

# The Pitshanger Digger

Summer/Autumn 2013



PITSHANGER ALLOTMENTS CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

## Your Hut Needs You and You Need Your Hut

How often do you unlock the gate and rush past the Hut to get to your plot? Pause a minute. The Hut is a well-stocked garden shop, probably the only



Plotholders stocking up at the Hut

one of its kind in Central Ealing and certainly the only one not run for profit. Think again about lining the coffers of Wyevale or B&Q and pop in on Saturday or Sunday mornings to inspect the large selection of seeds, implements, soil improvers etc.

To survive, the Hut needs two things. First, your custom: so make it your first choice for garden purchases. Secondly, your help. Since the sad death of George Heley, Robert Reynolds, himself a volunteer, has been running things single-handed. Could you offer one weekend morning a month to help out? A small team has already volunteered and you

may already have met some of them in the Hut. Robert would love to enlist the help of a few more people. The Hut is not only a place of commerce, it is a focus for our community. So pop in for a chat, a moan or advice. You will certainly find a sympathetic ear.

Now retired, Robert has a background in retail and when he acquired a plot seven years ago he thought the shop needed a bit of a face lift and offered his services. He's given his time and energy ever since. So let's support our Hut. Contact Robert with your offer of help on:

07971 000 020

## George Heley 1932-2013

George, who died in May this year, was one of our longest-standing plotholders and a much loved member of our gardening community. Although from a family of keen West London gardeners, George's interest and expertise only developed when he and his wife Veronica got their first plot in 1967.

That year roughly coincided with a complete change of direction in his career. Having been an engineer and government inspector, George joined the Probation Service to which he brought his commitment to serving others and his willingness to go "the extra mile" to help those in trouble. George's desire to help has been much

appreciated by all of us over the last thirteen years when, since retirement, he has been both front of house and behind the scenes manager of our trading hut.

Many hours of voluntary labour, serving in the hut, offering invaluable gardening advice, ordering and taking deliveries of stock, not to mention doing the accounts and dealing with the bank, were done week in, week out by George with efficiency, humour and diplomacy. "George was always a giver", says his wife, Veronica. We plotholders have been the fortunate beneficiaries and George will live long in our memories.



George and his old mate, Cyril Foster

## Something bugging you?

Make a note now of our AGM date:

**Thursday, 26<sup>th</sup> September at 7.30 pm in the Brentham Club.**

Come and have your say. This is your annual chance to review the Committee's actions over the year and influence our future direction. Don't miss out! Submit resolutions for the AGM to our acting Secretary by Monday, 2nd September and nominations for a place on the Committee by Thursday, 19th September. You can send these via email to [secretary@pitshanger.net](mailto:secretary@pitshanger.net) or by post to:

**PACA Secretary, c/o 193 Argyle Road, London W13 0AU**

## This Newsletter

Contact Anne Harrison at [editor@pitshanger.net](mailto:editor@pitshanger.net), with comments on this edition of 'The Pitshanger Digger' and your contributions for future issues.

Our thanks go to John Kane for the newsletter's design.

PACA also wishes to acknowledge the generous assistance of John Martin Estates in the printing of this newsletter.



# Celebrating the History of our Site

## and the efforts of those volunteers who contributed to it.

by Doig Simmonds



*As Doig Simmonds stands down from his active role in PACA, it seems appropriate to cast our gaze back over the last 15 years and celebrate the part played by dedicated volunteers, such as Doig, who have given their time and energy to develop and improve the site we enjoy today.*

*Most plotholders are probably quite unaware of just how much work goes on behind the scenes to provide the funds and labour for the communal aspects of our site. Doig Simmonds played a huge part in this process and in the site becoming self-managing. Next time you open the gate, walk the road, connect your hose, read the notice board or use the toilet, spare a thankful thought for the efforts of those whose dogged efforts provided them.*

*As Doig has been at the centre of PACA for so many busy years, we invited him to look back on his achievements and on those of so many other volunteers. We offer him our thanks and best wishes for many years of hassle free gardening. We hope too that his account will inspire the next generation of Doigs to offer their services.*

### Becoming self managing

In 1998 a working group of plot-holders was formed to consider the proposal that our site might be the first in Ealing to go fully self-managing. Roger Davies was, at that time, the Council appointed site manager, his responsibility being to distribute plots among applicants, make sure Council Rules and obligations were followed and to collect fees. It was through Roger that the Council Officers were first contacted. At this time Judy Harris was a Council employee and adviser on the future management of Borough Allotments. It was her paper on this subject which gave us a draft plan to work from. The original members of our advisory group were: myself, my wife Ruth, Christine Hullah, Charles Dunn, Roger Davies, Judy Harris and several others.

### Negotiations

The first task of negotiating with the Council fell to myself and Roger. Many meetings later, a self-management plan was formed consisting of a constitution, rules, a contract and the formation of a management committee of which I was the first Chairman following election at the first AGM in 2000. Here it is interesting to note that the already established, Pitshanger Allotments And Gardens Society which operates the Trading Hut were not in favour of self management, and wished to have no part of it. This is one of the reasons they remain a separate business entity. I was told many times that self-management would be a dismal failure because "you could never trust the Council. Nothing could be further from the truth. Once the PACA was established, we had nothing but help and good will from Council Officers.

### Building the road



The Old Road

One of my first acts as chairman was to obtain a sizeable grant from the Council for the rebuilding of the road-way round the site.

It is good to remember that this road-way project was managed almost entirely by Cian McCambridge who spent many hours working alone clearing the layer of weeds and mud that had buried the original track. It was only after lengthy appeals to the membership that we finally managed to get a good group of volunteers to help Cian. The Council grant provided the hoggins, which is the sandy coloured stuff that you see on the road-way today.

This required plenty of rolling with an extremely heavy petrol driven roller which Roger seemed particularly fond of doing. Cian, who has good carpentry skills, also built the notice board and helped considerably with shelving in the storage garage.

### Empty plots and lots of strimming

Although up to 1973 the site was fully occupied with a one year-plus waiting list, during the mid to late seventies allotments appeared to go out of favour and about one half of the site became derelict. Once we became self-managing we had a big clearance job on our hands. The derelict area was being sought by the Parks Department who were in a land-grab phase so it was imperative for us to show that a demand for plots existed.

The Council also provided man-power and heavy machinery to help us clear those parts of the site which had become overgrown with brambles.

It was at this period of low demand that we encouraged existing plot holders to take on as many plots as they could manage. This is the reason that you find certain plot holders with a large number of plots today. We are thankful to them, otherwise we could have lost part of our site. The clearance period took some time and I particularly remember Christine Hullah wielding a strimmer with great skill and energy day after day. She seemed to have cleared at least one third of the Northern end of the site, entirely by herself, of heavy brambles and weeds.



Clearing the land for cultivation



## Victims of Torture

Another significant feature of our site was the Medical Foundation for the Victims of Torture which, under the guidance of Jenny Groot, used the site for the rehabilitation of persons who had suffered at the hands of various totalitarian regimes in other parts of the world; mainly Somalia, Kurdistan, Kuwait and Iraq. They termed our site "The Hospital with the Blue Sky."

The Foundation has benefitted us in several ways. Not only has it made our site significantly multi-cultural but has contributed to our success in getting grants from the following bodies: Awards for All and the City Bridge Trust.



Jenny Groot

## A massive grant

The Investigating Officer from the City Bridge Trust was particularly impressed by the multicultural nature of our membership and that we encouraged young mothers with children to have plots a well. On the day he inspected us it was sunny and alive with young people and children, including one of the disabled beds with attendant plot-holder in a wheel chair. We got a massive grant which allowed us to fence the site, get new gates, build a self-composting waterless toilet and get an equipment garage. The new toilet was obtained after I spent some time at the Centre for Alternative Energy in Wales. We needed one that did not require electricity or water and one that was disabled-friendly too.

## Raised Beds



Building the new raised beds

One of my pet projects has been the establishment of raised beds for the less-abled. I built the first ones and got them assembled and wood treated by a local business club that was looking for charitable work to do during one week-end. These beds lasted about eight years and have been replaced entirely by Robert Reynolds; my last act as chairman was to get a grant from the Pitshanger Community Association for top soil so that these beds can be properly filled with decent material.

## No more hosepipe bans

Probably the feature most appreciated by plot-holders today is the fact that we have a bore-hole providing us with an apparently limitless supply of water at low cost. Prior to this there were always water problems and often hosepipe bans in the summer months. I can remember watering after midnight, when at last the pressure came back. For this project our thanks must go exclusively to Roger Davies. Roger and I did much research into suitable systems but Roger did the bulk of the negotiations and especially the raising of the finance which came mainly from plot-holder loans.



Laying down new pipework

## Many Helpers

The site has had considerable help from individual plot holders over the years; Trevor Townsend contributed his engineering and welding skills, Charles Vaughan-Jones has helped enormously with advice based on his farming and quantity surveying experience. I particularly remember depending on his expertise when we had an underground water leak on site; Ollie Glennon helped countless plot holders digging, strimming or rotavating their plots; Cyril from the Trading Hut also helped many plot-holders with digging.



PACA has always relied on volunteers

## Community Activity

There was a time up to the late eighties when we had many more social events: summer barbecues and the Garden Show. These are now being revived and I'm glad to see this spirit of help is not entirely dead to day. There are still people who help the community and it is vital to encourage this.

## Role of Chair

No chairman is any good without a very supportive committee and thankfully this I have had on every occasion I have been in this position. I have stepped down on two occasions, first when Nick Vanson took over then again when Brian Field agreed to take on the chairmanship. However the role does not suit everybody. Diplomacy is key and our present chairman certainly has this quality.

## My Thanks

Above all, of course, I want to thank all the plot-holders past and present who have supported me too. Also those who have been super-critical - nothing like the odd sharp remark to keep you on your toes!

*Doig*



## Plot 'Inheritance' and multiple-plot tenancy

Generally, when a plot holder at Pitshanger vacates a plot, it is offered to the next person on the waiting list, tenancies not being in the 'gift' of a plot holder to pass on to family or friends. However the committee has recently been considering the whole situation regarding plot transfer or 'inheritance'.

It has been decided that in a situation where more than one person, who is not a relative, works on a plot the co-worker needs to become an Associate Member of our Association and register his/her interest in a particular plot at

[mpaice@pitshanger.net](mailto:mpaice@pitshanger.net)

Associate membership costs £20 for the

first year, which pays for a gate key that may be sold back to the Association for the same amount and £10 p.a. thereafter.

Similarly a close family member who works on a plot needs to register as above that they may wish to take over a tenancy in the future. If they are not key holders, they do not need to be Associate members.

A maximum of ten rods/poles (two plots) may be inherited in the manner indicated above. Tenants may not be aware that as our plots are half the size of plots on many other sites we allow plot holders to rent two plots. This is achieved by putting your name on the

waiting list, which means a considerable wait. Current tenants may only jump the queue if an adjacent plot becomes available and they have been on the waiting list for over six months.

Tenants may also wonder why a few tenants are allowed to rent more than two plots. The reason is historical. Several years back our site was grossly under-cultivated and tenants were encouraged to take on extra plots to discourage the Council from considering the site for another purpose. Their efforts were successful and thanks to them we have an extremely popular and well-cultivated site.

*Malcolm Paice, Lettings Officer*

## Meet our Chairman

David Housego acquired his plot back in the summer of drought in 1976. Like many young couples, David and his wife struggled with the demands of family, full time jobs and the plot which they could only get to at weekends. "I certainly understand the difficulties people can face when they finally get their longed for plot" says David. During the 90s David began to devote more time to his plot. "I began to appreciate the peace and refreshing escape from mental pressure that tending my plot gave me", he reflected.

Since retiring from his job as an



**PACA Chairman, David Housego**

architect four years ago, David has been even more attentive to his plot and was happy to join the Committee in 2011. He was a little more reluctant to accept the role of chair: "I'm beginning to enjoy it a bit more now" he admits. Like all of us, David often feels frustrated by the problems of couch grass, flooding and pigeons, but his healthy crops of peas, beans onions and tomatoes more than compensate. Our Chairman is certainly someone who understands both the pleasures and pains of allotment holding.

## What do you do with your surplus produce?

Does it go straight into the compost? Do you ever wish you could give some to people who struggle to afford fresh food?

Elizabeth Cave is hoping to find a way to link growers with would-be eaters. Ideas, please, to Elizabeth. Come and talk to her on plots 74/75, or phone her on (020) 8997 0753 or email:

[elizcave84@btinternet.com](mailto:elizcave84@btinternet.com)

## Summer Fun

Chantelle, our Social Secretary, is organising a "Beautiful Shed" competition over the next few months. For rules and an entry form, please email her at:

[social@pitshanger.net](mailto:social@pitshanger.net)

The closing date for entries is **31st August**.

Our Summer Show and Barbecue are being revived and will take place on **Sunday, 1st September**.

Keep your eye out for notices publicising both events.



**50 Sheds of Grey - NOT !**