

The HAA Lock-Down Chronicle. 2020

Hi All,

Some of you will have read in the national media that many of our more important archives and museums have been appealing for records and testimonies of Britain's experiences during the ongoing Covid pandemic. The plan is to leave a permanent archive of this time - at a personal level - for our descendants' benefit, and for future historians.

Hence we at the HAA have decided to contribute to this fascinating national archive. Our own focus being that of a small dedicated group of allotment gardeners from one fairly typical English village. Our offerings will include individual comments; hopefully the inner feelings of some, and photographs from as many of you prepared who are prepared to contribute. *(Our intention is to incorporate this document into Geoff Roynon's HAA website so that eventually it will have a wider readership.)*

To get this project underway, Cath, Chris, Sophie, Gaetan and myself, have been busily photographing each of our current plots, ideally with our tenants working on them and to establish a photographic record for each plot.

Because it's so large we've had to convert it to the PDF format for mailing & consequently it's locked and cannot be altered by recipients: only Chris and myself have the "open" file.

Please look at your own entry and decide whether you would like to add another picture of yourselves actually working the plot, or are unsatisfied with what is already there and would like to insert a photo of your own choice. If so, then please send your corrections to me, quoting plot number, and I will get Chris to amend the main (open) file.

Of importance for the historical record, below each entry will be space for for your own comments and, especially if you feel able, what your own inner feelings have been during this time of great uncertainty: sadly an uncertainty unequalled during most of our own lifetimes. When these are complete we will insert them below your photos. However, should anyone feel diffident over publicly airing their innermost thoughts, we will have an "Anonymous Contributions" sub-file (which we will privately authenticate before submitting it.)

It now seems certain that the longer-term effects of this pandemic (and its undoubted recurrence) will change forever many of the ways in which we live our lives and, if this national project is successful, future generations will be able to understand what we all experienced and how we felt about what was happening. So do please contribute!

Fiona (HAA Chair)

The Lock-Down Chronicle 2020

First up; the Children's' Box Garden plot up on the bank by the container.

The comments below are by Frances, Kathryn's daughter; with Poppy - Wendy's daughter (plot 20), & Charlie, Kathryn's young son. A whole new generation of gardeners...!

Childrens' Allotment – The Raised Beds at top of the top of the Hill

(From Frances Goodliffe – July 2020)

“At the top of the hill we took in the raised beds and planted some seeds in. So far, I have a flowering cosmos, flowering cornflowers, an ornamental gourd, flowering tomatoes, a nasturtium, gazanias, stock, marigolds, verbascum, sweet peas, onions and massive sunflowers!

Charlie has some carrots, a nasturtium, flowering cornflowers, some cosmos, courgettes, a sunflower, onions and runner beans.

The shared raised bed has strawberries, cornflowers, onions, verbascum (though we are not sure if they are verbascum or cornflowers) and a sunflower.

Poppy has some sunflowers, marigolds, cornflowers, verbascum, cosmos, a poppy, sweet peas and nasturtiums”.

Frances, Poppy and Charlie Summer 2020



Frances!



Poppy and Frances taking a rest break!



This is what our beds looked like when we had finished weeding them



Bug hotel and Charlie



Frances' raised beds



We have made some bunting to decorate the boxes



Charlie and Frances painting the boxes

The HAA log hives above the container unit.

Although strictly speaking not garden plots, these log hives add much value to the pollination potential of our site.



These massive sections of condemned beech trees came from Headington Hill House in August 2015.

*(More details of this project are in the *Origins of the Horspath Allotments* document, page 26, on the HAA website)*

Credits: *the majority of these photographs were taken by Cath Riley unless otherwise noted. Thanks Cath!*

Plot 1. Jan and John (before and after clean up!)



Plot 2. Ann and Paul



Plot 3. Sonia, Mike & Abel



Plot 4. Dave & Pete (*formerly a waste plot due to previously using a heavy tractor to try to drain it, but which had the opposite effect by leaving deep waterlogged ruts! After much reclamation work we were finally able to bring it into cultivation*)



Chris is beginning to break in their new plot for them with a heavy American rotavator.



Pete with the HAA rotavator to break up the clods left by Chris.
(Chris and Dave sitting in judgement...)



Pete & Dave's first season's harvest from a previously unusable swampy plot.

Plot 5. Cath & Julie



“Weeding the onion plot on the 23rd April - needing a good downpour! “



“Plenty of gooseberries and the first pots of jam !!”



“Potatoes, carrots, lettuce and beetroot have been planted. Hoping for some good results! “



Retrospect: Cath winning the first Village Show Cup in 2015 at the post-show dinner at the Chequers. *(credit Chris Pym)*

Plot 6. Judy



First fruits of last season. And more to come from 2020!



“My strawberries have been very good this year.
The attached represents 2.2kg from my 3X2m section.”



Panorama Plot 6

Plot 7. Becky & Nige (need more pics!)



Becky watering in the heat.

Plot 8. Sheila & Pete



Plot 9. Susan & Graham



Plot 10. Lindie & Mike





Plot 11. Kathryn & Phil





Plot 12 & 13. Jo & Steve





Plot 14 Fiona & Tim





Hannah helping her mother

(NB: no children were harmed in the making of this picture...)

Plot 15 Gordon & Diddy



Plot 16 Fiona's wood-lot; Sadly useless for gardening as it floods badly in Winter.
Now used for temporary log storage.

Plot 17 Sophie & Gaetan *(credit: photos by Sophie or Gaetan)*



Gaetan tilling with HAA rotavator, after Sophie had broken the plot in from waste with the same machine



Sophie with their “new” shed: in position. she towed it up by Landrover from a disused empty plot down by the gate. A result!



The “new” shed turning the corner on its skid at the top of the hill, en route from its previous location lower down by the road hedge. Sophie adjusting the tow rope.

Comment from Sophie & Gaetan:-“We now have an infra-red trail camera & have started using it to capture the surprising amount of wildlife that roam our plots after sundown & before any of us get out of bed...”

Here are the links to what we've seen so far on the track outside plot 17. Fiona will post more of these as we get them.”

Badgers -

<https://youtu.be/oWMm5Rindsc>

Fox -

<https://youtu.be/EJCXKydaPzU>

Fox -

<https://youtu.be/-v61opmpRYU>

Fox and deer -

https://youtu.be/XsfUV_jp_L4

Fox deer and rabbit -

<https://youtu.be/tLk76SUF5yI>



R & R...!



Sophie helping to build their polytunnel

“Cet animal est très méchant: Quand on l’attaque, il se défend..”

(This animal is very dangerous: when attacked it defends itself..)

(Old French Proverb)



Barbecue pub area being put to a more, non-alcoholic, civilised use.



An elated Sophie towing the shed backwards towards their plot along the top track. (*Gaetan's photo*).

NB:

Apart from this main file entry, a separate, more comprehensive entry for Plot 17 will be added later to give much greater coverage of their technical pioneering on this formerly derelict plot and an explanation of their thinking for the interest of a new generation of gardeners. And perhaps give food for thought for us older ones!

Plot 18. Paul P (Need pics!)

Plot 19 and 23. Mel & Bob (Need pics!)

Plot 20. Hillary & Barry



Plot 21. Lynn & John





John's wonderful display of Sweet Peas

Plot 22. Geoff



Plot 24. Rob (Need pics!)

Plot 25 overgrown and swampy. Not used until we can afford drainage work.

Plot 26. Peter



Plot 27. overgrown and swampy. Not used at present.

Plot 28. Chris G.





Frost!

Plot 29 overgrown swampy waste. Not used at present.

Plot 30 overgrown swampy waste. Not used at present.

Plot 31. April & Mark (Need pics!)

Plot 32. Pollinator Garden & Bee-Hive (Chris & Mary)



Home-made bee-hive with working colony on pollinator plot in 2014.

(By 2020 the hive was protected by a barrier against our badgers, who will totally wreck it to get at the honey.)

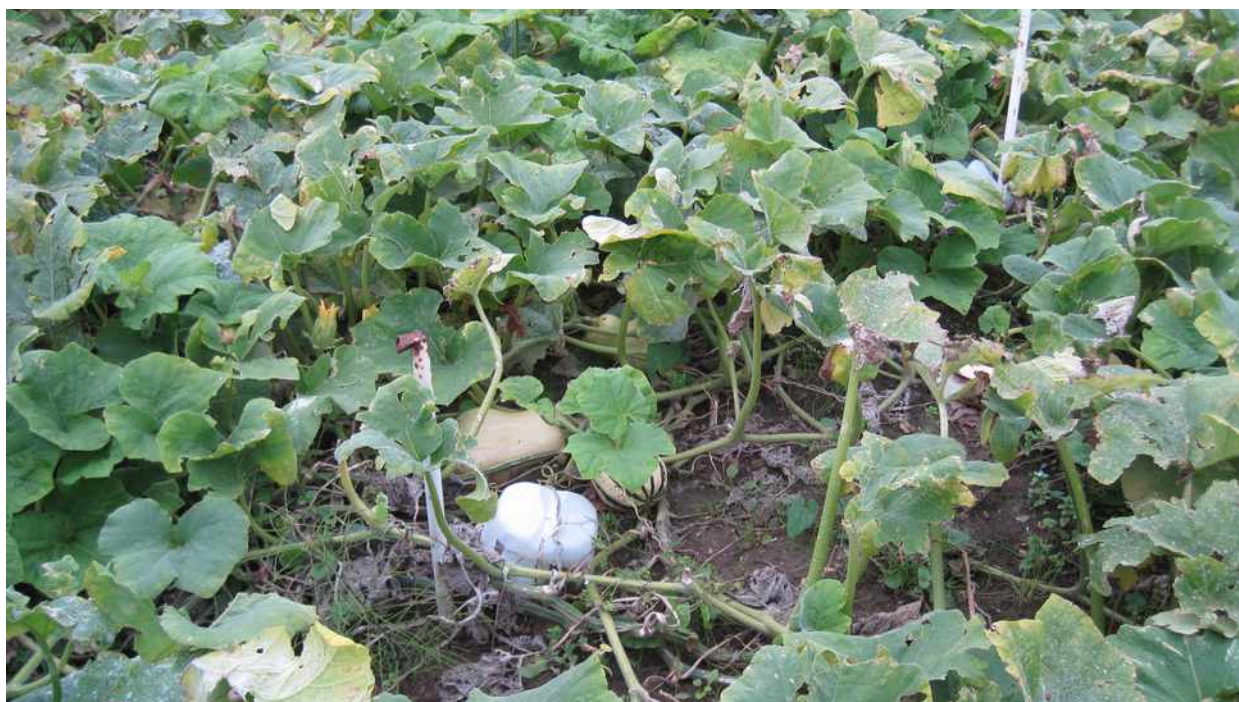
Glebe Plots. Mary & Chris.



Squash bed ready to be planted



Plants going in...



Harvesting under way. 02/09/2020



A small part of Mary's 2020 squash harvest. Butternut & Crown Prince
A total of 315 lbs (143kg) all told!



Old Retainer (*sic*) doing disused Glebe Plot maintenance in July until the HAA later obtained the lease from the Diocese. These then became new HAA plots for incoming tenants. (below)



The same plots ploughed over with the first new tenants starting to plant up on 18th September. (*Lindsay's future cut flower garden on plots in the foreground.*)

Plot 41 &



My Own Plot!!



Beginnings !



Rural view towards Garsington



Rabbit fence and gate up!

FURTHER ADDITIONAL AND PERSONAL COMMENTS

Comment by Chris P:-

“During the Govt. lock-down we really carried on up here as we've always done for the last 25 years since we “retired “ (whatever *that* means..) – apart from social distancing with friends and very carefully disinfecting the main gate's lock with a bleach solution.

We'd arrive at about 2pm, do “essential” - (Govt approved!) -work, and leave about 4.30pm. Later, as the rabbit & pigeon population exploded & crops on many plots were being damaged, I did my gamekeeper bit (with regret..). The remains of the offenders would then be recycled: i.e.,used to feed the foxes and Red Kites and by way of using them as bait for Sophie & Gaetan's trail camera. (*See Plot 17's Trail Cam notes*)

But I felt there was a noticeable atmosphere of latent fear in the air from nearly all of us on the allotments at this time, especially those in the higher-risk group. Very well concealed, edgy, but *very* definitely there. The UK Media had inevitably fuelled a huge sense of uncertainty across the country, with its daily mounting death counts and horror stories. Not knowing if a slight morning cough would have you or your loved ones in the mortuary by sundown, is not easy to deal with on a rational basis...

(To me, it was a horribly chilling reminder of the 1960-90 Cold War, when the friendly local siren at Marston promised us a four-minute siren warning of incoming Russian hydrogen bomb rockets.... Hard to bring up two small daughters in that nerve-racking atmosphere of the 1970s and not go crazy: but somehow we did... I think...)

According to the Media, there were over half a million dead world-wide by July 9th 2020. By 20th October the world-wide death rate was 1.12 Million and rising... 40,000 deaths in the UK; and rising.

On the bright side, farmer Dave Parsler from Garsington was able to deliver that day our much-needed dung at £45 per load (about one ton).

We keep calm and carry on.. Sort-of..

(In comparison, the Hong-Kong flu of 1968 killed over 30,000 UK citizens & 80,000 in the US, world-wide over one million died. Source:- [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)31201-0/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)31201-0/fulltext) I'd just got married the previous year and rather missed the whole thing..!)

However, only one of our allotment colleagues, as far as we know, suffered (badly) from the C-19 virus; he was bed-ridden and quarantined, but thankfully made a full recovery after several weeks.

The main memory for me though is of the utter peace and quiet we briefly enjoyed. Clean air, very few passing vehicles, and absolutely *no* aeroplanes or helicopters. Absolutely wonderful while it lasted! A time to rethink many things...

Mary writes:-

“The constant uncertainty, anxiety and fear felt (and still being felt still in late October) by many, and certainly by me, are difficult to deal with at times.

The other thing that is important for me is that I feel that we are very lucky indeed to have both a garden at home and an allotment where we could and can go to get much needed fresh air, exercise, relaxation and distraction from our anxieties, with the big added bonus of fresh of fruit and vegetables as a result of our labour and toil.

Above all we are very fortunate that being retired we do not to have to worry about our jobs, or if we can pay our very modest bills. But because of our age we are in a higher risk group, hence the much increased levels of caution and care that we are taking daily. I am taking the whole pandemic very seriously.

Also I very much miss the lack of contact with friends, colleagues and acquaintances from church and my voluntary work at the Nuffield Hospital, yet feel lucky we still do see some friends on the allotment; at the appropriate distances! The vital importance, not only of the front line workers in NHS and Police, but also the shop workers and lorry drivers, who work tirelessly to ensure our daily supplies, I have come to appreciate them much much more than I did before.

Overall I try to concentrate daily on the positives and all the things that I CAN do and savour them rather than on the ones that I cannot.”

Plot 17 – Further Comments by Gaetan and Sophie Staples

(MS Word closed-source spacing & unchangeable in Open Office...: -)

Unlike many during 2020, we've been fortunate enough to be *relatively* unaffected by Covid-19 and lockdown. We're both able to work remotely from home, and although work has been extremely stressful at times, we consider ourselves lucky that we still have jobs and are both healthy.

We have a very small garden at home and are surrounded by neighbours who are in a similar situation, so the allotment has provided us with a much needed place to escape to, making the last six months so much more enjoyable. We would finish work and head over to the allotment for the evening and often stay until the sun had set. Sometimes we brought our dinner, or at the weekend a picnic lunch to enjoy too. We found it such a mindful activity, working on the plot building things, weeding, digging or planting - you forget what is going on in the world. We are so grateful to have this on our doorstep and we now think of our plot as an extension of our garden. We are also very lucky to have such friendly allotment neighbours and have been overwhelmed by the advice and assistance that has been given to us by everyone at the HAA. Here is an overview of some of our mini projects that kept us busy over the 2020 summer season.

Lockdown project 1: polytunnel

After our first polytunnel blew away in 2019 and landed at the other end of the allotment, we decided to build a slightly more substantial version for the summer of 2020. We started just as lockdown began, which made sourcing materials a lot harder than expected since all non-essential shops were shut. Since acquiring the plot in 2019, we've tried our best to reuse/recycle as much as possible - mostly thanks to the generosity of Chris and Mary, who always have 'just the thing' for every project. A neighbour in Garsington gave us the unused water pipe to form

the arches, Chris and Mary supplied scaffold poles for the uprights (and the front door), and timber was sourced from various members of the HAA, family and neighbours. The rest, including the polythene cover and various bits of ironmongery was bought online. It was the perfect way to keep busy during the start of lockdown, especially as the weather was so good. Over a few weekends while we gathered materials, we knocked scaffold poles into the ground, fit the water pipe arches onto the scaffold poles and built a wooden base around it using pallet collars for securing the cover to. The pallet collar base is fixed to each scaffold pole with U bolt exhaust clamps, meaning the whole base can be pulled down to make the polythene tight as and when it begins to get slack. We installed a fold-down potting bench, suspended by chain from the window frame and added a removable polythene lined insert for the window for protection in colder periods.



It was quickly filled with plants, including tomatoes, peppers, chillies, sweetcorn, beans, courgette, chard, strawberries, cucumbers, melons and cucamelons - as well as a nursery for seedlings, using capillary matting trays to keep them moist for a few days between watering. Not everything worked but we had a good crop from most plants, continued to harvest into late September and will hopefully allow us extended growing of some crops over the winter period. A time lapse recording of some of the build can be watched here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfDNg_5hid8



An intrusive wasp...?





Norman Foster would have been jealous!





Lockdown project 2: Solar powered water pump

Situated at a similar elevation to the allotment spring's water tanks, our plot lacks sufficient water pressure to use a hose effectively. As a solution, we installed a 12v water pump in the shed to give the water pressure a slight boost, meaning we no longer had to make repeated trips to the tap to fill up multiple watering cans.

The pump is hooked up to a car battery which is kept topped up by a 10w solar panel (via a charge controller) fixed to the shed roof. The pump is pressure activated, meaning it only pumps water when it detects a change in pressure (i.e. when the watering gun trigger is pulled), keeping water wastage to a minimum.

Neither of us are electrical experts but we installed a similar setup to power lights in our garage at home (no mains power), so it was a satisfying mini project to work on, particularly as it actually worked well and continues to do so.

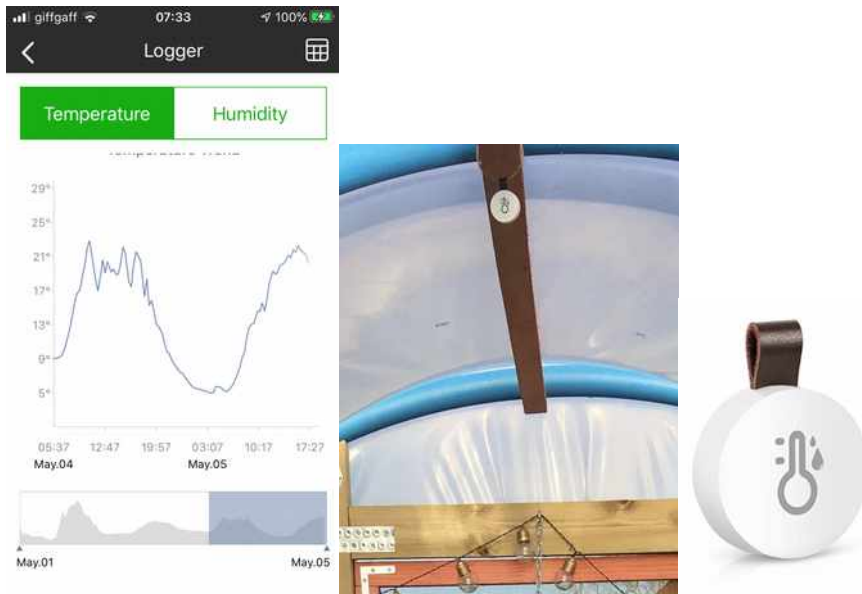




In operation!

Lockdown project 3: temperature sensors

Interested to compare the temperature difference inside and outside of the polytunnel, we bought two wireless thermometers. They were only around £12 each so we're not sure how accurate or robust they are but we're most interested in seeing the max and min temperatures. It got surprisingly cold in the polytunnel (almost freezing), so we may have to put some sort of thermal insulation over winter. It would be interesting to see how the temperatures differ from the top of the allotment to the bottom, as we're aware some plots were affected differently from the late frost this year. We luckily had hardly any, whereas some lower down the hill looked completely frostbitten.



Lockdown project 4: wildlife camera

A joint project with Chris and Mary, we set up a motion-sensor camera to see what kinds of wildlife we get on the allotment after the sun sets. We quickly captured footage of various animals, including deer, fox, badgers, birds, cats, a hare and rabbits - lots and lots of rabbits! Footage is now uploaded to YouTube, as and when interesting animals are recorded: <https://youtu.be/LX3H4cSFiUg>



Lockdown project 5: the weird and wonderful

As well as the 'normal' allotment plants, we experimented this year with a number novelty plants. This included purple potatoes (seed potato kindly given to us by Paul), purple french beans, sweet potatoes, cucamelons, colourful carrots, rainbow corn, cantaloupe melons, indigo cherry drop tomatoes and more. Most were relatively successful, others require more practice (cantaloupe melons, for example). It was a great experiment and we enjoyed the suspense of digging up or tasting some of these things for the first time. It's also fun to grow things you can't buy in Tesco!





LOCKDOWN THOUGHTS. COVID 19. (Cath)

When the Corona Virus happened in March and we all had to stay in I did wonder if we would still be able to visit the allotments. Luckily we could as its classed as a form of exercise.

Its been a 'Godsend' all summer because the weather has been so good with lots of hot sunny days and so we were able to spend more time than usual up there as our cleaning jobs came to an end which gave us lots of spare hours to fill. At first I was a bit apprehensive going through the main gates using rubber gloves to go in and another pair to shut the gate which got on my nerves a bit!! But it was a small price to pay.

I managed to get all my vegetables seeds and plants planted on time and then just waited for them to grow. I planted quite a lot of potatoes as there were rumours of a shortage of food in the coming months due to covid, even setting a space aside in my own garden for a few carrots, potatoes and beetroot.

As the weather was normally hot and sunny there was quite a lot of watering to be done and weeding. My strawberry patch was not too great but I had plenty of beans and the carrots have been a real success along with the sweetcorn beetroot, broccoli, cabbage, onions and shallots. I cleared my onion and shallot patch a bit earlier than normal and had them all stored away by the end of August and I made a few jars of pickled shallots. Also the blackberries were in abundance a bit earlier than usual. Julie and I spent a few hours collecting those and I have made lots of blackberry jelly along with gooseberry jam off my two gooseberry bushes.





In May, Pete and Dave took on the plot next to me. Chris gave them a hand to rotovate it initially and I must say they have made a very good job of it and have had some good crops:-



On July 11th we had a 'site clear up day' cutting back the overgrown paths and the hedges along the side of the road followed by a social distance BBQ.







Disaster struck the 25th August. I fell over in my garden and bashed my left knee on a paving slab surrounding the pond. I waited a week before phoning the doc who then sent me up the hospital for an x-ray, whereupon it was found I had a fractured patella (knee cap) so that was the end of my visits to the allotment and gardening. Another BBQ was arranged for the 30th August, bank holiday, and unfortunately I was not able to attend even though I was offered a lift there and back. I was not going to go and hobble around up there and make matters worse.

For the last six weeks I have been able to tidy up my own garden, not as much as I would have liked and have visited the allotment two or three times. I managed, with help of my two sisters and Julie my daughter, to dig up most of my potatoes and have stored them away in paper sacks and picked a lot of dahlias and zinnias.

Some of a good crop of potatoes



Overgrown Courgettes



Another thing to remember is the marvellous sunsets and the morning sunrise we have experienced this year unfortunately I could not get up the allotment to take these and these were taken in my back garden.





There was a hard frost for a couple of days in May resulting in some frosted potatoes - not mine I might add. Only minor damage and soon recovered.





The flower garden did well with plenty of beautiful dahlias, zinnias and cosmos. The Village show was cancelled this year but I think I may have stood a chance of a first with my dahlias.







We are so lucky to have this view while we are working, or drinking a cold beer, or a glass of wine!!

Cath