

# Allotment

and Leisure Gardener

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National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners

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## Another new Allotment site for Somerset

It was Early December 2008 when I received a phone call from a village in Somerset named Middlezoy situated on the Somerset levels in the Historic Sedgemoor area, the call by now a very familiar one asking if I would be able to attend a meeting to discuss the provision of allotments. The meeting was arranged, and on a cold dark night many of the villagers who were interested in having an allotment turned up together with Parish Councillors.

It was soon apparent to me that this group of people meant business, within a short time a working committee was formed and money was collected to join the NSALG, I gave my usual parting challenge. — Aim to be planting spuds by next Easter.

Amongst the group that evening was the son of a local farmer who is also a Parish Councillor. He felt that he may be able to persuade his family to consider leasing some land for allotments.

Over the Christmas period a lot of hard work went on behind the scenes between the Chairman of the newly formed Middlezoy Allotment Society Mr Ian Collier and the Secretary Mrs Lynda Robinson with involvement from the Parish Council who were very supportive through their Chairman. But as is becoming the norm it's the District Councils who often insist that a "change of use order" is required, and it can take some time to convince them that this is not the case. However good sense soon prevailed and a second Battle of Sedgemoor was averted!

It was the Chairman of the Parish Council who rang me early in February to ask if I would be able to attend a meeting between the farmer and his family, the Chairman of the Society and himself. The meeting took place in the very pleasant

surroundings of a warm farmhouse parlour, after a short introduction and discussion regarding the best location provisional terms were agreed over a nice cup of hot coffee.

Later that morning we visited the proposed site and I could not believe just how well situated this site was. It lay in about 2.5 acres of flat grassland, good rectangular shape, good access gateways, extremely well maintained perimeter hedge, water in the field and central to the village.

The agreement was that the farmer would let the land to the Parish who in turn would let to the Society who would self manage the site and let the plots to their members, the NSALG were able to help produce all the various leases, taking into consideration the farmers wishes regarding the type of sheds, exclusion of glass, carpet; use of water and general maintenance of the hedges etc.

All the necessary documentation and arrangements were in place by the 28th February 2009. With lots of hard work from the committee the plots were pegged out, lots/plots were drawn, agreements signed, rents taken, and a start was made, and once again within days this plain field was transformed into an allotment site.

"The power of the people" is indeed truly a remarkable thing and in this case some luck, good fortune and the sun did shine on this village, but only after a lot of hard work by all concerned, I know that given its location, detailed and planned layout and excellent management team this will be a model site well worth a visit in future years.

Allan Cavill

## The creation of Middlezoy Allotment Society

Allan Cavill, Regional Representative of the South West received this letter recently from one of his members.

Dear Allan,

Quite frankly, I never thought that I would be in this position, not in my wildest dreams, but I must say it's a very pleasant place to be in and even more pleasurable when I am on my allotment.

This is all thanks to yourself and the wonderful organization to which we all belong to, The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners.

This story all began a few years ago when my husband Karl and I lived in Rockwell Green where we had an allotment. We were not there very long because we moved house, we never even managed to harvest a crop. We got as far as clearing our plot which was overgrown with about 4 feet of weeds, planted some cabbages and then we left. We were sad to leave but we were happy in the thought that whoever took it on did so in a better state than we did.

We missed our allotment and had hankered for one ever since then. Many a time I would moan to my father-in-law who is Chairman of Middlezoy Parish Council and one day he came up with a simple suggestion. He told me that if I could get six names together then the Council are obliged to provide an allotment. He said 'you could also get hold of David Boyland your neighbour and Ian Collier, you know that architect chap, who lives by the bus shelter, they have also shown some interest in getting allotments too'.

I needed no further prompting, the next time I saw David, we got chatting and he told me he had tried to get some allotments in Westonzoyland, a neighbouring village, but was unsuccessful even though he had sufficient interested people. Quite frankly he lacked support from the Parish Council and most important of all, a site.

A little downhearted, I then contacted Ian who suggested we put a flyer in the village shop to gauge if there was any genuine local interest.

Within a week I rang Ian and said 'Got any names then'. He replied 'No not one'. To which I burst out laughing and said 'Well I have ten!'



Basically I asked everyone I knew including our local primary school. I made a list of our names and I wrote to the Parish Council on the 13th of October 2008 and brought the matter up for discussion at the next meeting. In the meantime Ian contacted the Allotment Society.

It was at this meeting that James Pring, a Parish Councilor and local farmer voiced an opinion that his parents might be interested in letting the parish some land for this purpose.

Everything looked very promising, we had the names, a supportive parish council and possibly a site, all in the space of about 3 weeks, quite unbelievable I thought, all being well we could be digging next autumn.

We had our first official meeting arranged by Ian Collier, now our chairman, on the 8th of December 2008. This is when we first met you Allan - NSALG front man in the South West. You gave us novices lots of guidance, support, direction and excellent reference points on many occasions. From that meeting we formed the "Middlezoy Allotment Society". We formed a temporary committee and decided to become affiliated to The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners Limited. It was one of the best decisions made, all thanks to Ian, our chairman. It was at this meeting attended by James Pring that we were offered a small field near our local pub. He had checked with D.E.F.R.A and there were no problems with their organisation concerning this. This is a very important issue if you are a farmer, failure to notify D.E.F.R.A. that you are letting any land could incur massive penalties, with your subsidies.

At our next meeting on the 12th of January 2009, we formed a grant sub-committee; our two ladies; Barbera Collier and Rachel Jones are doing a brilliant job. They have just been notified that we have been awarded a grant for £500 to purchase an allotment office. From this meeting we opened a bank account and wrote a constitution, again with help from N.S.A.L.G

### January 21st 2009.

This was a BIG DAY. Meeting Mervin Pring, his wife Christine, Ian Collier, Allan Cavill and Vernon Robinson. Change of site, bigger field 2.5 acres. Initially I thought, 'what are we going to do with that amount of land?' But it had hedging all around it, and two accesses. The lease would be made between Mr and Mrs Pring and Middlezoy Parish Council. The council would then sub-let it to us. N.S.A.L.G prepared the agreements.

### February 11th 2009.

Not very long ago at a committee meeting at Ian and Barbera's Vernon Robinson reported from a meeting with Mr. Pring that we needed to sort out the water with Wessex Water. Ian prepared some very professional plans of the proposed allotments. We decided what plan to adopt.

### February 21st 2009.

We priced and purchased timber to make pegs to mark out plots. Karl, my husband made 180, it took him 4 hours but it was far cheaper than buying them ready made. We also bought 22,300 feet of round bale twine for less than £12. Bargain.

### February 22nd 2009.

Ian, Barbera, Karl and myself spent the day marking out the plots, we walked miles. Barbera and I got sore fingers tying string. Thirty one plots marked out. Barbera brought out the most divine homemade chocolate cake. We sat in the middle of the field and ate the lot.

### February 26th 2009.

Meeting at the Methodist Hall, Middlezoy. Designation of plots, and collection of money and Kings Seed orders.

### February 27th 2009.

WE STARTED DIGGING!!!! We did it! Middlezoy has its own allotments. Yippeee! We are digging in spring, unbelievable.

We marked out a further two plots making a total of 33. We have managed to let all of these and currently have 2 names on the waiting list.

Thank you Allan for all that you have done for us, you have worked tirelessly on our behalf.

Kind Regards

Linda Robinson (Secretary)

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