



THE PLOTHOLDER

www.paddocks-allotments.org.uk

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FUTURE EVENTS –

**Sunday 18
March**

11am – 1pm
Seedy Sunday –
come along to
bring your spare
seeds and buy
new ones for this
year

Sunday 1 April

11am – 1pm
The future of the
Seed Store –
find out what our
options are and
offer your
comments

Sunday 20 May

11am – 1pm
Seedling Sale

Sunday 3 June

12pm – 3pm
Jubilee Picnic

**Sunday 16
September**

12pm – 3pm
Autumn social
and produce show

What should happen to our fire-damaged Seed Store?

At the AGM in November, a discussion was held concerning four possible options for either restoring or replacing the old Seed Store/Stable building, which was badly damaged by fire in 2009.

- 1. Rebuild the right-hand side of the building with a pitched slate roof
- 2. Rebuild the right-hand side of the building with a sloping (monopitch) roof
- 3. Erect a new wooden cabin or shed on the existing hard standing
- 4. Move the existing café shed onto the hard standing

Ballpark figures were submitted for the costs of the different alternatives: option 1 would be the most expensive and option 4 the cheapest. A general discussion followed, during which the point was made that, even if options 3 or 4 were adopted, the part of the building that is still standing cannot be left as it is: it needs either repairing or demolishing and clearing, which will involve a cost.



Should additional funds be needed, some plottolders said they would be willing to loan or donate money for rebuilding. A motion to increase the



rents to £30 per year was defeated, as it was felt that there should be wider consultation beforehand.

Instead, it was agreed that the next step should be to give all tenants more detailed information and cost estimates on the various options. The Plottolders' Committee has begun work on preparing specifications of the work in order to get quotes for each of the options. As soon as these have been received, a revised set of proposals will be circulated for discussion prior to there being a referendum on the choice of structure to be built.

We will be putting on an exhibition of working ideas and options to date, on site, on Sunday 1st April. Please come along to see the progress so far.

In the meantime, if you would like to add your views, please email us on plottolderscommittee@paddocks-allotments.org.uk We welcome all contributions.

Collapse of a section of the boundary wall

In January a section of the boundary wall behind plots 42–44 collapsed during the severe overnight gale. The Park Authorities put up metal barriers to prevent the deer encroaching on the site, stacked up the bricks, and cut down the ivy which was growing from the park side of the wall. Despite initial fears that the wall might not be rebuilt for a few months due to the high cost, work has started and is now well underway. It should not be long before the wall is completely restored.



Send contributions for the next newsletter to jenbourne@btinternet.com

News from your Committee

WELCOME TO NEW TENANTS

C. Squire & N. Gardiner (plot 96b); Frederick Grace (plot 33b); Tina & Tony Gath (plot 122); John & Bernadette Francis (plot 96f); James & Jennifer Brunner (plot 197b); Helen Sparrow (plot 101f); Moya Ratnayake (plot 129b); Qefsere & Gezim Hoxha (plot 129f); Bob Logan (plot 34); Stephen Ball (plot 156b); Isobel & Graham King (plot 57); Mary Downham (plot 67b); James Marsh & Kitty Jones (plot 78b); Russell Ives & Matthew Trembath (plot 81f).

THE OFFICE Open every Sunday, 11am – 12 noon.

THE PLOTHOLDERS' COMMITTEE

Bob Trevillion, Chair (plots 136b, 137)
David Harnden, Deputy Chair (plot 152)
Chris Nix, Secretary (plot 12f, 146f)
Carol Dukes, Treasurer (plot 77)
Jenny Bourne, Social Secretary (plots 27f, 28b)
Alan Buckingham, Website (plot 185)
Ashley Catto, Sheds (plots A,H)
Kay Gillespie (plot 86f)
Gill Hiley (plot 50)
Barry Houlston (plot 133b)
Tricia McLellan (plot 105)
Martin Scotton (plot 59)

THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Council appointees: Tania Mathias (Chair), Jonathan Cardy, Jerry Elloy, Gareth Evans

Tenants: David Harnden (Deputy Chair), Susan Saunders (Secretary), Bob Trevillion, Carol Dukes, Barry Houlston

Café News

The Christmas Café was a roaring success again! Snow wasn't a feature this year, sadly, but the brazier was put to good use

for taking the chill off visitors and roasting the chestnuts. The team of volunteers provided a rich variety of seasonal cakes and mince pies, along with warming drinks. Many thanks to them all.

We could always do with more servers and or bakers, so if you are interested and would like to help out please get in touch with Anne Wingrove who co-ordinates the rota on anne.wingrove1@btinternet.com



AGM, November 2011

The RPA's annual general meeting at Bullen Hall on Thursday 10th November was well attended and lively.

The hottest item on the agenda was a discussion of the various options for restoring, rebuilding or demolishing the burnt-out seed store building – see front page.

Other topics included the re-opening of the waiting list in September, and the continuing success of the café and social events. The meeting was reminded of the need for volunteers for these functions, and for contributions to this newsletter, *The Plotholder*.

Bob Trevillion described the changes to the inspection system, which are meant to deal with plotholders who habitually respond to warning letters by doing just enough to avoid termination of their tenancies. A large majority supported the new procedure.

A copy of the Treasurer's report can be found on our website under 'Events'.

PRIZEWINNERS 2011

The annual competition for best plot was as hotly contested as ever, and Councillors Tania Mathias and Jonathan Cardy were kindly on hand to present the cup and certificates to the winners:

Best full plot

Cup winners Elizabeth and Grey Rigge (plot 83) (pictured, top)
2nd Ashley Catto (plot H)
3rd Peter Caughey (plot 40)

Best half plot

1st Julie and David Lainchbury (131f)
2nd Elaine Sturman and Vladimir Gorbatch (plot 187b) (pictured above)
3rd Linda and Bruce McLaren (plot 128b)



Bees at the Royal Paddocks Allotments

Following a number of plotholders enquiring about having beehives on their plots the committee reviewed the situation. Beehives have historically been on the site – there are currently two plotholders who have hives on their plots. We recognise this can be a contentious issue. Both plotholders who currently have hives were originally in areas that were away from cultivated plots. However as time has passed there is little of the RPA site that is not given over to plots, although the hives are still in relatively isolated areas.

As we all know bees are under threat across the world and without them as pollinators we would not have the crops we so fervently desire. With this in mind we looked into this matter and there is little doubt that bees in themselves are very desirable.

The Committee felt that a place in the Wildlife area (the South West corner of the site), not suitable for plots, should

be given over to an Apiary for those plotholders who would also like to be beekeepers.

This site will be limited in terms of hives and of course will depend, in the longer term, on whether it will cause problems for the rest of the site. This is not anticipated, and it will be managed following the recommendations of the British Beekeepers Association, and prospective beekeepers will be monitored by a qualified beekeeping mentor.

Apiaries and allotments operate in conjunction all over the country, for the benefit of all.

bees.at.rpa@hotmail.co.uk
bbk@britishbeekeepers.com

Plotholders' Committee, 28.02.2012



Committee members and prospective bee-keepers clear the area for the new hives and construct a dead-hedge to screen them from The Avenue.

Rebuild – the Seed Store

The Past

When I took on my plot in 2002, there was a seedstore, open on Sunday mornings, in the old stables buildings. George Harmsworth ran it, helped by other tenants, selling products at discount prices. The stock was supplied by Hampton & District Allotments & Gardens Ltd (HDAG), a company set up in 1917. There were three seedstores – in Hanworth, Shepperton and the Royal Paddocks; the stock was housed in a storehouse in Bear Road, Hanworth, on an old allotment site. HDAG was affiliated to the National Society of Allotment & Leisure Gardeners, and benefited from NSALG's discount ordering scheme. George also sold his own raised tomato seedlings and eggs supplied by a neighbour. His wife, Hazel, provided tea and biscuits and the occasional bacon sandwich.



George Harmsworth, who made many repairs to the Seed Store building in the past

After HDAG was wound up George and Hazel retired and the shop and store were closed, until new tenants John and Amy Greenhalgh decided that the shop could be reopened as a café. They set to work with friends, enthusiasm and energy to paint and renovate, opening the Seed Store Café on Easter Sunday 2008. Volunteers joined the rota and a growing number of plotters began to enjoy the weekly homemade cakes and drinks. It also provided an unexpected and very welcome income to RPA funds. On 11 March



Amy Greenhalgh, co-founder of the Seed Store Café and shop

2009 the main part of the building, including the café, was destroyed in the terrible fire. Though all the stock

was gone the café volunteers, undaunted, continued to keep the café running, first in the shed by the pedestrian gate and then in the temporary shed where it is now.

The Present

Now we have an opportunity to reconstruct a substantial, fit-for-purpose building, in a style sympathetic to and in character with the surroundings; a community resource not only for the use of present plotters but for those to come when we've hung up our gardening gear for good!

There will no doubt be tenants who are not in favour of spending money on the rebuild. But we all as plotters benefit from the funds generated throughout the year from the café and the Socials, substantial revenue that is ploughed directly back into improving the site for all of us. Everyone benefits from the input of those plotters who volunteer their time and energy: the work parties and steering groups; the committees who manage the site; the social committee; the café volunteers and cake makers – they all go that extra mile for the RPA. We have the people power, now we need a building to match – I think we're worth it!

The Future

The new build will be the setting for all our RPA community activities: committee meetings and EGMs, the café, talks, workshops and demonstrations, education sessions for local schools and community groups, a resource library – the possible uses are up to us. In February 2002 the newsletter

summed up the potential future use of the building: "And it should be *inclusive*, catering for all the groups of people who come to the Paddocks, old and young, novices and experts, working or retired, fit or no longer so fit. All need varying kinds of back-up to make a success of their plots. The buildings can provide shelter from bad weather, maybe a place to make a cup of tea... a space to meet other gardeners and swap plants and advice." I'll drink to that!

Jenny Bourne (Individual plotholder)



Before the fire – Sarah and Joanie welcome café visitors

Cleve West – Our Plot by Jenny Bourne

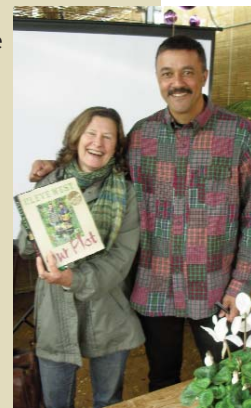
Talk at Petersham Nurseries – 26.11.11

Cleve West, garden designer and Best in Show winner, Chelsea 2011, gave a talk to promote his new book, *Our Plot*. The book is an account of his experiences as an allotment plotholder on Bushy Park allotments, our nearest allotment neighbours on the opposite side of the park. Cleve said that this is not primarily a 'How to' reference book although it does contain a wealth of practical advice and information for managing an allotment. It is more of a personal journey; from the time he and his partner, Christine, took on the first overgrown plot in 1999: 'Faced with the enormity of the task before us, I did what any sensible bloke would do in such a situation. I built a shed!' To listen to Cleve talking about his growing successes and failures, battles with weeds and pests, soil conditions, shed building, fellow allotmenters, the allotment community, wildlife, on-site vandalism, produce theft, etc – well, it all sounds strangely familiar! There are differences of course – their plot is bounded by a stream with the Park on the other side and, in line with their strong organic principles, slugs and snails are conveyed carefully over the bridge, with predictable results! And their dedication to organic principles and wildlife preservation leads them to take action on wet nights that even the keenest RPA wildlife lover may feel to be beyond the call of duty!

Cleve discovered that, although growing his own food was the original reason for taking on his plots, it was his fellow allotmenters that he came to value and appreciate, and his chapter, *People*, celebrates the diversity of plotters and community life – *The dynamics of allotments depends on variety. Not just in terms of vegetables, methods or eclectic styles but in the characters that inhabit them. Each person has their own idiosyncratic ways and peculiarities. Colour, religion, politics, dress sense (not to mention levels of nakedness), efficiency, ability, sociability, transport, sheds, fruit cages, bird feeders, scarecrows, veg varieties, veg to flower ratios, killing methods, compost heaps, bonfires, generosity, organics, DIY or off-the-shelf, maverick or by-the-book, labeller or non-labeller, bull-shitter or diffident, cooperative or pain in the arse, barking mad or ever so slightly mad (because you have to be a little touched to have an allotment)... everyone, praise the Lord, is different. Sounds familiar?*

He is realistic about the time and effort involved in managing a plot, citing enthusiastic new plotters who find that actually it's all about hard graft and give up fairly soon. 'Romantic as they sound, allotments need regular attention to keep them productive... We each spend about at least one full day a week at the plot and often more during the busy period of sowing and growing between March and July... Oh, and by the way, when I say a day I don't mean office hours, I'm talking of at least twelve hours.' This is a down to earth, engaging and entertaining book that reflects Cleve's warmth, humour and pragmatic attitude to allotment life. It also does what it says on the tin, providing practical allotment advice drawn from his experience and considerable horticultural skills and knowledge. Highly recommended!

Our Plot by Cleve West
Frances Lincoln Limited Publishers



Jenny Bourne finally meets her hero...

Your Soil – Acid or Alkaline?

by Alan Buckingham

Confused about the difference between acid and alkaline soil? Baffled by pH numbers? Here's a simple guide to what you need to know and why.

All soils are acid, alkaline or – as is more common – neutral. Acid soils are low in calcium, and alkaline soils are high. Every soil can be given a pH number which grades it on a scale from 1 (very acid) to 14 (very

alkaline). In fact, the pH is actually a measure of the water that the soil contains, rather than the solid material from which it is composed. A neutral soil has a pH of 7, which is also the value for pure water.

THE pH SOIL VALUES

1–5	very acid
6	acid
6.5	slightly acid
7	neutral
7.5	slightly alkaline
8	alkaline
9–14	very alkaline

What is the pH of our soil?

The soil on the Royal Paddocks site is described as 'freely draining, slightly acid, loamy soil'. Our own soil tests bear this out. Using a basic soil-testing kit from a garden centre, we have got pH readings of

around 6.5–7.0 – which is on the borderline between slightly acid and neutral. However, it's worth doing some tests of your own. The pH can vary from one part of the site to another. It can even differ from one part of your plot to another – particularly if you've limed your the soil in the past, if you've applied a lot of compost, manure or mulch, or if you've got raised beds. One plotholder recently got a neutral reading of 7.0 at the front of plot 27f but a slightly alkaline 7.5 at the back of plot 28b.

MEASURING SOIL pH

is done using a simple test kit. Add soil to the solution in the test tube, shake well, then match the resulting colour against the pH chart provided.

Does the pH matter?

It is not normally an issue, as most fruit and veg are fairly tolerant. However, some are unhappy in soil that is too acid, while others dislike soil that is too alkaline. Plants find it difficult to absorb important nutrients such as potassium, calcium and nitrogen if the soil is very acid, and iron, zinc and copper if it is very alkaline.

A slightly alkaline soil, with a pH of 7.5 or more suits cabbages, cauliflowers, Brussels sprouts and other brassicas since the alkalinity

discourages clubroot. A lower figure of 6.5 or less suits acid-tolerant crops such as blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, radishes or potatoes.

DID YOU KNOW?

The H in pH stands for hydrogen – but scientists can no longer agree what the p stands for!

Raising the pH of an acid soil

It's fairly easy to make an acid soil more alkaline. Simply add lime (calcium carbonate) or a lime-rich material such as mushroom compost. Sprinkle in some powdered limestone, wood ash or calcified seaweed if you are digging during the winter or shortly before planting out seedlings. You can even drop some directly into the planting hole. Just don't add lime at the same time as manure: the two act chemically with one another.

Lowering the pH of an alkaline soil

It's trickier to make an alkaline soil more acid. Although it will happen over time due to the natural effects of rainfall and weathering, you can speed things along by adding composted sawdust, composted pine bark or needles, sulphur dust or chips, or loam-based ericaceous compost.

Picture Competitions NEW FEATURE!

Future editions of **The Plotholder** will show the interior of a shed belonging to someone on our site – a 'through-the-keyhole' look into this world of interiors.

There is a **£5 garden token** for the plotholder who identifies the shed owner and one for the most entertaining caption to Jenny Bourne's magical photograph (far right), which

was taken at the end of 2011, following the Christmas Café.

Please email your replies to jenbourne@btinternet.com or put a note in a sealed envelope in the letterbox of the shed near the gate, with your name, plot number and a contact number or email address.

Who does this shed belong to? →



How to contact us:

You can leave mail for the Committee in the letterbox in the shed by the gate.

www.paddocks-allotments.org.uk