

## **Annual General Meeting - November 2022**

### **Site Secretary Report – Site 2**

This past year has certainly been an eventful one, some events rather more pleasing than others. The summer brought wall to wall sunshine for months turning the soil into what can only be described as solid rock.

On the 12th August, the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs issued a statement that parts of South West, southern and central England and the East of England had moved into drought status. Thames Water, which provides water to people living in the Thames Valley and parts of London, confirmed it would announce a hosepipe ban. Rarely had so many different colours and sizes of buckets and watering cans been seen in evidence as there were following that announcement. Activity was feverish as the water butts were emptied and refilled rapidly to irrigate parched vegetables and fruits. Nature, however, eventually saw fit to change all of that by finally sending in the rain clouds that had been absent for so long and life on Site 2 happily resumed its normal, leisurely, relaxed pace.

One good thing that resulted from the perpetual sunshine was the absence of tomato blight although there were one or two apparent sightings of the dreaded brown patches on tomato foliage and stems. Mercifully, these did not appear until the tomato season was almost at an end and, coincidentally, after the reappearance of the long-awaited precipitation. Whether or not we actually had blight remained a moot point.

In the meantime, with the very welcome rains, many of our plot holders were nurturing their prize vegetables and fruits for the Autumn Horticultural Show due to take place on the 10th September. Nobody could have expected the news that was to change the face of history forever. The shock to the nation following the revelation of the Queen's demise on the 8th September was seismic. What followed was a period of national mourning with some loyal citizens processing for upwards of thirty hours for the Queen's Lying-in-State at the Palace of Westminster. As a mark of respect for our late, long serving monarch, the Autumn Show was cancelled without demur from any of our members.

For centuries, Halloween lanterns were carved from turnips. Although small in size, nonetheless, they were very effective. However, as is so often the case in life, they have moved over to make way for progress in the shape of the larger, more dramatic

and capacious pumpkins – a welcome American import. It has been delightful to see so many cucurbita snaking their way across various plots or hanging pendulously from makeshift trellising. Highly variable in shape and size they made their appearances as oval, cylindrical, flattened, globular, scalloped, fusiform, and/or tapering shapes. Their smooth, warty, wrinkled or furrowed skins gradually matured to reveal glorious autumnal colours of yellow, light to dark green, nearly black, cream and/or orange. A great year for pumpkins and the squash family is usually based on the three pillars of cultivation, namely, heat, water and rich soil. However, with the long, hot, dry summer we have had, watering was a problem. It is a testament to the perseverance and diligence of the pumpkin and squash growers, therefore, that they have managed to produce such fulsome growth to herald and brighten up the arrival of our darkening autumn days.

For me, the advent of this autumn has signalled the end of my term as Site 2 secretary. It is with some sadness, therefore, that I now lay down my baton to concentrate more fully on matters closer to home. I shall not forget, however, the warmth with which you welcomed me as your secretary and your voice for which I am extremely grateful.

It has been a pleasure working with my two secretarial peers from Site 3, Vivien Fowler and Ali Linton, while having the support of our indomitable Chair, Helen Finch. The icing on my particular cake, however, has been the privilege of getting to know you all and sharing anecdotes and life stories while you dug, weeded, sowed and harvested.

You will be missed.

*Catherine Maunsell-Bower*