

# THE PLOTHOLDER

ROYAL PADDOCKS ALLOTMENTS NEWSLETTER

No 9 - February 2001



## 2001 - A SPACE ODYSSEY? Arthur C. Clarke

notwithstanding, Paddocks tenants have their boots firmly on the ground, and have been getting down to work whenever the weather's been right. Luckily, we haven't experienced Waterworld either, on our side of the wall, though parts of the Park have been under. So we can get on with the spring digging. There's been fine work already by some of our new tenants.

It should be easier for would-be tenants to find us, now we are to have our details included in Richmond Council's allotments leaflet. All the council-run plots, incidentally, now cost £50/year. Mary Newing is also to build us a web site linked to Hampton-on-line.

THE PLOTHOLDERS' COMMITTEE 2001, elected at the AGM, is now eleven strong (three vacancies). We're delighted to welcome three new members. **Matthew Allchurch**, who rents plot 25 with his partner Sarah Levine, joined Paddocks last year. He started growing vegetables at age 8, he tells us, but 'took 15 years out for other interests - beer, girls and cars!' He's keen to grow organically as far as possible, and as he's an architect, will be able to advise us as we address the future of our Victorian buildings. **Martin Dawson** has worked 166f with wife Marina and now their little son, for about three years. They previously had a successful plot in Aberdeen, and they too prefer organic methods. They now plan to grow fruit on 167f. The Dawsons like the friendly atmosphere and the number of young families - what about a safe area for children? **John Greaves** (111f) a tenant since '92, is a biology lecturer who previously worked as a horticultural instructor for the Home Farm Trust. He grows flowers as well as vegetables, and is interested in the HDRA seed library. He thinks allotment gardening has an important educational role for today's children, who may have little opportunity to learn just where food comes from.

*A full list of this year's Committee, with some contact numbers, is on the shed by the gate.*



THE CLEARING BLITZ at the end of last November went brilliantly. The weather was great, and about 20 of us, including our 2 councillors, worked from mid-morning till dusk. We cleared a good stretch of brambles, fortified with hot soup and sausages. More good news - if you missed this one,

## THE NEXT BLITZ IS ON SUNDAY 4 MARCH

We aim to produce some more lettable plots, and mattock out some of the old bramble roots. JOIN US! IT'S SAVAGELY SATISFYING!



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**NEW DOUBLE GATES** are being made in the Stockyard workshop, and may already have been installed by the time this newsletter hits your doormat. The small gate, which now carries our nameplate, is being repaired too, and we thank Ray Brodie, Bushy Park Superintendent, for finding the funds for this, despite many calls on Park finances during a rough winter. The new gates will carry a second set of bolts higher up, to reduce the strain on the lower pair. As always, be careful to close and bolt all doors behind you, to prevent damage to them and keep the site secure.

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**GET WELL SOON, MIKE . . . . .** *Mike Veysey, Plotolders' Treasurer, and 'Manure Major Domo', fell on the ice while cycling to work at the end of January. He has a nasty ankle fracture, which will take some time to mend. He does a lot for us on site, and there'll be a big gap while he convalesces.*

**THANK YOU, GEORGE AND HAZEL . . .** *To mark George Harmsworth's retirement from both the Management and Plotolders' Committees, he was presented with a cheque for £100 at the November AGM. His wife Hazel, who provided tea on Sunday mornings until ill-health prevented her, received a bouquet. For more than 50 years George has served the Paddocks site, heading the team which repaired our buildings, running the Seed store and maintaining the pumps. He continues with his plots, the store and the pumps, but Hazel, sadly, now has to stay at home. Our grateful thanks to them both.*

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**WELCOME TO NEW TENANTS** Basil Arden (29f), Lucy Bird and Petula Daniels (134), Richard Hallala (100), Rosie and Robin Harper and family (40), Patrick and Susy Kingsmill (192), Ruth Krief (39b), John and Diana Loffler and family, plus visiting guinea-pig (165), Jozef and Sharon Osten (46), George Phillips (39f), Mrs M. Roche (156), and David Wasley (157).

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**CUP WINNERS** *It seems a long time since the AGM in November, when Wally and Annemarie Locher were once again declared winners of the cup for the Best Kept Plot, for the cultivation of plot 57. Hans van der Meulen (88) came second, and Margaret Patient, a relative newcomer, was third (54). Tony Walker won the only prize awarded for a half-plot (33f). Mrs Howell, Bill Jones and Frank Levingstone were highly commended. Hearty congratulations to all the winners, who grow an interesting range of vegetables and flowers.*

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**MUCK MAKES THE MAGIC** Light soil like ours is easy to work, but needs plenty of organic matter to help it hold water and nourish the crop. Manure is what's needed, and we are lucky in having deliveries from our local stables in Park Lane every Saturday morning - £15 buys the week's accumulation of straw and dung. It needs several months to rot down, but watering helps to speed up the process. Some people like to keep it covered as well, to prevent rain from washing out all the goodness. To book a delivery, ask at the office on Sunday mornings. Bookings are being taken for deliveries from April on.

**NOT ALL BAD?** Not a lot of people know that couch grass, on whose white runners we wage continual war, is actually a medicinal herb. Dorling Kindersley's Medicinal Herbal gives a recipe for tincture of couch grass which is 'mildly antibiotic and diuretic', and used to treat cystitis.]

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**RUBBISH** There should have been a rubbish collection at the beginning of February, just after Mike Veysey broke his ankle. As Mike is the one who drives the lorry, the collection had to be postponed, and other arrangements are currently being made.

Anne Jones wrote in the last issue of the Plotholder about the patio doors she discovered under the brambles on her new plot. Maybe you've discovered something even more unlikely? *Let us know - a small prize is offered for the most extraordinary find!*

Seriously, think carefully before you bring material in, and be prepared to take it away once you've finished with it. It costs us all money to have rubbish collected, and in theory at least anything non-combustible should be removed by tenants once they no longer need it. Glass is a particular hazard. In the past it has even happened that stuff has been brought in just so that someone could have it taken away for nothing, though we're sure this doesn't apply to present readers.

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**BUILDINGS** are not allowed on the Paddocks under the terms of our 1921 licence, so unlike other sites, none of us can have a shed or greenhouse. But we have two brick buildings, the Victorian stables which were on the site before it became allotments, and which are shown on the OS map of 1894. Paddocks tenants were granted the right to convert them for their use in November 1925, by Colonel Erskine, Crown Equerry, 'on the understanding that the cost of material, repairs and maintenance will be defrayed by your Society'. The expectation was that these costs would be covered by the rents, the level of which was set by the Management Committee. And any repairs were subject to supervision and approval by the Superintendent of Works at Hampton Court Palace.

Times have changed, and we no longer have the support and advice of the Palace: we do, however, still have the buildings and the bills. The one on the south side houses the office, seedstore and our equipment, plus a few lockups for tenants in the vicinity. The other, on the north side, is divided into a number of lockups, used by about 25 tenants. Both buildings have had quite major repairs carried out over the years by George Harmsworth and his team, and a contingency fund of £2,000 was built up for emergencies after a tree went through the Seedstore at the end of 1979. Because plot rents have always been so low, it was difficult to accumulate a larger sum.

Worries about the holes in the roof of the lockups were voiced at the 1999 AGM, and the committee asked the advice of Matthew Williams (plot 142), who is an architect. He prepared (at no charge to us) a schedule of basic repairs to the lockups only, which the Management Committee put out to tender to a number of builders. This resulted in quotes between £10,000 and £19,000.

So we have a serious problem. The work now needed is beyond the powers of our tenants and to pay for professionals will probably mean approaching charities for grants. As the buildings are in a conservation area, they are subject to planning consent, which presumably means we would need permission even to demolish them - were they ours. But they are not.

It was clear from discussion at the AGM last November that a good number of those present would like the rule banning sheds to be changed. If it were, it would mean that, should the lockups be demolished, some substitute storage would be allowed. Our councillors are looking into the question of whether individual sheds might be permitted (as they are on the Hampton site). But many of us would be extremely sorry to see the buildings go - they're part of the history of the site, they're pleasant to look at, and we would find it very difficult to manage without the office building, in particular. The Management Committee is to meet Mike Fitt, of the Royal Parks Agency, at the beginning of March, to discuss the whole question. The Plotholder will keep you posted.

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**ARE YOU NOW, OR HAVE YOU EVER BEEN, A USER OF THE LADIES' LAVATORY?** *If so, would you be willing to join a rota for keeping this in the condition in which we'd like to find it? One of Mike Veysey's many jobs used to be emptying the Ladies' Elsan, which seems to lack natural justice. A rota of six would mean helping out just once a year. Please contact Susan (8977 4675) with offers.*

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*Nicky Hartopp is a member of the National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens (NCCPG). You may have seen the hollyhocks growing on her plot (180). She writes about the work of the organisation:*

*'In the late 1970's there was increasing concern among gardening organisations at the many good varieties of garden plants disappearing. Old gardens with extensive and rare plant collections were running into financial difficulties and being sold for development. Nurseries were 'rationalising' their lists; Hilliers, for instance, were to cut theirs from 8,000 to 3,500 in 1982. A growing number of serious gardeners began to feel that something must be done, and in 1978 Christopher Brickell, then director of Wisley Garden, called a conference to look at the role of gardens in conserving vulnerable garden species, which were being lost at an estimated 1,000/year. This conference resulted in the formation of the NCCPG, also known as Plant Heritage.*

*One of its original recommendations was to support existing plant collections, and to form new ones. There is now a National Collection Scheme, which aims to form collections of as many species as possible, including cultivars, within a genus, to conserve as wide a gene pool as possible. Approximately 620 collections are now listed in the NCCPG's annual Directory, one local collection, of heliotropes, being at Hampton Court Palace. Another, of rhododendrons, is in the Isabella Plantation in Richmond Park. The Directory also lists plants that members are trying to trace. Over 1,300 genera have been identified for future collections, one being hollyhocks (Althaea), with 12 species and 5 cultivars. They grow pretty well on the allotments.*

*Vegetables are not represented in the NCCPG collections, partly because they are annual or biennial. It's more difficult to keep strains of named varieties pure, when they need to be sown each year, and kept apart to prevent cross-fertilisation. However, the Henry Doubleday Research Association maintains a collection of 800 varieties of heritage vegetables, grown in isolation by guardians to maintain cultivar purity, and HDRA make the seed available to members of the Heritage Seed Library. These are cultivars not otherwise available due to EU regulations on seed registration, and would have died out if people had not kept growing them from their own seed.*

*NCCPG supports a number of fruit and nut collections, many at Brogdale Horticultural Trust, and some collections of herbs. There is also a collection of 24 species of horsetail!*

*Once in a collection, a plant can be classified and researched for botanical, medicinal and horticultural properties. Plants thought to be rare can be increased. Altogether the National Collections scheme holds 12,000 species and 38,000 cultivars, more than Kew. Some plants, for example Tulipa sprengeri, are now only found in gardens, and the NCCPG plays a role in reintroducing plants to the wild.*

*About 20 collections are displayed each year in the Plant Heritage marquee at the Hampton Court Flower show, and plants are sold, often quite rare ones. There are NCCPG groups in London and Surrey (42 local groups countrywide), and Nicky can supply details of events. See also the NCCPG website: <http://www.nccpg.org.uk>*

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### PADDOCKS DIARY DATES FOR 2001

*SPRING CLEARING BLITZ - Sunday 4 March*

*Plot inspections start at end of March*

*SPRING SOCIAL - Sunday 8 April (Palm Sunday)*

*MIDSUMMER OPEN DAY 2001 - Sunday 24 June*

*PLOTHOLDERS' ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - Friday 9 November*

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To contribute to The Plotholder contact Susan Saunders, 8977 4675. Letters and comments welcome.