



I've had allotments for over 30 years, the first allotment I had was when I was in my late twenties. It was on the side of a railway embankment, and was a British Rail property in the posh district of Cressington, it was larger than the standard allotment, in fact it was massive. In order to get the plot, I had to attend an interview at British Rail Estate offices some where in Liverpool City Centre.

When I was deemed a suitable candidate- I was given lease of the land for the princely sum of £8 per year, I was given a map with the boundaries and the measurement of the land which was in chains. I was also given a book of rules, do's and don'ts, one rule which caught my attention was that the plot had to be kept in a husband like manner, I thought to myself that's ok - I had not long been married so being a husband that made me very qualified. I only learned in later years the true meaning of husbandry.

There were only two other occupants of plots on this site, although the size of the plots we had it would have made about eight full size allotments. Mine was so big I never quite managed to cultivate the whole of the plot.

The first plot was owned by a Mr Bowes who by the very nature of his appearance demanded his full title; he was a kindly old guy who always looked smart even in his gardening attire, and he always wore a tie, his plot was always immaculate, weeds wouldn't dare to grow there, everything was planted in straight rows, and everything was of the highest quality, the stuff that you see in photographs, I set out trying to achieve (but never did) what he had. Mr Bowes kept to a strict regime down at the plot at the crack of dawn, and away by lunchtime. The only time he ever to my knowledge

made a mistake was for some reason unknown, he left his spring brassica's uncovered and the pigeons devastated them. Owl George (as I used to call him) had the plot next door to Mr. Bowes - rubbed salt into the wound by leaving him a note in scrawly handwriting on crumpled paper pinned to Mr. Bowes shed door telling him that the pigeons had been at his brassica's. (As if he needed reminding).

This brings me very nicely to Owl George:

By contrast Mr. B and Owl George were two very different characters, the proverbial chalk and cheese you might say: whereas Mr. B liked everything so orderly, Owl George used to grow his produce in small patches in clearings among the weeds, although it's fair to say he did grow some quality stuff.

George was an Andy Cap type of character, like Andy he wore a flat cap, he also wore a long black overcoat be it summer or winter and like Andy he always had a ciggy in his mouth, a roll your own which he smoked to whisker of his lips, it was always wet with spittle from his mouth. He always had a dewdrop dripping from his nose which miraculously always missed the ciggy protruding from his mouth.

George had a faithful old friend in the form of an ancient Jack Russell which darted around me excitedly snapping at my ankles, occasionally he caught my ankle, and out of politeness I swore quietly under my breath. George did remonstrate the dog at times but this only caused it to get more excited, and I swear it made its mind up to take it out on my ankle.

George had an old boneshaker with a pannier on the front and always seemed to have a bunch of rhubarb tied with string of course and a bunch of Chrysanth's, I often wondered if they were the same bunches that he'd forgotten to take out when he got home.

George had some eloquent saying and didn't mince his words, I remember he was explaining how to do something, which the

passage of time has slipped it from my memory, however I'll never forget the expression he used to bring home the message it went something like **"It'll stick like shit to a blanket."**

I look back fondly the first allotment where I served my apprenticeship, and the two Characters who impressed so much.

The word "Groworganic" is rendered in a 3D, blocky font with a green, textured surface that resembles soil or moss. The letters are slightly offset from each other, creating a sense of depth and movement. The text is positioned in the upper left quadrant of the page.