



Tales from the POTTING SHED

Robert Kett Court resident Owen James – aged 95 - shares gardening tips and stories from his life in Bunwell in this, the first of an occasional series. Owen was born and lived in Bunwell his whole life until two years ago. A true 'Broad Norfolk' speaking character who worked as a shepherd, the village postman, gravedigger, registered vermin destroyer and handyman, gardening was his passion from the tender age of seven. He grew prize-winning chrysanthemums and veg and sold produce from a roadside stall outside his home in Bunwell Street. He now runs a residents' gardening club at RKC with help from his Wymondham town councillor daughter Annette.

Ar yer orrite bor?

Hello to you and welcome to my potting shed. First, my top gardening tips for September:

- Cut back and remove all dead stalks from herbaceous borders now. Watch out for new shoots such as those from delphiniums. Cut off with a heel of old wood and pot up to make a new plant which you can

use to fill a gap in the border in the spring.

- Gather in seeds from your plants now and place in glass jars if you are keeping them in your shed so the mice can't get at them.
- Your lawn will have an autumn growth spurt so now is the time to sort out any patchy or bare areas by sowing seed or reurfing.
- If your lawn is prone to waterlogging, or has lots of moss in it, it may be compacted. Spike it with a garden fork to get water and air through the soil. It may look messy in the short term but this has many long term benefits and is well worth the effort.

Grass cutting always makes me think of my time at Old Buckenham Area School (as it was called then). I went there when it first opened in 1938 aged 13. I'm right proud of the fact I never attended a single classroom lesson there! Bunwell Primary School's Headmaster, Mr Douglas, recommended me to Old Buckenham's Headmaster, Mr Twiddy, as a good gardener who would be more useful planting up and caring for the new grounds than in a classroom. That suited me well as I had had more than enough of book learning by then. My first job was planting a lorry load of shrubs – that took me two weeks – and placing a climber at every pillar on the verandah. Some of them may still be there for all I know.

The playing field was huge and one day a grass cutting machine duly arrived. It was my job to cut the grass but I was not strong enough to push the machine on my own so another lad was deputised to help me. This machine was temperamental and lethal – it amazes me to this day that neither I nor my helper were injured using it. I think today's Health and Safety people would not be impressed at two by then 14-year-old lads doing this dangerous unpaid work! I spent a lot of time looking down at the grass as I pushed and noticed there was a large patch that had nothing but four-leaved clovers in it. To this day I wish I had taken some of it for planting in my own garden. >



Owen (aged about 7) with his mum Florence James at home in Brick Kiln Lane, Bunwell

TALES FROM THE POTTING SHED, continued...

> The closest I came to classroom learning was helping the woodwork teacher. The school started a Poultry Club and he needed someone with experience building chicken coops. I used to help my dad make these so I volunteered and made the first ones at the school. I kept chickens in my Bunwell orchard for many years before I moved to Wymondham – you can't beat a freshly laid egg from your own chickens.

Afore I go I must point out we didn't have a school bus then. Each day I cycled to and from school from my home on Bunwell Hill – a 10 mile round trip. My pal Reggie and I did a test run to time the journey so we would not be late on our first day. Pupils were given a new bicycle by the Education Authority if they didn't have their own, plus capes, leggings and caps for bad weather. Every two weeks we had to parade our bikes so a teacher, Mr Thrower, could check they were in good order and had not 'disappeared' – in other words been sold on by the poorer families.

Well, I hope you have enjoyed reading my memories. Schools were very different in my day to what they are now – and that may be both a good and a bad thing. Until next time, as we say in these parts, 'moined 'ow yer go'.

Owen



Chrysanthemums growing in Owen's Bunwell garden. These were sold to florist shops and the public.

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IN SEARCH OF YOUR CORONAVIRUS STORIES

By Neil Haverson

Wymondham Heritage Museum is still looking for your coronavirus experiences - how you managed lockdown and now all the rules and regulations that have been introduced. Oli Sparrow emailed to tell his family's story:



"My family relocated from Manchester to Wymondham in March, just days before the government-ordered restrictions were enforced. We didn't know the area or anyone that lived here. One week later I was furloughed from my new job, never to return, and my wife Isabelle was still on maternity leave with our nine-month-old daughter. As a result, we had almost eight weeks isolated together in a strange new town but exploring Wymondham inch by inch on our daily exercise walks (thanks Boris), and grew to love the place.

"When the Town Green Cafe reopened, we were quickly welcomed as regulars with the staff learning our 'usual'. We felt fortunate moving from such a highly affected area as Manchester to a relatively untouched part of the country but remained concerned about all the friends we'd left behind. Our daughter Nina turned one year old shortly after garden visits were allowed, so we invited the grandparents to come and spend the day celebrating.

"The picture attached shows us all raising a glass of champagne to Nina spaced - at 2m apart, of course."

If you have an experience to share, email whm.info@wymondhamheritagemuseum.co.uk