AUTUMN IS HERE, with spiders, mellow fruitfulness and tomato blight. It's also rent collecting time. Technically, tenancy of our plots ceases at the end of September, and if rent is not paid by the end of October a plot could be re-let. Despite the notice on site, we have until 31 October to renew, but the committee would prefer us to pay earlier, so that we can accommodate people on the waiting list for a decent plot. It's still astonishingly good value, so why wait?

The Plotholders' Annual General Meeting will be held in the Bullen Hall on Friday 10 November at 7.30 p.m. The Bullen Hall is in Bennett Close, off Park Road. Please come: your presence is very important. A lot still needs to be done to improve the maintenance of our site, and this can only happen if we all work together and elect a full committee. We have several vacancies: do think carefully about whether you could offer a bit of time to help run our site. The committee meet nine or ten times a year, on site in summer, and at the British Legion, Teddington, in winter.

Also at the AGM, find out who won the Cup this year, and who were the runners-up. And see Nick Baylis's photographs, now part of the Royal Paddocks Pictorial Archive! We'd be delighted to receive other photos you may have taken of the Paddocks, ancient or modern. See you there.

DIDN'T WE DO WELL WITH OUR FIRST OPEN DAY - thanks to the hard work of a number of people. Special thanks to Gail Carll (whose idea it was) and Nicola Boyce for the enthusiasm they brought to the project, for their help with publicity, and for co-ordinating activities for our youngest tenants; to Nick Baylis for his lovely photographs, which really give a flavour of the day; to Stan Bastion's family for help with the barbecue; to everyone who contributed food for the lunch, which meant that everyone who wanted had a tasty and incredibly good-value meal; to those who gave goods for sale on the stalls; to the committee, who all worked hard on our behalf; and to everyone who came.

We gained a number of new tenants, among them Anne Jones, who writes about her family's first three months as plotholders on this issue's back page. And we put ourselves on the local map - how often have we met people who say, on coming in through the gates and taking in the full amazing extent of the Paddocks - 'I never knew this place existed!'

Mike Veysey's Royal Vegetable Quiz was much enjoyed. Two entrants got all the right answers, and the winner, whose name was drawn out of a hat, was John Frith, who thus got the bottle of wine. Congratulations to everyone.
COMMITTEE BUSINESS IN BRIEF

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE: We now have a reconditioned rotavator, which tenants can borrow. As with the strimmer and mower, we use these at our own risk. We hope to organise a training session soon, for the less mechanically-minded. Donations towards the cost of fuel are always appreciated.

BUILDING REPAIRS: We are currently getting tenders for repairs to the lockups at the north end of the site, and thank Matthew Williams for his help in preparing a schedule of work. This building, over a century old, has not had professional attention for a long time, but if we are to keep the use of it, something must be done soon. The committee intend to make the space in it available to many more tenants than use it at present, but repairs will be very costly, and funding them may take some time.

ARE YOU A MEMBER OF THE RHS? The answer is, yes you are, by virtue of being a Royal Paddocks tenant, as we are an Affiliated Society. Affiliated membership brings various benefits, besides our insurances for our Cup, and public liability. Among other things, we get:

- a monthly copy of THE GARDEN, available in our site office
- one free group visit each year to an RHS garden (Wisley; Hyde Hall, Chelmsford; Rosemoor, Devon; Trebah Garden, Cornwall), and reduced-price Garden Entry cards to these gardens (not Trebah)
- reduced-price tickets for RHS shows, including Hampton Court
- two reduced-price tickets for Chelsea
- free gardening advice from the Department of Botany at Wisley

Free gardening advice is particularly valuable. It means we can send specimens to Wisley, and get a detailed written answer, usually accompanied by RHS fact sheets. Your editor found this extremely helpful when microscopic examination by experts was needed on her raspberries. If you want to send a specimen, or phone them for advice, and are not an individual RHS member, you must do it through our association - contact Susan Saunders on 8977 4675.

Affiliated Societies were also invited to submit a plan for a Courtyard Garden at Chelsea 2001! (Something for another year, perhaps.) A copy of the leaflet about all the RHS does for its affiliates will be displayed on the shed, and in the office. Have a look, and tell your committee if anything interests you. There weren’t many takers for the cheaper tickets for Hampton Court this year - but perhaps you were all taken by surprise! What about a group visit somewhere in 2001?

CLEARING BLITZ - ADVANCE WARNING!

Our next social event, on Sunday 26 November 2000, will be combined with a blitz on some of the overgrown areas. Come with your strimmers, loppers, scythes, or whatever is your preferred weapon. Drinks and hot food will be available. We plan to hire a shredder, and are investigating the possibility of composting in bulk, as is done at Kew Gardens. Watch the shed for more details nearer the date.
Sometimes at the end of the season, the plot offers small amounts of a lot of different crops. This is a good way of using them, if you like spicy food, and the recipe can be infinitely adapted according to what is available - regard it as a starting point. [Acknowledgements to Jack Santa Maria’s ‘Indian Vegetarian Cookery’.]

**NEPALI VEGETABLE CURRY for 4 - 6**

In a large frying pan with a lid, heat 4 tbsp oil or oil and butter, and fry 2 chopped onions till golden. Add a broken bayleaf, a quarter teaspoon of ground black pepper, a chopped green chilli (Nepalis use much more), 6 cloves crushed garlic, an ounce of grated root ginger, half a teaspoon of turmeric and 2 teaspoons of salt. Stir and cook for a moment, then add up to 2lbs cubed potatoes and fry till they start to brown. Add 2 teaspoons of ground coriander, 1 tbsp of chopped coriander leaves, 1 tbsp cumin seeds and any other cut up vegetables, in cooking order, which you think might taste good together, for instance carrots, parsnip, cabbage, tomato, cauliflower, chard, runner beans, peas, spring onions. Beetroot is good, though makes the dish red. Add a little water, bring to a simmer, cover and cook gently till all vegetables are tender. Add a squeeze of lemon juice if you like.

Served with rice and a lentil dish, you have the traditional, well-balanced meal of Nepal - dal bhat tarkari.

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**SLUG STATISTICS**

In a summer with normal rainfall it’s hard to recall the drought years, when we spent so much time irrigating plants just to keep them alive. This year the challenge has been to pick the crops before the slugs get them. It seems slugs can consume twice their own body-weight every day. So a slug weighing 0.1oz could, over a 20 week growing season, eat a pound and three quarters of veg! More sluggish facts: a cubic metre of garden can contain up to 200 slugs of varying sizes; one grey field slug can produce 90,000 grandchildren; slugs are not born knowing what their food is - they try almost anything once, but never make a mistake twice. So if they eat a slug pellet and survive, as can happen, they simply glide past the pellets next time to what they really like.

They’re most active at night, and seem particularly keen on cabbage: there are few more infuriating sights than finding great sausage-like creatures draped all over one’s brassicas in the dew of an early summer morning.

Their natural predators are birds, hedgehogs, frogs and carabid beetles, but as we all know these hardly seem to dent their numbers. Controlling them without recourse to pellets can be difficult: watering with nematodes, barriers of broken eggshells, slug traps filled with beer, or just going round picking them off. At the Centre for Alternative Technology in Wales, where all crops are grown without chemicals, they put slabs of wood or slate on the beds. The slugs shelter under these during the warmest part of the day, and can be removed then. What you do with them next depends on your sensibilities, but we cannot recommend throwing them onto your neighbour’s plot.

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LOCAL HISTORY: Bullen Hall, where we hold the AGM, was once the site of a foundry, and no doubt some readers will remember it - it was demolished in the early ’70s. This information comes from an exhibition in Hampton Wick Library, The Changing Face of Hampton Wick. Are the Paddocks the only place where time seems to stand still?
"You'll never guess what we've just done..."

As a resident of Hampton Wick, I've often imagined what lay behind the wall in Park Road as we've walked into Kingston. On occasions we've even peeped in through the gate and glimpsed at the secret gardens that lay within. But one Saturday at the end of June, we had our chance! Open Day was just the opportunity to have a good look round!

With my husband away in the States on business, the children and I were in the mood for something different, and before long we became caught up with the idea of taking on our own plot. By the end of the weekend, we'd dug over a small corner, picked half a dozen raspberries, found a few redcurrants, rescued some roses, and scratched our arms to pieces picking over four pounds of gooseberries.

Since then our mood has swung between total optimism (we can do anything, we can grow anything) to despair (where do we begin? what will we find next under the bramble?). But most of the time, we're somewhere in between. Last week, I collected seven different items of produce: runner beans and courgettes (grown late from purchased plants), a tiny lettuce, a baby carrot, blackberries, redcurrants and rosemary.

The pride I feel when serving up our own produce is second to none. But this autumn we've got our work cut out to be ready for next year. We need to clear brambles and weeds, get rid of rubbish (including an assortment of rusting structures and a set of patio doors), and think about how to improve the soil. We've got tons to learn about planning and planting, but the main thing is that we've had lots of fun. Taking on our plot (150) has got to be the best £5 spent all year!

Anne Jones

Thank you, Anne and family! This is exactly what our Open Day was all about - Ed.

SWEEPING IT UNDER THE CARPET (2)

We've been asked to point out, following the piece about carpet in the last newsletter, that it isn't of course, a permanent solution to weeding. If carpet is left down too long, weeds will eventually grow through it, or over it, and a really unlucky successor on your plot could find they're trying to dig through a layer of it. A couch grass/carpet sandwich is the worst of both worlds. If you really can't turn the ground over during the season, turn the carpet over, which will arrest things for a while longer. And foam-backed carpet is not a good idea except for short-term use - it comes to kits.

A second worry is that carpet shelters slugs. But this can be turned to advantage - it's a good place to catch them napping. What really encourages slugs, apart from tender seedlings, is long grass and weeds.

Thanks to all our distributors this year, who've delivered newsletters through the doors of nearly all our tenants.

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