Sinking to new depths

Our hand pumps are not only a piece of living history, they’re essential to a working allotment site with no piped water supply. Last year was the hottest on record, and forecasts are that hot summers will become the norm. So we owe a great debt to Barbara and Peter Wood, leading a team of tenants servicing our pumps, and now starting to replace those which are failing (the pipework’s over 50 years old).

Putting in a new tubewell is normally done by professionals, using machinery. But last summer, through some of the most scorching days, the thump of a manual post rammer rang round the Paddocks. Pipes have to go down between 12 and 15 feet, and judging when the water-bearing layer has been reached is something which must be learned by experience. The lion’s share of the work has so far been done by the Woods and their family – Peter spoke about it at the AGM – and relays of tenants took a turn at ramming, or bringing water to flush out the pipes as the pump tops were made operational.

Luckily, our situation near the river means that we are unlikely to run short of ground water. But we can only access it with pipes in good condition. A set of new pipes for one pump costs around £500 – luckily we are at present well supplied with pump bodies, and we bought spare washers last year (imported from the continent). Work on another two pumps will begin soon, and the aim is to keep as near as possible to the original provision of one pump per ten plots. If you are near one of the pumps being renewed (or even if you aren’t), please consider whether you can give a donation towards the cost of the new pipes.

We’ll be very grateful for any help, both financial, and physical.

Renovation of the Seed Store

John and Amy Greenhalgh (Plot 120) are heading up a spring project to renovate the Seed Store. The hope is that a facelift will put life back in to the building, helping it to become a real community space again, a lively hub that can be used to host fundraising events and a place to meet other gardeners and share tips!

We plan to trial opening for 2 hours on Sunday as a café, also selling a small stock of essential gardening supplies. The café would strive to make best use of fair trade and organic products, as well as allotment produce! All profits would go to the Royal Paddocks fund, so the good news is that buying a cup of tea and slice of homemade cake would count as doing your bit to support the allotments!

Work began on Sunday 28th Jan, with a 10 strong team whitewashing the interior walls. In keeping with our aim to be ‘eco’ we used second hand paint donated by a local paint amnesty project.

Of course, there is a lot of work to do so we will keep you posted on our progress. For now though, we’d love to hear from you if you are interested in getting involved in any way, or might like to help running the café on a rota system.

Contact: john@glec.net or call 0208 9772661.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

On Site
Spring Social To be confirmed, look out for notification
First Plot Inspections Thursday 1st March 2007
At the Lion, Wick Road Plotholders AGM Thursday 9th November 7.30 for 8.00pm
Welcome to new tenants Bryn Hird (4), Jessica Williams and Hilary Thomson (28f), Tony Blount and Denis Lewendon (32f), Jim Boon (40), Peter Czaja (41b), Amanda Mcivor (51), Jayne Gardner (63), Elizabeth Rigge (83), Barbara and Ray Hulm (93), Peter Aitken and Allison Bridle (101f), Tania McNay (103), Fred and Sybil Peters (109), Alan Shirley (116), Michael Boyle (121), Roger Wild (127f), Geraint Williams and Nick Lewin (127b), Helen Astbury and Anthony Measures (128f), Julie Roberts and Mark Porter (130), Peter Rocic (132f), Perit Alver and Owen Jacka (132b), Joanne Murray (134f), Eileen and Peter Church (134b), Mandy Tennant and Jonathan Adams (135f). Mark Schranz (143), Richard and Anne Timme (150f), Michael and Caroline De Rosa (156b), Amy Keeper (157), Jon Honeywill (172f), Elaine Smethurst (175f), Simon Wood (186f), Caroline Dick (194f), Kate and Martin Fern (198f), Valerie and Benjamin Quaillet (Ed), Vanessa Lavelle (131b), Mira Zwyttick (135b), and Chris and Louisa Rollinson (150b).

A sad goodbye to Darren Sait, Christine Eastham and daughter who have moved up north; Linda and Duncan Mekie who have moved to France and Fleur Davis who has moved back to Cornwall.

CONGRATULATIONS to Paul and Nerys on plot 79, now Mr and Mrs Byford.

Introducing the 2007 Plotholders’ Committee:

Marguerite Pocock (Plots 55 & 62 Back) Secretary
Gavin Collins (Plot 163) Treasurer
Helga Foss (Plot 170 Back) Social Secretary
Gill Hiley (Plot 50) Publicity
Jenny Bourne (Plots 27 Front & 28 Back)
Jean Blanc (Plots 29 & 162)
Ashley Catto (Plots A & H)
John Greaves (Plot 111 Front)
John Greenhalgh (Plot 120)
Chris Pocock (Plots 55 & 62 Back)

And our 2007 Plotholders’ committee newcomers:

Barbara Wood (Plots 182 - 4, 201) our new Chairman, has been a repeated winner for her plots since 1981 and is well known to all at the Royal Paddocks. The successes that she is most proud of include sweet potatoes and melons, and this year she is going to try her hand at kiwi fruit and watermelons. The crops that she does not grow any more are celery due to the slugs and globe artichokes due to black fly. With her enthusiasm, experience and accessibility, and her passion for allotment growing, she would like to see a thriving and friendly environment and the site returning to the purpose for which it was intended, namely food production.

Ian Hopkins (Plot 30) joint cup winner this year joined the Royal Paddocks in 2005 and his major triumph was turning the plot into a workable and productive space in just four months. He is particularly proud of his hard landscaping and the use of reclaimed sleepers to create a terraced plot which is easy to maintain and the net and bamboo tents which keep the pigeons off and are very economical. His failures are both because of the ravenous rats and their penchant for sweetcorn and carrots! Ian believes his willingness to help and knowledge will be an asset to all plotholders, and wants to foster the current goodwill and community spirit at the Royal Paddocks ensuring help and encouragement to all tenants new and old.

Jo Box (Plots 160 – 161) also a prize winner since her arrival in May 2004 is the new shed coordinator and hopes to bring together the new tenants’ views with those more established tenants’ opinions to create a harmonious and productive site. Her successes include a really early bumper crop of peas and sweetcorn last year and some excellent cauliflowers. Failures include something different every year but normally include Florence fennel and celery. She hopes to bring dedication, determination and a fresh view to the committee and hopes that the Royal Paddocks future is a long and prosperous one.

RENT RISE – NO DECISION YET, BUT WE NEED FUND RAISERS

At the AGM last November our treasurer, Gavin Collins, explained the considerable costs we face during the next few years if we are to keep our water supply flowing, and make our buildings safe and useable. The water pipes might cost us a total of £10k over a number of years, the building repairs more in the region of £25k. There are three main ways of financing these: by fund-raising and donations, by raising the rents once more, and by seeking grants.

A provisional grant has been offered towards the cost of pipes for two pumps by Hampton Wick United Charity, dependent on matched funding raised by us. All grant-giving bodies will require evidence that we are making significant attempts to meet our financial commitments ourselves, and Gavin suggested that a good step towards this would be to raise the rents again, to £36.50 per full plot (or 10p per day). This would still keep our rents well below those of the local authority, which only offers that rate to tenants qualifying for concessions.

The Committee responsible for setting and collecting the rents is the Management Committee, and at its meeting last November it was agreed that, with two recent rent rises in ‘02 and ‘05, no decision to raise it again would be taken yet.

To keep rent at its present level, we need to do some serious fund-raising. If you have ideas or experience, in this area, and would be willing to join a fund-raising group, please contact us. We’d also like help from anyone with experience in applying for grants. Can you grow money? Then we want to hear from you.

Where there’s muck...

Do you know of a good source of manure, preferably not sawdust based? Since Mike has had to stop the manure deliveries we are all keen to get our hands on some good stuff.

If there is a friendly stables near you let us know, by email, phone or put up a note on the shed by the gates. Thanks
Water - a wildlife haven on your allotment

Ponds - The number of ponds across the UK has severely decreased in the last 50 years by around 70%, so adding water to any site will improve the wildlife value. Water in the garden or allotment – no matter how big or small – will always bring a wide range of wildlife to the area. Ponds act as drinking places, breeding grounds, baths, food sources and shelter. Frogs, toads, newts, invertebrates, mammals, birds and insects, many beneficial to gardeners, will all be attracted to live, breed, or drink from a pond.

Any container buried in the ground will enable amphibians, birds and insects to live and breed. The essential point is that the sides are accessible to wildlife with planting providing safe routes in and out. For those of you who would like to create a pond on your plot here are some basic instructions.

Planning - Different types, sizes and styles of pond are made to attract different kinds of wildlife. Generally the bigger the pond the better for wildlife. As you can include a variety of habitats. However, we are limited by our plot sizes – there are already a few ponds on the site, including one newly created on plot no 142 by Roger Archbold. He made it last year and it now contains a variety of pondlife, including water boatmen, water beetles, snails, damselflies and some large healthy tadpoles just about to develop their back legs – with any luck they will become slug gobbling frogs, every grower's friend!

Position and size - A reasonably sunny spot is good to attract dragonflies and invertebrates. Shade can be provided by planting around the edges and margins. Avoid placing the pond directly under trees as the leaf litter will rot, increase the nutrient levels in the pond and lead to algae growth.

Frogs and smooth newts are happy to breed in smaller ponds but toads and great crested newts require larger areas of water, about 15 square metres.

Access is vital for wildlife. Sides should be sloping with 'sheathed' edges and have a shallow area, to provide a drinking spot and spawning area for amphibians. It also acts as an escape route for any animals that may fall in. Deeper water is also necessary, at a depth of 60cm+, so that the pond will only freeze in the very coldest weather.

Creating your pond

Ponds can be lined with clay, concrete or pre-formed plastic. Ideally, for a wildlife pond it is better to use a butyl or polythene liner. These come in a variety of thickness and with various guarantees – choose the strongest you can afford.

Estimate the amount of liner required by measuring the depth, width and length of your pond, then use this formula:

- L+2D = the length
- W+2D = the width
- Allow extra for overlapping

Stocking up

You will be surprised by how much wildlife will just appear in your pond even if you do nothing. However, a bucket of water from any nearby pond will quickly bring invertebrates and plant life to your pond. Stock it with native plants either from garden centres or specialist nurseries. Provide a mixture of submerged, floating and emergent plants to give the maximum range of habitats to wildlife. Be aware of the possibility of contamination from other water bodies and invasive non-native plants.

Timing

The best time to carry out work on your pond is between October and December as the breeding season is over and plants have died back. Dredging a pond should not be necessary as a healthy pond will regulate itself and is best left alone. If work needs to be done the early autumn is best, as amphibians will be hibernating in the mud over winter.

Fish or not?

Generally fish and amphibians do not mix.

Pondlife

Invertebrates such as dragonflies, water beetles, pond skaters and damselflies will travel great distances to water. Amphibians will also seek out the water naturally. Frogs are thought to be able to 'smell' water and will travel over a kilometre to find it. Other wildlife you are likely to attract includes butterflies, dragonflies, newts, birds, foxes and even bats.

Plants

Leave the pond for a few days to before planting to allow the silt and water to settle. Plant between April and September if possible and put invasive species like water mint and water lilies in containers.

There are three main types of plant to include in your pond for maximum habitat creation. A selection includes:

Submerged plants – plant in deep water
Curl pondweed
Potamogeton crispus
Hornwort
Ceratophyllum demersum
Spiked watermilfoil
Myriophyllum spicatum

Floating plants – plant in deep water
White water lily
Nymphaea alba
Yellow water lily
Nuphar lutea

Emerging plants – plant in the shallows
Water mint
Mentha aquatica
Yellow flag iris
Iris pseudacorus
Water forget-me-not
Myosotis scorpiodes

Keep it clean

Many things can make the water in the pond look murky. Algae can smother plants and block out light to the pond. Keeping it clean is relatively easy:
- Getting the right plants helps a great deal, especially the deep planted ones as the use the nutrients necessary for algae to thrive.
- Water fleas and daphnia will quickly clear a pond of algae and help to establish a natural balance.
- It is not advisable to use chemical solutions as they will harm wildlife.

Information London Wildlife Trust’s Froglife advice sheets.

FROM 27th JANUARY 2007 THE GATES WILL BE LOCKED AT 5.00pm UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE.
The unlocking of gates in the morning will remain at 8.30am.
PLEASE NOTE: If you try to leave after the time displayed on the gate, there is no guarantee that a key holder will be available, therefore we strongly advise you to leave by the time stated.

IT'S LIKE THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD, said James Greville, tenant of a plot near the section of perimeter wall which blew down on 18 January. The wall collapsed in a rather neat blanket over the backs of plots 18 to 25, and the gap was quickly made secure by the Stockyard staff using metal fencing. It will be rebuilt, recycling the old bricks, but not immediately, so if you need to move them, please leave them close to where they fell.
Everything's right about this soup: it's wonderfully velvety and light, and a beautiful colour, as well as being extremely tasty. Make it with any variety of the squashes you grew last summer, and still have sitting in your store cupboard (Crown Prince was very good).

**SQUASH AND PARSNIP SOUP**

- 1 tbsp oil, 15g butter
- 1 onion, chopped
- 900ml stock (cube is fine)
- lemon or lime juice to taste
- 250g carrots, chopped
- 250g parsnips, chopped
- 250g squash, deseeded, peeled and chopped
- salt and pepper

To garnish: 1 tbsp olive oil, 1 garlic clove, crushed, 1 red chilli, deseeded and finely chopped, good pinch of ground cumin, 3 tbsp chopped mixed parsley, mint and coriander (or whatever's available).

Fry the onion in the oil and butter until soft. Add the carrots and parsnips and stir well. Cover the pan and cook gently for 5 minutes; then add the squash, and cook for a further 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the stock and season. Bring to the boil, then simmer gently for 30 minutes, until vegetables are tender. Blend until smooth, and add lemon or lime juice to taste.

For the garnish, fry the ingredients in the oil for 2 minutes, and spoon some over each serving of soup.

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Congratulations to the following prize winners:

**Best Kept Full Plot** - Following Barbara Woods’ agreement to judge, joint winners Ian Hopkins (Plot 30) and Jo Box (Plot 160) share the cup this year and Chris Loughton (Plot 7) was awarded third place. Those commended include Sue Croft (Plot 73), Vicky Glaysher and Alison Hughes (Plot 71) and Bolia Rice (Plot G).

**Best Newcomer, Full Plot** – Corrine Ransom and Jon Tarnton (Plot D) took the coveted first place, closely followed by Jenny Trevillion (Plot 137) who came second, third went to Shirley Murray (Plot 3) and Nicky Burridge (Plot 2) received a commendation.

**Best Newcomer, Half Plot** - Was jointly awarded to Peter Caughhey (Plot 39B) and Ivan & Una Flanagan (Plot 168B). Third place was awarded to David and Julie Lanchbury (Plot 131F) with Paul Depledge and Rochelle Brugh taking fourth place.

A very well done to all those mentioned and everyone else who have collectively improved the site as a whole. The competition this year is wide open, and as judging usually takes place during the first week of August, why not go that extra mile?

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The Spring Social will be the next grand event of the RPA social round, after the Easter school holidays. There will be opportunities to compare notes with your neighbours over a hot dog and a drink, get your seeds for the biggest pumpkin and tallest sunflower competition, fun activities for kids (suggestions welcome!) and all we need is a sunny day!

Please contact a member of the committee if you can offer any help or suggestions.

**Don’t forget the first plot inspections for 2007 are scheduled for 1st March, please ensure that your plots are properly numbered and paths are free from obstructions.**

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**CAUTION – SLOW!**

There have been some recent incidents of vehicles driving over the edges of corner plots, causing damage to plotholders’ plants and shrubs. Would all vehicle users please make sure that they keep to the roads, leaving a good distance between wheels and plot edges.

We also ask vehicle users to ensure that they drive slowly and with due care when on the allotment site, keeping speed down to a minimum, as there have been near misses involving young children. We would encourage everyone to use their vehicles as little as possible, for drop down or pick up only. If it is essential to bring your vehicle onto the plots, please park off the allotment roads where possible and if you have to park by your plot, displaying your plot number will help others to find you if there is a problem with access or obstruction.

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How to contact us: You can leave mail for the Committee (but not money), in the postbox in the shed by the gate. Our website address is www.parkdocks-allotments.org.uk. We welcome all contributions to The Plotholder. Contact the editorial team, Susan Saunders (Plot 53): susan.saunders@fish.co.uk, Jo Box (Plot 161): jobox@beeb.net, Jenny Bourne (Plot 27f): jennybourne@beeb.net, Sarah Smith (Plot 39): bliss@plot39.wanadoo.co.uk or Ian Hopkins (Plot 30).