



**Joys of small things**  
**Part One: Making of an allotment**

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## Introduction

To keep busy during the pandemic, and to avoid senseless scrolling of phone on social media (sic) or obsessively watching the news, among other things I started subscribing to Maria Popova's newsletters ( <https://www.brainpickings.org/2019/05/27/oliver-sacks-gardens/> ) during the first lockdown and was really struck by this one which she started with a quote by Oliver Sacks on the Psychological and Physiological Consolations of Nature:

*"In forty years of medical practice, I have found only two types of non-pharmaceutical 'therapy' to be vitally important for patients with chronic neurological diseases: music and gardens."*

and then went on

*"I work like a gardener," the great painter Joan Miró wrote in his meditation on the proper pace for creative work. It is hardly a coincidence that Virginia Woolf had her electrifying epiphany about what it means to be an artist while walking amid the flower beds in the garden at St. Ives. Indeed, to garden — even merely to be in a garden — is nothing less than a triumph of resistance against the merciless race of modern life, so compulsively focused on productivity at the cost of creativity, of lucidity, of sanity; a reminder that we are creatures enmeshed with the great web of being, in which, as the great naturalist John Muir observed long ago, "when we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe"; a return to what is noblest, which means most natural, in us. There is something deeply humanizing in listening to the rustle of a newly leaved tree, in watching a bumblebee romance a blossom, in kneeling onto the carpet of soil to make a hole for a sapling, gently moving a startled earthworm or two out of the way. Walt Whitman knew this when he weighed what makes life worth living as he convalesced from a paralytic stroke: "After you have exhausted what there is in business, politics, conviviality, love, and so on — have found that none of these finally satisfy, or permanently wear — what remains? Nature remains; to bring out from their torpid recesses, the affinities of a man or woman with the open air, the trees, fields, the changes of seasons — the sun by day and the stars of heaven by night."*

At the same time I was doing a lot of walking and learning about living in North Wales with growing interest in nature – having been a city dweller all my life till recently- and realising how privileged we were to be living in beautiful rural North Wales:

### **Countryside living lessons**

*Lambs bleating, sheep baaing  
occasional neigh with horse rider and dogs  
woodpecker on tree, sparrows chirping, and the cockerel  
the distant drone of tractor and the muck spreader on the fields  
and the list grows as she keeps pointing out on daily permitted walk  
never realised how 'noisy' the countryside is, but isn't that lovely  
senses being woken up uncluttered by the city sounds*

*Tomorrow's lesson will be local wild flowers  
walking through 'primroses lane'*

I had already read most of Robert Macfarlane's books, along with many other writers on nature, and then came across James Rebanks' writings and got further interested in environment, and plight of farmers (not the fat landlords, but the real workers).

Long story short all this led to the idea of making an allotment, never having done this before, as a way of connecting with nature and learning something new, partly due to pandemic and partly given retirement.

This is the story of the project, one year later it has taken (some) shape; and what a joy it has been and continues to be. Its the small things, done well, seeing the plants come up over time – you do not see anything for a while and then just when about to give up they come to life, and where time is not just linear but circular as they die and come back again and again, which has made, and continues to, such a difference to one's health and well being. Surrounded by lambs in the field during the season on one side of the wire fence, and tending to the garden on the other side, under the blue skies with gentle clouds has been magical.

## Corner of a field

### (Back to roots)

Easier said than done, where is the land the first question, and when lateral thinking helped as realised that there was (maybe) a possibility in a nearby field where cows and sheep grazed, with some trees including a giant oak at the corner with a small stream by the side, and there was a ramshackle pig sty with a leaky tin roof, full of rotting hay hiding two mummified cats and stingy nettles all around- well, the pig sty had not been used for over 50 years though it was a good hiding place for Simon to play when he was young and his family owned the land and the neighbouring farm house. You see it was Simon who jointly owned the field though let out to a local farmer for grazing; so forewarned by mum, he came to assess what yours truly had in mind.







## Help is on the way

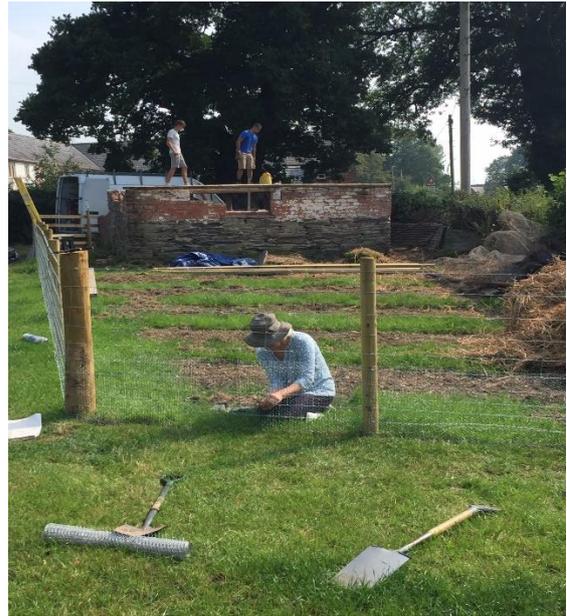
### (in come the workers and out go the animals)

With Simon's approval, things were put into motion and before long, Bryn, the faithful, the reliable, the flexible, the one and only for Herself, came over and made the tut-tut noises, and said be it on your head if you want to develop the pig sty into not just a tool shed for an allotment but also a place for sitting/contemplation, but he would help. But first get the fencing done to keep the animals out!

So step forward Dafyd, son of Gareth, the local farmer, with his machinery and in no time put up a fantastic fence. But there are animals and there are animals- not just sheep and cows but also rabbits, to be kept out and the mutts- lfor and Delyth- to be kept in; surely the dogs will want to help with allotment. Who can disagree: dogs first, second and last motto so got to be dog proof too. Hey ho.







And then Simon led the way, by clearing the overgrowth and Bryn's boys arrived.







Not over yet, more to do, but good start, Brian already been to take down the internal dividing wall and waiting for Eric.....



## Getting ready

(Everyone loves a 'trier')

Not so fast, got to do some work before can start on the garden and vegetables. Ask and you shall be given, or indeed did not even have to ask; the offers flooded in. Brian brought his trusted rotavator- ancient one, only he can operate.



Gareth donated muck and straw to spread



Eric took away metal ware- barb wires of decades and tin roof and brought pellets to make stack



Any guesses who did the pointing- and did not she do well!



and started preparing the ground, in winter, for sowing later



**And then its time for the garden  
(finally!)**

Judith had left some Garden centre vouchers after her stay, and which were handy for buying fruit trees – small allotment but big ambition, so in goes one each of apple, pear, plum and cherry – self fertile ofcourse.



and in go flowers too, gotta have some colour and to keep company during the hard slog when tending to vegetables!



Diana and Susheela donated a head of rhubarb each, planted out of the way, whilst planning rest.



Mary and Graham gave fruit bushes- damsons, goose and tay berries, and brought loads of herbs – though not sure what to do with some of these!





A mystery donor – neighbour from further up the lane - leaves some strawberry bushes!

Robin sends tomatoes – but will need to be kept at home for sun and watering!

And in go the other crops: early potatoes, onion sets, cauliflower, courgettes.....  
and salad stuff.....



and the joys of weeding- forget paying £50/hour to counsellor, get down on knees and weed for mindfulness



and need more flowers : waiting for them, to add more colour.



Not to forget garlic- Iain amused to see it being planted in summer, says always planted in autumn, will believe when see it, so send him the early shoot photo of early shoot:



## A word of warning (and thank you)

Be careful who you tell, as ended up with numerous books on growing vegetables, and flowers and about garden wildlife – to make the most of the communing with nature, whilst on the allotment.



Before and after



**To be continued**

Not over yet – waiting for inspiration on what to plant next!



## Success (and approval)

Simon comes after a year, and gives the thumbs up and helps put up the canes for beans to climb – canes courtesy Paul who has been chopping bamboo in his overgrown garden.



And even the fruits start appearing- cherry and plum (and more wild flowers)



## **So was it worth it?**

### ***Seeking joy***

*You do not pursue, it ensues  
from doing well all you do  
work or pleasure to best of abilities  
not for reward but the act itself  
immersed, focussed, curious  
and before you know it  
you are whistling, smiling  
infecting others and it multiplies  
stop "if this then that" mentality  
this is it and make the most of it, now*

But let us not get too serious here:

### ***We are all philosophers now***

*Outdoing each other  
With wise words  
Outpourings about life  
Yoga, poetry and families  
Lessons learnt  
How to do things  
How not to do them  
Borne out of long experiences  
Worth paying heed  
But  
Do not stop partying yet  
There is life still  
Miles to go....  
Pints to drink....  
Tall tales to tell....  
Dance to the music ...  
and put the world to right*

PS: And gardens to tend to, race between weeds and vegetables, never ending source of joy! And bad poetry to write, and mutts to look after adds Helen.

At this stage, a special mention for the Poetry Group whose support has been helpful during these challenging times, and whose last get together with discussions about Gardens – the theme for next session - gave the idea for compiling this anthology:

***Poetry group during lockdown***

*Not everything is cancelled  
The sun is not cancelled  
indeed it is shining brightly  
Reading is not cancelled  
indeed more enjoyable  
Smiling is not cancelled  
indeed even if you tried  
as one reads the poems  
sent by fellow poetry lovers  
full of fun, life, celebration  
during our virtual session  
each sitting in own garden  
savouring poems, weather, friendship  
Hope is definitely not cancelled  
made of sterner stuff  
we will overcome this too  
and soon.....*

and it was great to be able to meet finally, after nearly 18 months; not on the allotment though but may be soon:



(No, this is not a mistake with duplication- eagle eyed will see the difference! Sorry not all members were able to join that day)

## **The Peace of Wild Things**

When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

***Wendell Berry***

**THANK YOU**  
**to all for your support and keeping me**  
**sane and safe**

*(Do not stop buying vegetables yet!)*

For other writings please see: <https://www.nhs70.org.uk/story/rajan-madhok>