



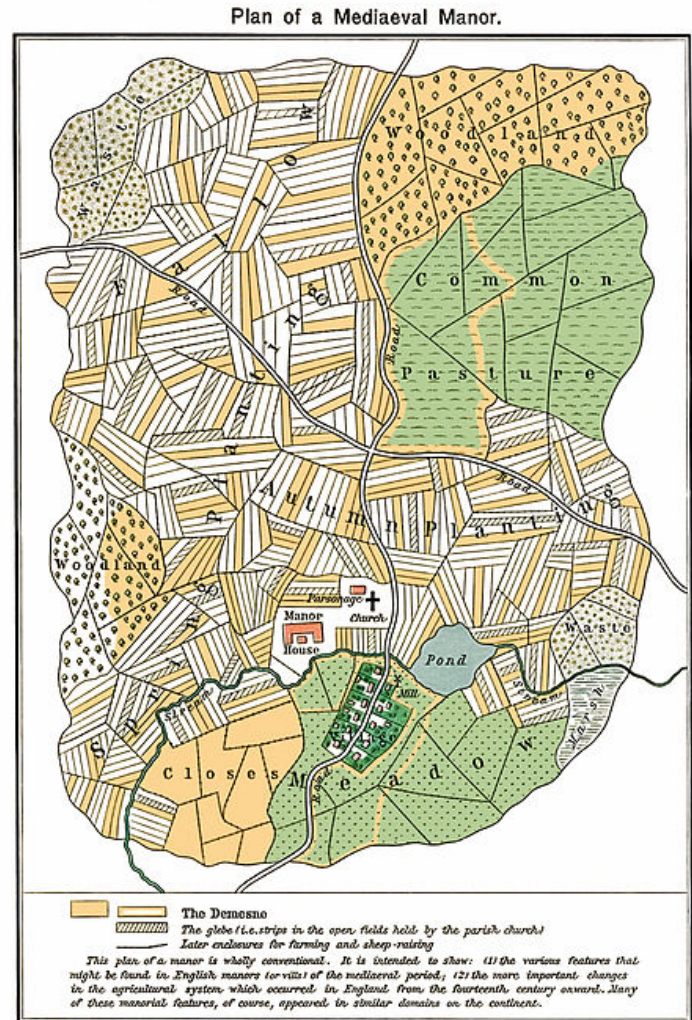
# Allotments: Their History and Cultivation

Brian King



# Allotment History - Background

- The Open Field system in Manorial England dates from the late Saxon period
- Division of land into long narrow strips (selions), typically one furlong x one chain in size
- Eventual pressures on this system ..
- .. led to the privatisation of land (enclosures)
- 5m acres enclosed between 1700 and 1860 (3,500+ Acts of Parliament)





# Allotment History - Beginnings

- Gentry and farmers prospered while the poor were disenfranchised
- This led to debate in The Gentleman's Magazine (1760s) .. members of the nobility and clergy with social consciences push for allotments
- Advocates claim that allotments will lead to reductions in crime, immorality, drunkenness and poor relief
- Initial allotments provided by Carrington, Winchilsea & Egremont plus individual vicars
- Rules and regulations



# Allotment History – Some Progress (Early 19<sup>th</sup> century)

- Plots subsequently became known as field allotments ..  
¼ acre up to as much as 4 acres in size
- They would typically be run as “mini farms”
- Demand for plots exceeded supply despite the fact that they were more expensive than farmland
- 1820s and 1830s are a period of social unrest in the countryside .. The Swing Riots
- Labourer’s Friend Society (set up 1832) lobbies for allotments
- Around 100,000 plots by 1850





# Allotment History

- General Enclosure Act (1845)
- Fuel Allotments and Poor's Land
  - Objective to generate income and use it to relieve hardship among the poor
  - Charitable trusts, e.g. Sunninghill, Hampton & Tilehurst .. many of which still exist today
- Potato Grounds .. popular in the SW

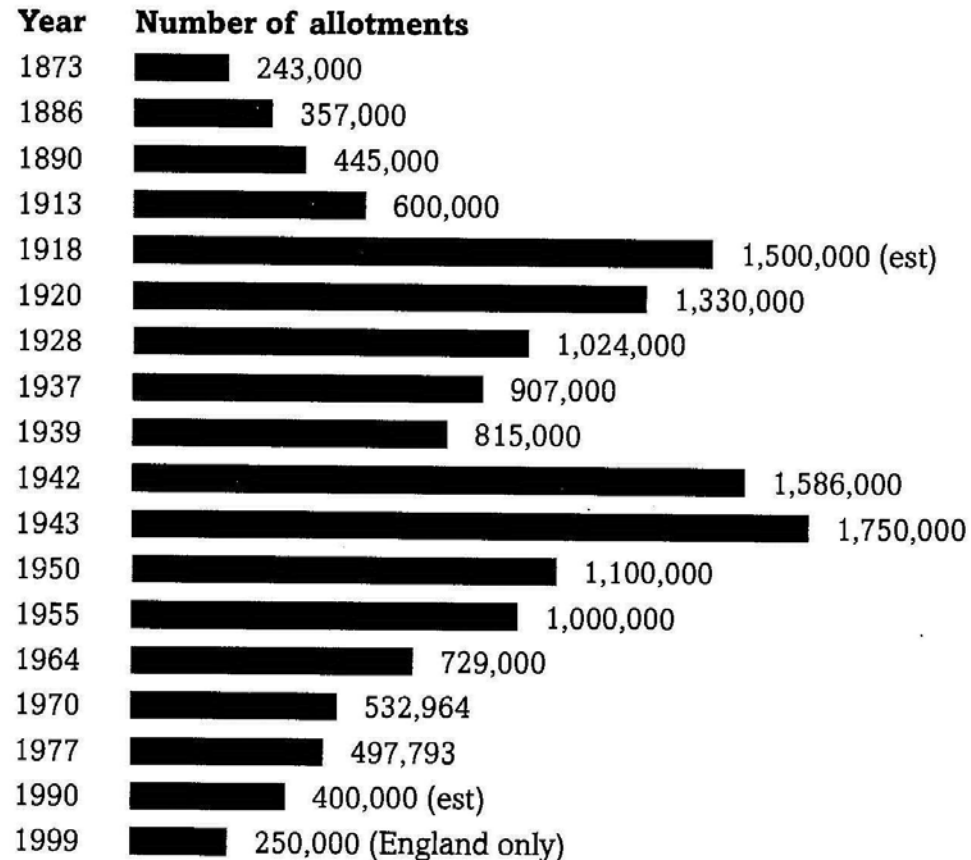


# Allotment History – Urban Plots

- Migration of people from the countryside
- Plots established in cities such as Nottingham, Newcastle, Leeds and Sheffield around the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Sheffield earlier)
- Allotment gardens .. Up to  $\frac{1}{4}$  acre, more typically 300-600 square yards
- Rod vs. pole vs. perch!?
- Wider range of crops grown



# Allotment History –Plot Numbers



## Sources:

1873-1918 Board of Agriculture

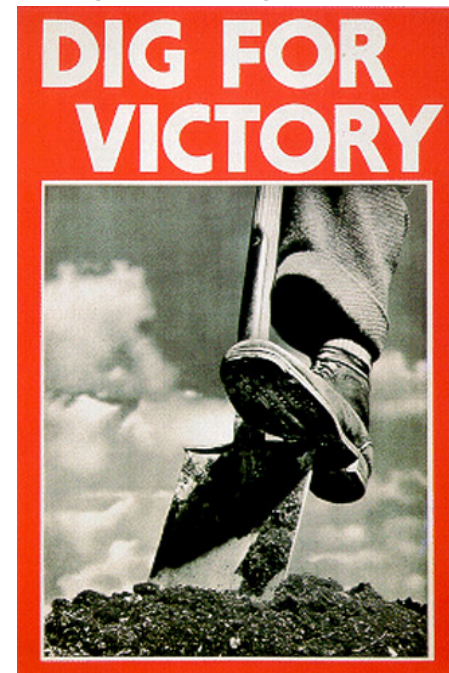
1920-1943 Gangulee

Others: Ministry of Agriculture



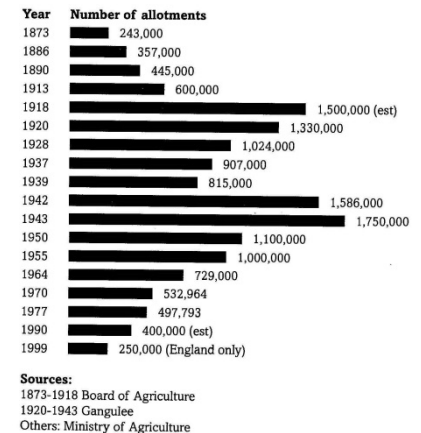
# Allotment History – The Explosion (1873-1945)

- Various pieces of legislation from 1880s .. leading to Small Holdings & Allotments Act (1908)
- Halley Stewart MP for Spalding (stood partly on an allotment ticket in 1887)
- Local Government Act 1894
- DORA (WWI).. 1.5m plots by 1918
- Dig for Victory(WWII).. 1.75m plots



# Allotment History – 1945 to present

- Inevitably, some loss of interest after WWII
- Improvements in living standards
- Thorpe Report (1969)
- Occasional changes in legislation
- Cyclical demand for plots from 1970s onwards
- Estimated 250,000 plots in England at the turn of the century
- Gradual move to smaller plots



# Allotment History - Sunningdale

- Earliest plots at Clarefield Court (1861-1890)
- Richmondwood (1896-1932)
- Church Road site - late 1870s up to the present
- Parish Council assumes responsibility in 1896
- In 1898 .. 47 plots @ 10 rods, 19 @ 20 rods spread over a 7 acre area
- Water arrives in 1961
- Threat of development (mid to late 1980s)
- 60 plots at present (average size 4.4 rods)





# Allotment History – Further Info

Drawings taken from The Allotment Chronicles by Steve Poole, published by Silver Link in 2006.

For further information on allotment history see the following articles on the allotments page of [bkthisandthat.org.uk](http://bkthisandthat.org.uk) ..

- A Brief History of Allotments in England
- A History of Sunningdale Allotments
- Links to the histories of other sites
- A Brief History of Cultivation

Articles include bibliographies and lots of links to related material.

# Allotment Cultivation - Challenges

- Growing in an open field
- Uncultivated neighbouring plots
- Meeting place for all the local wildlife





# Allotment Cultivation - Approaches

- Raised beds
- Beds (simple division of plot)
- One big growing space





# Allotment Cultivation - Approaches

- Soil preparation - digging .. or not
- Manure, compost and fertilisers
  - Manure, typically from Broomhall Farm
  - Cold compost
  - Blood, Fish & Bone and Seaweed Extract
  - Sulphate of Potash (or Comfrey / Nettle “tea”)
- Trenches and pockets



# Allotment Cultivation - Timing

- Beware sowing / planting too soon
- Extending the season
- Successional sowing
- Catering for summer holidays



# Allotment Cultivation – Protection against the elements





# Allotment Cultivation – Protection

- Against the wildlife .. Soft fruit, brassicas, peas & mangetout and aphids / flies





# Allotment Cultivation – Attracting Beneficial Insects





# Allotment Cultivation - Salads





# Allotment Cultivation - Salads





# Allotment Cultivation - Melon





# Allotment Cultivation - Asparagus





# Allotment Cultivation – Climbing French Beans & Runner Beans





# Allotment Cultivation – Borlotti Beans





# Allotment Cultivation – Peppers





# Allotment Cultivation – Celery and Celeriac





# Allotment Cultivation – Winter Squash





# Allotment Cultivation - Aubergine





# Allotment Cultivation – Garlic & Onion





# Allotment Cultivation - Mangetout





# Allotment Cultivation – Spinach





# Allotment Cultivation – Pak Choi





# Allotment Cultivation – Soft Fruit





# Allotment Cultivation - Tomatoes





# Allotment Cultivation – Joseph's Tomatoes





# Allotment Cultivation - Leeks





# Allotment Cultivation - Herbs





# Allotment Cultivation - Apples





# Allotment Cultivation - ?



# Allotment Cultivation – Jerusalem Artichoke





# Allotment Cultivation - Grapes



# Allotment Cultivation - Questions

Further reading - articles in [bkthisandthat.org.uk](http://bkthisandthat.org.uk) aimed at new plot holders. They summarise the experiences of a dozen or so Sunningdale plot holders

- New to Allotments
- Approaches to Cultivation