

## **Fowler's Lot: the allotments at Chipping Norton**

A wide, much-used track off a car park  
leads to windswept acres of endeavour:  
Fowler's Lot, high above the town.

Pay a small rent, you can grow fruit  
and veg, berries, flowers, make a shed  
to house the rake, spade and fork; a tank,  
a stout blue barrel, to catch rain;  
'Rubbish will not be tolerated' and  
'No rabbits, no slugs, no birds', but  
debris regulations are relaxed for  
tyres, hubcaps, mowers, old prams.

Ordered chaos - a wrought-iron gate  
disapproves of rusty metal sheets  
flung onto heaps, effectively now  
recycled, make-do-and-mend.  
A white bath, shiny taps and all,  
rests by a careful hazel hedge,  
neglect cheek-by-jowl with nurture,  
a crowd of jumbled huts on a hill.

Some measure plots in rods and poles,  
water in gallons (sounds old-fashioned  
but apt). They cluster huggermugger,  
haphazard under the boiling clouds.  
Way of life, not just a plot, a leveller:  
codgers or commuters, they're the same  
when they look up and sniff the air,  
hoping for some sun to cheer and warm.

Autumn - morning glory, late late roses,  
nasturtiums, dahlias, chrysanthus, glads,  
berries, plums, pears, apples, grapes.  
Winter - cabbage, onions, carrots, sprouts.  
Kites dance slow quadrilles above,  
red robin carols from an elder bush.  
No-one shouts, flags flap and tug  
in the wind, which blows long and strong.

When alone here you feel the soil turn.  
Roots thrust. Sheds of all kinds:  
some are solid, some lean steeply  
foundations stubbornly anchored.  
This haven both active and still,  
a cherished child, to which we have  
entitlement, historic rights, soon  
may be scarred by a dark invader.

Remember the man say there's a line  
from his shed door through Watford  
to Dover, and if you were tall enough  
you'd be sure to see the white cliffs?  
Not with a road there, you wouldn't,  
never mind the peace disturbed, worn  
patchwork gardens, dark blue barrels,  
rust, scarecrows, dung-heaps - all gone.

Less the sweet smell of cut grass,  
Instead black tarmac, roaring trucks,  
light dazzle; birds would sing louder,  
the better to make themselves heard.  
Remember them, these small gardens,  
fight for the good old digging days,  
solve the world's ills from plastic thrones,  
turn your faces to catch the westering sun.

*Mo Browne*  
1.20