

# THE PLOTHOLDER

*ROYAL PADDOCKS ALLOTMENTS NEWSLETTER No 6 - February 2000*

After a mild winter and what seems like an early spring, new growth is already starting in the allotments, and our new Chairman, Roy Bennett, writes:

Congratulations to the Lochers, winners of last year's Best Kept Plot contest, to Hans van der Meulen and Bill Jones, second and third, and to Tony Walker, winner of the Half-Plot prize. Fifty-one tenants came to November's AGM, and we have 151 tenants at the time of writing, of whom over a third have offered various kinds of help with running the site. This is a very positive beginning to the year 2000.

Our first objective now must be **finding tenants** for our fifty-plus unoccupied plots. These not only represent a loss of rent, but also seriously detract from the look of the site. This is particularly true of those bordering the Avenue, the part most visible to the public, and more importantly to the Park authorities, who are responsible for the annual renewal of our licence to occupy the site.

Attracting new tenants means **advertising**, which we are doing as widely as we can, following suggestions made at the AGM. Word of mouth is best of all, so spread the word among your neighbours. We must also make sure that the site is **user-friendly**, that we support newcomers, and that vacant plots are not so overgrown that they discourage new gardeners. The Plottolders' Committee has divided the site into **areas**, each with a co-ordinator responsible for regular **plot inspections**, and for receiving tenants' queries and comments. A postbox is being put in the door of the shed by the gate to help communication with the committee. **Regular maintenance** of common and unlet ground is being co-ordinated by Mike Veyesy and Russ Knight, who will contact all those who volunteered to help.

You can check your area and co-ordinator by looking at the site map on the shed by the gate. First inspection of the year takes place this month. If you are having difficulty keeping your cultivation going for any reason, let us know - we may be able to help. **Don't let things get out of control.** I hope this will be the beginning of a successful year's gardening for each of us, and look forward to seeing many of you at the Spring Social on 9 April.

**Roy Bennett, Plottolders' Committee Chairman**

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**Meet your neighbours at a SPRING SOCIAL on Sunday 9 April 2000  
between 11.30a.m. and 2p.m. outside the Seed Store. Watch for posters  
and book the date now for drinks, food, plant swaps and neighbourly chat.**

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## SOME INTRODUCTIONS

The new Plottolders' Committee has had two busy meetings since November's AGM. But who are they? Longstanding members Mike Veysey, Fred Adams, Stan Bastion and George Harmsworth need no introduction - they've kept things running for many years, and are familiar faces on site. **Roy Bennett**, the new Chairman, joined the committee in May '98, at the EGM called when the Paddocks seemed to be under threat. Roy has had his plot for 13 years, and prefers to grow organically, though (like many of us) still uses the occasional slug pellet.

**Helga Foss** has been gardening at Paddocks for 8 years - a farmer's daughter, she did some energetic bramble clearance before she could start cultivating her plot, and is now having success with lavender, globe artichokes, and purple-skinned Roseval potatoes. Since joining the Committee last year, Helga and team run our socials. 'We must support newcomers, with all the encouragement we can muster.'

**Gill Hiley** has had her plot for 20 years, and is a dedicated organic gardener, not looking for big yields, but absolutely fresh food without chemical use. Gill, on the Committee since '98, is responsible for publicity, and our attractive posters. She wants more new tenants, to make this a thriving, fully-cultivated area. **Susan Saunders**, with her husband, has had her plot since '72, and has been the main gardener for the past 9 years. She is committee secretary, edits the newsletter, and joined the committee 2 years back, to help communication between tenants. 'So many people are getting interested in where their food comes from, and what goes into it. We must get them down here growing their own - it's good for body and soul.'

**Patricia Nicholls**, a tenant for 2 years, joined the committee last November. Last year, she was pleased with runner beans she grew from seed left behind by the previous tenant, and hopes to try Florence fennel next season. She is strongly behind the drive to tidy the site and bring untenanted areas under control.

**Christine Thorpe** was a new tenant last year. Another who is interested in organic cultivation, she has done well with winter salads like mizuna, rocket and winter radishes, and plans to try out unusual or forgotten vegetables. She hopes we can encourage a spirit of friendliness and mutual support among plottolders, which should result in more lettings and better cultivation. **Russ Knight** is an 'old-timer', who already cultivates an interesting crop, the Carlin pea, which he wrote up in an earlier newsletter. He's recently been co-opted to the Committee, and is an expert with the mower and strimmer, having helped with site maintenance for years.

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**COMMITTEE BUSINESS IN BRIEF:** No plots will be let to beekeepers, following strong representations made to the committee. ~~~~~ A non-returnable single payment of £20 is now being charged to each new tenant, as their contribution towards the cost of running the site. ~~~~~ Each new letting now comes with a New Tenant's Pack, containing site map, rules, list of committee members and a welcome letter. 'Old' tenants can also have one on payment of 50p to the Millennium Fund. Let us know how the pack can be improved. ~~~~~ The committee is looking into the question of professional repairs to the buildings. ~~~~~ Insuring tenants to use the mower and strimmer would cost several hundred pounds a year, so we use them at our own risk - normal practice in these cases, says the adviser at the RHS Affiliated Societies department. Training will be given to anyone wanting it. Our Public Liability Insurance, arranged by the RHS, covers non-tenants only. ~~~~~





## THANK YOU, DEREK!

On a bright frosty morning just before Christmas, about 25 tenants gathered outside the Seed Store, to enjoy the last drinks on site of the last Millennium, and to make a presentation to our retiring Honorary Clerk.

Derek Shail, in office since 1983, had vowed to take Paddocks into the next century, and so he has, handing over on 31 January this year. For 16 years he has served the Management Committee - has almost *been* the Management Committee - keeping in order our many independently-minded tenants during that time. But he has been gardening in the Paddocks for much longer - it's over 30 years since he took over his father's plot, and he's lived in Hampton Wick all his life. Not many people know, maybe, that the clock on St John's Church, by which gardeners without watches tell the time, is kept wound and chiming by Derek.

His particular interest, horticulturally speaking, is chrysanthemum growing, says his cousin. *We give Derek our grateful thanks for all his faithful years of service, and wish him luck in next year's Best Kept Plot contest, now that he has a bit more spare time!*

The Management Committee is responsible for lettings, rent collection and liaison with outside bodies. Derek is being replaced by two people - Susan Saunders, the new clerk, will handle the secretarial side, and Helga Foss is now the treasurer. The other members are George Harmsworth (chairman), Mike Veysey, Roy Bennett, and six Councillors.



..... **and thank you to Fred Adams,** our gatekeeper for many years, who morning and night has locked and unlocked the padlock on the main gates. Now well into his eighties, he's retired after a spell in hospital, and the Plotholders' Committee, on behalf of us all, has given him some garden tokens in recognition of his work. Fred was also our contact for manure deliveries from the stables - Mike Veysey is now the man to see.

*Fred is irreplaceable, which means we are all responsible now for the security of the site. PLEASE, CLOSE, LOCK AND BOLT ALL GATES BEHIND YOU, AND IF YOU FIND THEM OPEN, CLOSE THEM. The only exceptions to this rule are Saturday and Sunday mornings, when the gates are left open for deliveries.*

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*A number of you said you enjoyed Sarah Onion's diary extracts. In our last issue, her early sown broad beans were taking their chances in a frosty January. Last February, she was collecting free dung in the park, dividing rhubarb, sowing a mix of non-hearting continental lettuces, discussing the mares' tail problem with Fred, making a 'Chinese takeaway' bird scarer, and dressing the broad beans (yes, they were still alive in February) with bonfire ash. How did her crops fare later in the year? Another instalment in the next Newsletter. And yes, it is her real name . . .*

How do the Cup Winners do it? Wally and Annemarie Locher share some of their gardening tips with us.

### **THE LOCHER'S GARDENING YEAR - early spring**

**Mrs A Locher** is the name on the silver cup awarded for Best Kept Plot last year - but as Annemarie said when she accepted her prize, management of winning plot 57 is very much a joint enterprise. She and husband Wally have been growing vegetables in the Paddocks since the 80's, after some years on a Twickenham site. They like our easily-workable soil, and value the protection from vandalism the locked gate gives us.

The Lochers are both Swiss, and so are some of their gardening methods. They used the bed system from the start, so as not to compact the soil, and they were early users of horticultural fleece. They prefer to garden without chemicals, apart from minimal use of slug pellets. Some years back they began keeping careful records for each bed, noting when manure was applied and what crops were grown. This methodical approach, together with very regular attention to their three plots, has meant five commendations during the last five years, before last year's outright win.

They're pretty well self-sufficient in vegetables, and at the time of writing (late January) are still picking carrots, beetroot and celeriac (protected by straw), leeks, sprouts, cabbage, corn salad and sugarloaf lettuce. Garlic and Japanese onion sets from the Seed Store were planted last autumn, and are showing now, as are the broad beans put in at the end of November.

**Main work at this time of year is clearing up and applying manure** to the chosen beds for the next growing season. The Lochers use carpet strips on paths between the beds - these keep the weeds down, and it's also easy to pick off the slugs which will be hiding under them later on. The first crops will be sown in February, in a frost-free greenhouse - broad beans in pots, to compare with the autumn sowing in the ground, and onion seed, which Annemarie sows in blocks of 5 or 6 seeds. The seedlings are also planted out in a cluster, which she finds gives more bulbs of a reasonable size for the area available. They look rather like shallots when they're growing.

They get plants to sow themselves wherever possible - corn salad comes up in many odd corners, and chard seedlings are already visible around the foot of a big plant allowed to run to seed. Any special favourites? For the past few years Wally has grown many kinds of squash, for food and decoration, and there's a cheerful display of them outside their house. These are sown at the end of April. And this year they'll certainly put in Romanesco cauliflower, a beautiful vegetable with, says Wally, a delicious nutty taste.

In the next issue, the Locher's recipe for nettle and comfrey fertiliser.

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*NEED A KNEELER FOR WEEDING? Ask Norman Simmons (plot 184) for a waterproof kneeler (ex St Mark's Church), price 50p to church funds.  
Contact Norman on 977 5194*

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To contribute to The Plotholder, contact Susan Saunders 977 4675. Letters and comments welcome.