

Secret Gardens (Lady Road Allotments)

By Peter Wright M.B.E., Chairman, Lady Road Allotments

Tucked way between Newington Cemetery and the railway line is an oasis of calm, vegetables, flowers and wild life. The well-hidden entrance off Lady Road is a foretaste of the treasure inside. The flower filled beds open into the allotment site, which is shaped as a lozenge, so the plots are not the standard shape but fit into the landscape. On the cemetery side the trees provide shelter from the easterly winds and the Pow Burn provides water for the fruit trees which grow on its bank. Above the burn on top of the Pow Burn Sewer the plot holders have built greenhouses and laid out vegetable beds, as it is always that bit warmer there catching the winter sun and retaining heat in the granite stones.

The land originally belonged the railway, used for storage during construction of the line, and then for their employees. One of the legacies from the railway construction is that dreaded weed, horsetail, it was deliberately planted on the embankment to stabilise and compact the soil and now it has invaded the whole site.

Walking along the main path, you can see many varieties of birds, a kingfisher, heron and a pair of mallards frequent the burn with wagtails both yellow and pied. The trees harbour the curse of the fruit growers, pigeons, causing us to net the produce, erect bird scarers and hope that our resident fox likes pigeon pie.

At far end of the site is the communal area, scene of committee meetings and BBQ's. Developed from a derelict plot by two enthusiastic plot holders, it was one of the factors that the Keep Edinburgh Growing judges took into account when they declared Lady Road Allotments the best site in the Edinburgh area. At the awards ceremony in the City Chambers on 7th Sept. two plot holders received the award from Bill Summers Chairman of Keep Scotland Beautiful. This was the second year in succession that Lady Road had taken first place.



Allotments in Edinburgh have a high profile both in the community, there is a city wide waiting list of 900, with 135 potential plot holders wait at Lady Road, and within the Council who in April this year opened the first purpose built organic allotment site in Scotland at Bridgend Farm opposite Inch Park. The standard of gardening on the plots is rising and one of the benefits of global warming is the more exotic crops which are grown, this year on the plots we have grapes, blueberries, autumn raspberries, asparagus, peppers, chillies and sweet corn, whilst one plot holder has a fig tree in the greenhouse with fruit, bearing in mind that there is no artificial heating to keep away frost in winter the fleece overcoat comes in useful.

As winter draws nigh the emphasis changes from planting and growing to preparation, with planning next years rotation and planting sequence, digging in green manure and compost, repairing sheds and building new.

Allotments provide a green gym, healthy eating and mental therapy away from the maddening crowd and are to be cherished as part of our tradition and a green lung for the city.