

## Elmcross Allotment Holders' Association ANNUAL REPORT June 2019

Few of us will have experienced a season of gardening challenges like last year's. The cold and lingering wet spring of 2018 was superseded by one of the hottest summers most of us will ever remember, and that includes '75 and '76 (for those of us old enough to recall prolonged hosepipe bans and watering our gardens with the soapy contents of washing-up bowl or twin tub).

Potential for landscapes of sandy desert at the upper and lower ends of Elm Street became a thing of the past as a knight in shining armour mounted upon a powerful steed (ie Simon Powell in mini-digger) excavated trenches for new water pipes, allowing gardeners at either extremes of the site to have water on tap without having to join at least three full hosepipe lengths or trudge yards with heavy cans. The timing could not have been more welcome nor finely tuned, since summer had begun in earnest with barely a drop of rain falling for weeks once the new taps were installed. Only the wet spring had kept the threat of water restrictions at bay. Other dragons were also tamed; tenants who had felt the fiery breath and footprint of earth-moving builder's vehicles on their northern edges – a health and safety issue - were protected by a series of chains, linking a row of stout, wooden posts.

Shacklecross was not without similar blessings, as the Draycott Road gate, a longtime issue of cumbersome, heavy metal with a stubborn refusal to line up and a penchant for trapping lady gardeners, was magically transformed into a new, shining pair, befitting the entrance to such a beautiful haven.

The Fairy Godmother involved in these transformative works was Doreen Webster, who had agreed to take on this Cinderella of Parish Council committees, making a stunning difference to allotments within weeks. Although admitting that there was a lot to learn, she spent hours regularly visiting the sites to get a feel for the place, met and befriended gardeners, liaised and championed the gardener's cause. Here was someone who actually enjoyed the atmosphere of these special green spaces and the tranquility and well-being they promote. Another new addition on Elm Street to promote relaxation came in the shape of a beautiful bench, installed by Mr Frank Case in memory of his late wife Anniki, a long-term allotment gardener who had 'loved this place.'

But, back to work! Once established, crops such as carrots and beetroot did well, their roots searching deep into parched ground to find water, while damp-loving peas were a disaster, preferring typical showery British summers. The extended heat and sunshine necessitated regular watering, but the pay-off meant grass-mowing and weeding were minimal. Was it merely imagination, or did life become slower and more relaxed, with gardeners having more time to chat and hence a greater feeling of cohesion? A box affixed to the fence by the Elm Street gate imploring passers-by to help themselves to fresh surplus produce proved a great success and, despite its being constantly replenished, drew one comment from a tenant that it was 'always empty!' A resounding endorsement, then!

One major casualty of this most accelerated season however, was cancellation of the Annual Show, a decision which the overruled secretary was most unhappy about, especially as other local allotment groups had gone ahead with theirs. The late decision had been based upon a possible lack of entries, given that many crops had failed whilst others had been over early, their usual growing period speeded up in a summer of intense heat. Whether this factor had any influence on the competitive aspects of the Erewash in Bloom competition is debatable, but the two sites tied for equal 3rd place in the Best Allotment Site category, continuing the friendly rivalry between us and acting as a reminder that we could all do just a little bit better!

Elmcross would like to record a huge vote of thanks to the Parish Council and in particular to Doreen Webster, whose efforts to both improve the sites and to let vacant plots have made such a difference to the many of us who invest so much of our time working on our own 'piece of heaven.'

Julie Smith,  
Secretary, Elmcross Allotment Holders' Association