

Country pie

by Tony Boardman

SEPTEMBER IS HERE and thin bands of filmy mist shroud the stubbled fields in the early morning. The local farmers have been busy in recent weeks getting in the harvest, seizing the opportunity whilst the weather was kind, and in consequence there has been much to-ing and fro-ing of combine harvesters, tractors and trailers, along our country lanes.

Harvest time has always been a busy hard working time but it can also be a very rewarding time as the yield is safely gathered in for storage. Fruit appears to be quite plentiful this season too and when Sue and I visited my sister-in-law's last weekend we discovered that there were some superb blackberries this year, that is if you are prepared take on the bramble's thorny protection, plus the accompanying thistles and stinging nettles..... The succulent blackberry does not submit without a fight!

Brambles growing in the right place along a field edge are a boon to the human being (who doesn't like blackberry and apple pie or bramble jelly on toast, for instance), but the dense thorny branches provide all kinds of sustenance to small birds, animals and insects. The blackberry bush can be a live-in-larder and what's more its all free and you can't say that about many things these days can you?

Mid-August provided us all with some welcome rain after an extremely hot July. Night after night when Sue and I came back from work we would go across to our allotment patch to water our parched beans and vegetables, carrying can

after can of water on a diagonal route from the dribbling water trough on the main path.

As I trudged back and forth for the umpteenth time I had to chuckle to myself. What was my star sign? Born on February 14th - why Aquarius the water carrier of course, mind you, with that well-worn journey across perhaps it should have been Cancer the Crab!

An allotment can be time consuming and let's face it, damn hard work but you know it really is well worth it when you can walk across and lift some fresh carrots or pick the runner beans for the main meal at the weekend. There is also the marvellous camaraderie you have with your fellow toilers alongside you, for whatever the seasons have in store for us we are all in the same boat at the end of the day.

The consideration uppermost is what you paid for a packet of seeds and what you pay week after week in the supermarket for, frequently, foreign produce. The realisation that you have saved money and have beans, for instance, stored away in the deep freeze and you can still go across and a hack out a parsnip or two on a cold frosty morn, that's what makes it all so rewarding and there is nothing quite as fresh and tasty as vegetables you have a just harvested. And with that Alan Titmarsh-like opinion I will pipe down on the benefits of being an allotment holder.

You may recall when I chatted to you last (well it seems as if I'm chatting to you) in at the August / September issue I remarked on the fact that there were few butterflies to be seen.

Well the hot spell has brought them out in quantities and the peacocks, red admirals, and some painted ladies are still gracing the buddias here in our gardens and even the maligned whites, which were surprisingly scarce, have rallied in numbers.

Possibly the wet and indifferent spring took its toll on the earlier hatches. I even noted some small coppers (no, not diminutive policemen) once really common, enjoying the sunshine. The large copper which was predominant in the fenlands became extinct due mainly to drainage, although a sub-species from Holland was introduced in the late 1920s and I believe thrive locally in that area.

Have you noticed that with autumn nudging late summer aside that we are getting a quite heavy dew in the early mornings, it is also the time of year that the long legged creatures come to the fore like the daddy longlegs or crane fly, who swarm across your lawn depositing eggs which become the infamous leather jacket so loathed by all green keepers and devotees of the perfect lawn. Enter the squabbling starlings who strut about prizing the little devils out with their long pointed bill thus giving a beneficial spiking to the lawn as well. They are all part of the food chain you see.

Walk outside in the mornings and you are almost certain to get ensnared in a spider's web - it is what I call the spiders convention time when they rush about the place being busy, and at night-time they can be seen in the dim lights of the TV making frenzied runs for a murky corner across the open carpet creating great interest for the dogs who have to investigate.

October heralds the autumn tints when the trees clad themselves in fiery reds, rosy pinks, mauves, and bright yellow as if to say one more party when we can put on our finery, and then they divest their leaves and settle down for winter slumber.

Time for me to dry up too, but not without sending you away with, I hope, a tailpiece smile.

I cannot divulge who perpetrated this howler, but he was about 13 at the time, writing to his young girl friend he scribed "I'm writing this sitting in bed wearing my knight clothes!" Jolly uncomfortable it must have been too, presumably he took a gauntlet off to write.

I am indebted once more to Mrs Anne Matthews for the following European notices seen on her travels, some reminiscent of the late and much missed Gerard Hoffnung monologues. Who will forget the brochure that boasted "There are French widows in every room!"

VENICE...

You are welcome to iron in our wardrobe!

FLORENCE...

Keep off the flowers bed and meadows. (Grass outside the station!)

Keep dogs on the leasch and to muzzle.

It is obliged to pick up animal excrements.

If you have any such gems phone me (01993 831332) evenings please.

Enjoy what looks like being an Indian summer.