our last issue.

**Prizes were awarded** by past chairman Mike Veysey, and the full list of winners was displayed on the shed. All deserve warm congratulations, but special mention must go to newcomers Polly and Emma Moore (1f), and Jessica Kazimierczak and Sonia Exell (129). Both plots were impressively cleared and planted in a short time – 129 had crops growing within seven weeks. Of established tenants, Jenny Bourne and Jem Negus (27f) had a very attractive display of flowers and vegetables, and the three full plot winners, Chris Loughton (7), Hans van der Meulen (89), and Barbara Wood, who won the cup for 183, attained a very high standard indeed.

*Summer show? Years ago, the Paddocks had a flower and vegetable show, and Jessica K suggests we might have a little contest once again – what do you think?*

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**PLOTHOLDERS' COMMITTEE 2004** The committee were very sorry to say goodbye to Roy Bennett, who has had to step down as chairman because of ill health. Susan Saunders has taken over as chairman, and is replaced by Jo Nicholds and Christine Thorpe as joint secretaries. The full committee list is on display, and we welcome a new member, Ashley Catto (plots A and H). Ashley won Best Newcomer in 2002, and is a good source of advice on dealing with bramble and couch grass!

**THANKS**, once again, to George Harmsworth and Bill Jones for maintaining the pumps, our essential water supply; to Joe Sell for all his patient work with the power tools, to Joe and to George Loosemore for a lot of general tidying up, to Barbara Wood for much painstaking work on the boundaries, to Matt Allchurch for hours of professional architectural work given for nothing, to members of both committees for equipment repairs, rubbish removal and much more. The chairman especially thanks everyone who says Yes, when asked to do something. You know who you are!

**WILDLIFE.** Why, if all the plots are let, are there still bramble clumps on the south side? Biodiversity is the answer. It's now generally

recognised that the wild creatures with whom we share our growing space can help us keep a balance of healthy crops, as well as being themselves beautiful and interesting. Birds and insects may compete with us for a share of our produce, but they can also help to clean our crops of pests. And if we had some hedgehogs, we might have fewer slugs.

Many of the plots bordering the Avenue were for long unlet, and became a valuable refuge for birds, mammals and other creatures, as well as providing an excellent blackberry supply. Now the whole stretch is let, apart from two areas which the Committee will be conserving for wildlife.

**It would be good to collect some data** on what birds, mammals, insects, wild plants or fungi we have on site. Keith Birch (plots 91 and 92) is knowledgeable about birds, and will be glad to hear of any sightings you've made. He has also joined the Special Interest Group on Wildlife set up by the Bushy Park Restoration Project. If you have expertise in any wildlife topic, please share your observations, and maybe write a piece for the next issue of the Plottolder. For more information on the subject, look at [www.rhs.org.uk/biodiversity](http://www.rhs.org.uk/biodiversity) if you have internet access.

**WE WELCOME** new tenants Tracy Dunkley (9), Tessa Lash (15b), Tracey Holloway (30), Ged Burnett (36f), Ann Walls (44b), Leah McClimans and John Browne (79), Matt Bassford (118), Louise Clark and Jim Kay (119b), Gaby Armstrong and family (123), Joan Fulton and Michelle Kent (124), Patty Lloyd (138b), Jeff Doble (140f), Peter Scott (150), Melanie Laurence (163), Clive Scoggins (169b), Kerry McMillan (175b), Lisa Pendreigh (186f), Sue and Robin Hoar (187b).

A few tenants have had to give up – among them we say **goodbye** to Celia Melia, whose back has let her down. Her friend Beverley continues to work 94 and 95.

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### **FIRST AID JOTTINGS - from Russ Knight**

*Without wishing to tempt Providence, it has thankfully been very uneventful on the first aid front. A few minor sprains and grazes, and a nasty cut (from the incinerator door) needing attention at Teddington Hospital were the sum total of casualties.*

*I hope this happy state of affairs at the Royal Paddocks remains but before we all wallow in complacency, it is well to remind ourselves that gardening can be a hazardous pastime and some degree of thought is needed.*

*Let us remember a few simple points:*

*(i) Injuries to hands and feet are very common so protect with appropriate gear, i.e. gloves and solid footwear.*

*(ii) Goggles are a must when using power tools, e.g. strimmer.*

*(iii) Keep tetanus jabs up to date (they last 10 years).*

*(iv) Plasters and a bottle of water should be part of everyone's gardening equipment.*

*Keep safe and healthy! Russ Knight, Plot 82*

*We continue to be very grateful for Russ's prompt help and expertise, and for obtaining the First Aid kit, available when needed in the shed by the gate. Ed.*

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**ROAD SAFETY** around the entrance gates has been a worry for some time, because of the very poor visibility when driving out, or even crossing the road on foot. Following a visit in December from Paul Tugwell of the Transport Planning department of LBRuT, we have now had the welcome news of improved warning signs to be placed in Church Grove and Park Road, together with 'at any time' waiting restrictions for 10m right and left of the gates.

The work is due to be completed by mid-April. Our request for a mirror opposite to help those driving out has been refused: they are no longer installed, being vulnerable to vandalism.

However, the waiting restriction, especially to the right, will mean the view in that direction is less obstructed on Sundays. A diagram on the shed shows the details.

### **BUSHY PARK RESTORATION PROJECT**

As stakeholders, the Royal Paddocks tenants have been invited to briefings and opinion-gathering sessions, and we joined two special-interest groups, Wildlife and Education. We don't know yet how the project will affect semi-public areas of the park like ours, but we need to be part of the process, and we'll keep tenants informed of any developments and public meetings.

Catherine Mukhopadhyay, who is one of our tenants, is the project's new Education and Community Officer.

**ONION WHITE ROT** If your plot is affected by this, remember it can be spread on shoes. Try to keep to the main paths, and ideally keep a separate pair of shoes for working the affected ground

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### **SPRING SOCIAL AND OPEN DAY SUNDAY 2 MAY 2004**

*We held our first Open Day, with considerable trepidation, back in June 2000. We had 30 vacant plots, and were very keen to advertise this wonderful resource – the secret garden on the doorstep which so many seemed unaware of. This year we're unlikely to have any vacancies – but we want an occasion when all our new tenants can meet one another, as well as the 'old hands', over lunch and a glass of something. We'd like to have activities for younger members too, and we'll be contacting those of you with children in the next few weeks. It can still be an Open Day: bring your families and friends, some food to share, and maybe seedlings to exchange. The Committee will provide the drinks and the barbecue, and we'll all hope for May sunshine. Watch for posters with more details.*

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ANGIE BARKER and Richard Eastburn-Hewitt joined us in June '02, after the Open Day. They took on plot 123, when the land along the Avenue was pretty much unclaimed land, and made gallant progress, through bramble and some pretty rough weather. For a while 123, with its frog pond and archway, began to look rather gracious. But Angie fell ill, and for much of the next summer Richard looked after her. She got back to gardening with the help of a motorised buggy, funded by the Musicians Benevolent Fund - Angie was a dedicated jazz player, and founded the Richmond Jazz Forum during the '90s.

We were very sad to hear from Richard of Angie's sudden death on 4 January. She was buried with a simple ceremony, in a woodland burial ground near Rugby, and a black poplar planted on her grave. When the burial ground is full it will be handed over to a wildlife trust, something which would have been close to Angie's heart. Richard and Angie took a lively part in the life of the Paddocks during their short stay, and also contributed to The Plotholder: Richard's alias was Spademan, and Angie added to the woodlouse glossary. Their well-equipped toolbox was left on their plot, and generously donated by Richard towards our funds. Richard and the Jazz Forum have planned an Angela Barker Memorial Concert to raise money for the Musicians Benevolent Fund.

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**CUCURBITAE** (courgettes, marrows, cucumbers, squash) **FLOURISH** in the hot summers we seem to have now, as long as they're in soil enriched with plenty of organic material, and kept well watered. Their trailing habit and large leaves make them very good weed suppressants, but they can also be grown over netting if space is short. More and more kinds appeared in the Paddocks last summer - Boula had a Chinese variety, and there were some extremely large pumpkins (Wally and Annemarie needed help getting one into their car - maybe they should have contacted Cinderella).

If you haven't tried squash, here's a recipe from *Christine Thorpe* (plot 49)

#### **ROASTED SQUASH WITH HERBS**

You will need: 1kg squash (Butternut, Delicate or Onion), 2 garlic cloves, ¼ teaspoon dried chilli, 1 teaspoon fennel seeds, 1 tablespoon dried oregano, 1 teaspoon thyme leaves, some extra virgin olive oil.

Preheat oven to 200C, Gas 6. Peel the squash and cut in half lengthways. For Butternut, remove the seeds and then cut each half into quarters. For Delicate, remove seeds and cut halves in half; for Onion, cut into eighths. Peel and chop garlic, crumble chili and crush fennel seeds, and put these all into a large bowl. Add the squash, olive oil, oregano and thyme, and turn gently to coat the squash pieces with oil and seasonings.

Spread the pieces on an oven tray and bake for 20 minutes; turn them over and bake for a further 10 minutes, or until cooked and lightly brown.

*Christine adds: You can vary the herbs according to what's available - chopped rosemary works well. Any leftovers make an excellent, velvety soup, with softened onion and stock, and a spot of curry powder or spices.*

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AS THE WEATHER WARMS UP more people will want to borrow the machinery (strimmer, mowers and rotovator). For safety, the fuel cans are now kept separately. Ask Joe Sell (plot 66) if you need to fill up. He can also advise you about how to use the machines, though you are responsible for your own competence to handle them safely.

Our insurance is a Public Liability policy, not Accident insurance, so every tenant needs to be aware of the safety issues before borrowing any equipment. Anything borrowed must also be signed in and out, so that we know where it is, and so that faults can be reported. **Included with this newsletter is an Equipment Loan form. If you think you will want to borrow the machinery, and haven't yet filled in a form, please do so and return it to the Clerk via the mailbox in the shed by the gate, so that we can hold it on record.**

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HAVE YOU GOT A SECRET TALENT? Our site is maintained and run by volunteers, and some of them have been very talented indeed. But time moves on. Is there anyone reading this who knows something about bricklaying, carpentry, machinery maintenance, or similar practical skills, and could spare a bit of time? It would be good to have a register of skills, so that jobs could be spread further, and no-one is asked to do more than they can manage.

6100

**PROSPECT AND REFUGE**, suggests Simon Schama in his monumental work 'Landscape and Memory', are two essential features of a landscape pleasing to the human psyche. That is, we feel most at home (no doubt for evolutionary reasons) in a landscape of which we have a good clear view from a place of shelter – whether it be a folly, a summer house, the kitchen window - or a garden shed.

8215

120

357

One of the unique features of our site has been that sheds were not permitted in our lease. The document signed by King George V stated that 'no building or structure of any description shall be erected on any allotment', no doubt to prevent problems with squatters. An exception was made in the case of the first shed by the gate: after negotiation, Hampton Court Palace, which supervised the Paddocks in those days, agreed to allow shelter for the Hon. Clerk to use when he collected the rents (presumably before permission had been given for use of the stable buildings). In the days before ballpoint pens, shelter from the rain while writing receipts was essential!

The 'shed ban' has meant that the rotting structures common on some other sites has not been a problem for us. But the hunger for refuge saw the construction of a number of somewhat oversized 'toolboxes', some partly subterranean, which would permit the dedicated tenant to have some shelter from the weather, even if in a crouching position.

It was difficult to apply this rule fairly, and it seemed time to get an official interpretation of its intention. We have now been granted permission to put sheds on individual plots, provided they conform to the Crown ruling on construction, size and colour.

None of us wants the site to end up looking like a shanty town, so the whole question was debated at the AGM, and a vote taken. A majority (not a large one) voted in favour of sheds, subject to certain controls, including the conditions laid down by the Crown.

**THE RUBBISH PROBLEM** One of the main expenses of the site has been the cost of removing rubbish, usually stuff left behind by departing tenants, some of it quite large, and sometimes hazardous. What we don't want is to find, some years on, that sheds are abandoned, or not properly maintained by someone who has taken them over, and that

the committee are left to deal with them. A number of people were also concerned that a neighbour's shed might block the light or cause an obstruction.

**IF YOU WANT A SHED, THIS IS WHAT TO DO**

- ask at the office, or phone the chairman, for a copy of the Shed Regulations.
- apply to the Committee for planning permission, and they will contact tenants on either side of your plot to make sure everyone is in agreement as to the siting.
- pay a £20 returnable deposit to the Committee for each shed. This will be repaid to whoever finally removes the shed.

If you put a shed up, and then find you have to leave, you can choose between taking the shed away and having £20 back;

selling your shed, and the £20 interest, to someone else;

or leaving the shed, and the £20, to the committee, who will deal with it as seems best at the time.

We hope these conditions will deal with the caveats raised at the AGM.

**DISCOUNT POSSIBLE** Sheds can be a pretty expensive item, and we're investigating the possibility of a deal with a local supplier who might agree a price reduction.

Full conditions regarding sheds are posted on the forerunner, the Shed by the Gate, and are also available from the office, or from the editor.

Finally, if you have internet access, check out [www.transglobal-emporium.com](http://www.transglobal-emporium.com) for details of the Luxury Shed Calendar (but don't get any ideas).

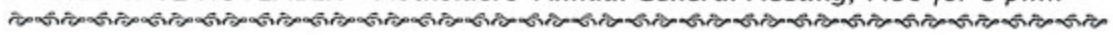


**FOR YOUR DIARY**

*Next Plot inspections in early April*

*SUNDAY 2 MAY - Spring Social and Open Day - watch notice board for details*

*FRIDAY 12 NOVEMBER - Plottolders' Annual General Meeting, 7.30 for 8 p.m.*



**HOW TO CONTACT US** You can leave mail for the Committee (but not money), in the postbox by the gate.

Contact the editor on 8977 4675, [susan.saunders@fish.co.uk](mailto:susan.saunders@fish.co.uk). Our Website address is [www.paddocks-allotments.org.uk/](http://www.paddocks-allotments.org.uk/)

We welcome contributions to The Plotholder.