

Allotment Gardens: A Reflection of History, Heritage, Community and Self

Lesley Acton*

Allotments are small parcels of rented land, in rural and urban locations, used for growing fruits and vegetables for personal consumption. The demand for allotments and their availability have changed over time. In this article, I focus on the reasons for the changing demand and the motivation behind taking up this activity. In so doing, I refute the long held assumption that allotmenting was taken up primarily for economic reasons. Instead, I show that while allotments have at various times been used for the alleviation of hunger, it is the social aspect of this hobby that primarily motivates most plot holders. Accordingly, I show the various ways in which allotments are valued both by the individual and the collective, including as part of our history and cultural heritage.

Introduction

Allotments are small parcels of land rented for nominal sums and used to grow fruits and vegetables for personal consumption (figure 1). While demand for allotments has ebbed and flowed over the course of the twentieth century, it is now higher than at any time since WWII. In 2010, the national waiting list had reached 95,000 (Campbell and Campbell 2010), an increase of 17,000 from 2009. This resurgence was led by concerns over methods of food production, health and nutritional issues, a desire not to lose any more urban green spaces to further development and the recognition of the need to create a more sustainable environment. In working towards these goals, '[a]llotments have, the papers say, become trendy. Certainly they have developed from being a significant cultural heritage into an increasingly complex and dynamic part of contemporary life' (Crouch 2003, 1).

Because of the lack of research, the origins of allotments remain obscure, and until recently, allotments were viewed as anachro-

nistic and the domain of the working classes. However, my research shows that while allotments have been valued at different times for different reasons, their underlying value has always been for the recreation they afford as opposed to the more generally held notion that their benefit was/is functional (economic). Here I reveal the reasons for the changing demand for allotments over the course of the twentieth century and argue that the value of an allotment has a social and/or cultural dimension both to the individual and his/her community.

This paper begins by reviewing the supply of, and demand for, allotments throughout the twentieth century. Next, it discusses the motivating forces behind allotmenting. These forces include the reasons people take up this activity and the conditions that contribute to its success. It considers the relationship between plot holders and the wider community, as well as what produce is grown. The cultural heritage of allotments is briefly explored, as are the ways in which the sites themselves and their material culture have become commodified. Finally, the ways in which allotment heritage contributes to

* UCL Institute of Archaeology



Fig. 1: Top: Becontree Heath Allotments, Becontree Essex. Bottom: Lincoln Road Allotments, South Woodford Essex.

community building is commented upon.

An interdisciplinary approach has been taken to addressing these questions. Allotments have been considered within a social/cultural, political and economic framework. Apart from archival research, fieldwork - including interviews with allotment holders - was undertaken not only in my case study area of Ilford/Redbridge, Essex, but also in the north and east of England in order to form a basis for comparison between different sites. This research strategy enables an understanding of the different ways in which different communities use the allotment landscape, not only to grow food, but also as a social and cultural space.

Note: The 'allotment movement' is defined as individuals or groups that work together to advance the shared ideal of renting a small plot of land to grow food for personal consumption.

A Brief History of the Twentieth Century Allotment Movement

Background

Allotments have, as Archer remarked, 'largely escaped the historian's archival spadework, receiving only occasional and sporadic examination' (Archer 1997, 21). Despite the fact that the nineteenth century allotment movement was primarily rural, a small amount of research has revealed that there were, in fact, 'a surprising number of allotments around large towns, such as Birmingham, Coventry, Nottingham, Sheffield and Southampton, to name but a few, from about 1700 onward' (Thorpe 1975, 170). However, most of these early urban allotment sites were absorbed by the growing metropoli (Flavell 2003, 100), so that by 1829, there appears to have been only fifty-four allotment sites, mainly in the southwest of England (Burchardt 2002, 36). Nevertheless, over the course of the next fifty years the movement grew, so that by 1873 there were 242,542 sites, spread from Cornwall in the south-west to Northumberland in the north of England (Burchardt 2002, 225).

Until now, the assumption that allotments served as a form of social welfare for the rural agricultural labouring poor had been

the accepted academic discourse (Archer 1997; Barnett 1967; Burchardt 2002, 11; Mingay 1967; Moselle 1995; Thorpe 1969, 3). However, recent research by the Family and Community Historical Research Society (FACHRS), concludes that the number of agricultural labourers holding allotments was roughly equivalent to their proportion in the employed population. A very high proportion of plot holders were also craftsmen, industrial workers, tradesmen and widows. In fact, the occupation of plot holders reflected the communities in which they lived (Burchardt and Cooper 2010, 32-47).

My own case study area of Ilford/Redbridge, Essex (1900-2010), has revealed that while it was primarily a middle class area, it also supported everybody from the professional with live-in servant to the farm labourer. Employment focused on professional support workers, professionals and manufacturing industry workers, as opposed to workers in raw material producing industries, such as fishing, mining and farming (ESRC Cambridge Group 1921 census). The extensive urbanisation of the area, coupled with the Council's policy of enabling home ownership through cheap loans, brought a huge influx of new residents into the area during the early years of the twentieth century. Most of these new residents were anxious for social networking opportunities and, accordingly, there was a large number of flourishing clubs and societies, including allotment societies, in the area. Being a member of an allotment society offered opportunities to network, both on and off-site, through events such as dinners, concerts and charitable giving.

Tracing some of Ilford's early plot holders through the 1911 census has revealed that the 'typical' allotment holder was a 39 year-old, home-owning, middle class male, with an average family size of four - a far cry from the stereotype of the working class old man. Indeed, throughout the twentieth century, it appears to have been the skilled/managerial classes that formed the majority of the allotment cohort in Ilford, although by 1980, they were joined by a substantial number of retirees.

The development of the allotment movement 1900 - 2010

The twentieth century allotment movement has its roots in the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1907 (7 Edw.7, Ch. 54), which put county councils under a duty to provide allotments where demand existed. Although the First World War 'gave a tremendous impetus to the extension of the allotments system' (Thorpe 1969,16), the end of hostilities required that land requisitioned for use as wartime allotments be

returned to its former use or intention. In many areas, the intention was urban development. However, as the table below shows, while the number of allotments fell post-war, demand did not. In fact, by 1923, the number of allotment holders had more than doubled since 1914 and there was a waiting list of 15,912. These data further show that by the first quarter of the twentieth century, allotments had become predominantly urban, which was in contrast to their nineteenth century rural roots.

Date	No. Allotments	Acreage	Notes
1913	118,240		7,950 returns, excluding parish meetings & private allotments. Returns show occupiers of allotments partly as individuals & partly as associations. Therefore, number of individuals is unknown.
1914	580,000	130,000	
30th April 1918	1,350,000		Estimate only.
31st December 1918			No returns made.
31st December 1919	1,250,000 (returns incomplete)	180,000	Including DORA* holdings of 276,355.
31st December 1920	1,330,000 (estimated)	65,474	Including DORA* holdings of 254,785. 11,462 authorities.
1921			No returns.
1922			No returns.
31st December 1923	1,190,000	170,000	Waiting list 15,912. Allotment holders have more than doubled since 1914, but the acreage under cultivation only increased by 13%.
1924			No data reported.
31st December 1925		66,140	12,759 authorities. 30% of holdings purchased by local authorities.
31st December 1926	1,047,318	156,496	12,733 returns, (includes parish meetings). Local authorities provided 47.5% and owned 24,930 acres. Private landowners provided 52.5%, including railway allotments.
	1,022,530 - 1,022,580	152,435	
	483,903 (excluding parish meetings and private allotments)		
* DORA The Defence of the Realm Acts 1916 and 1920 allowed the government to procure land for use as allotments.			

Table 1: National allotment data (<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/>).

Despite the waiting list for allotments, numbers continued to decline until the economic depression of the 1930s sharply reversed this trend. Allotments were seen as a way of averting both a hunger crisis and potential social unrest 'by mitigating some of the worse consequences of unemployment' (NAS 1st Annual Report, 1930, 10). In 1926, the Society of Friends (Quakers) began the Allotment Gardens for the Unemployed scheme in South Wales (figure 2). The scheme quickly spread throughout Britain, supported, initially at least, by the government (SOF archive). The provision of allotments was said to be the most successful of all the schemes instigated to help the unemployed during this period (Young 1934, 162). By 1932, the scheme had helped 61,200 applicants (NAJ 12/1932, 23) and by 1936, the value of produce, in that one year, was estimated to be in excess of £1,000,000 (SOF archive).

However, even at that time, the availability of allotments was highly dependent on the willingness of local authorities to provide land. Newcastle, for example, was unable or unwilling to provide permanent land and West Ham (Greater London) had not one single permanent allotment (1st Annual Report of NAS, 1930, 12-28). At the other end of the scale, towns such as Brighton, Hove, Eastbourne and Hastings were well-supplied with sites. Bognor, in particular, was exemplary and sold land to local societies on a 30-year instalment plan (1st Annual Report of NAS, 1930, 29).

By the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, there were about 740,000 allotment plots in England and Wales and the government launched its Dig For Victory (DFV) campaign in order to get the nation to grow its own food (figure 3). The immediate success of DFV was due in no small measure to the work of the Quakers and the Allotment Gardens For The Unemployed Scheme during the preceding years of austerity. By the end of 1942, there were 1,400,000 plots and an unknown number of home gardens and

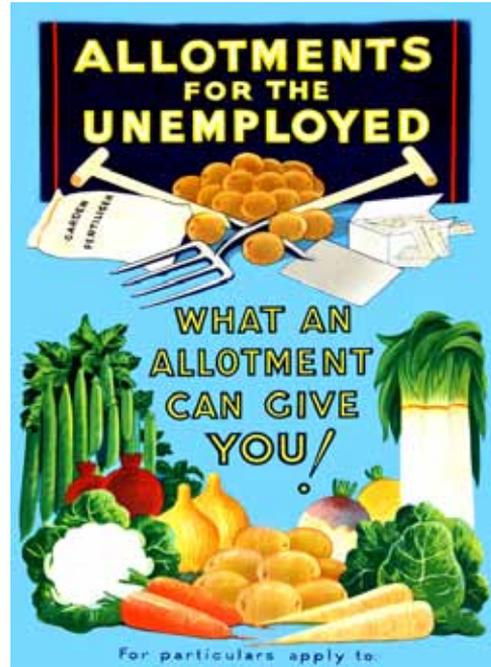


Fig. 2: 'Allotments for the Unemployed' (Society of Friends Archive).



Fig. 3: 'Dig for Victory' (Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse Museum, Norfolk).

'unofficial' plots under cultivation (Thorpe 1969, 48). Today, DFV has become part of the iconic public memory of the Second World War and is heralded as a paradigm for sustainable living. St James's Park in London, for example, has a demonstration allotment plot, which is an 'attempt to shift the focus back to sustainable living habits adopted during the Second World War' (www.royal-parks.org.uk).

Post-war, the reconstruction of the country meant that much land formerly used as allotments was now taken for building purposes. Food rationing finally ended in 1954, and post-war advances in technology, including television and the proliferation of supermarkets and restaurants, changed not only culinary culture (Sandbrook 2006, 48 – 79; Spencer 2002, 324-327), but the way in which leisure time was spent. While gardening was still very popular, allotments began to appear anachronistic. The 1950s also saw the last of the seven Allotments Acts (Clayden 2008, xxiii; Thorpe 1969, 21) and finally, in 1957, government withdrawal of all funding and support for the allotment movement.

During the 1960s, neglected sites were seen as easy targets for development. Some allotment holders were accused of carrying out activities, such as car repairs, running garages and sawmills on site. The unrealistically low rents (sometimes less than fifteen shillings per year) encouraged these illicit enterprises, as well as poor cultivation (www.hansard.1976/1). Eventually, because so much allotment land was vacant, the government ordered a Committee of Inquiry into Allotments (Thorpe 1969). Its brief was '[t]o review the general policy on allotments [...] and to recommend what legislative and other changes, if any, are needed' (Thorpe 1969, ii). Allotment holders were, in Thorpe's view, 'highly privileged members of society ... custodians of extremely valuable urban land at very low rents. He described many sites as 'little more than horticultural slums' (Thorpe 1975, 178). Thorpe's solution to

this problem was to reinvent the allotment movement by placing 'the emphasis on allotment gardening as a rewarding recreation—as a productive leisure activity for all classes of citizen—rather than on outdated and over-emphasized economic motive' (Thorpe 1975, 178). However, Thorpe's report had little impact and few sites made the transition from allotment to leisure garden.

The decline in allotment numbers was sharply but temporarily reversed by the 1974 economic crisis. Rising food and fuel prices and strikes culminated in frequent power cuts, a three-day working week, and the threat of rationing (Times 14/12/1973, 16). There were also bad droughts in 1975 and 1976, all of which led to a marked increase in the price of vegetables (R Backhouse pers. comm., 4/1/2011) and a renewed demand for allotments. This resurgence was fueled in no small measure by the media, especially television's *The Good Life* (www.good-life), which celebrated the virtues of self-sufficiency. By 1975/6, the waiting list, was reputed to be 57,000 (www.hansard.1976/1). Friends of the Earth launched a campaign to use derelict land to grow food (Allotments Campaign Manual, 1977, 9). Even so, the number of allotments continued to decline.

By 1977, there were 498,000 allotments, but within twenty years that number had dropped to 296,923 plots. Despite these losses, many allotment holders continued to enjoy this activity and many also fought for sites that were under threat of development. However, between 1970 and 1978, 6,250 plots per annum were lost and between 1979 and 1996, this number increased to 9,400 per annum (Crouch 1997). Thus, despite some support, the movement suffered a substantial decline. In 1998, *The Future for Allotments Report* (Crouch 1998) was published, having been commissioned by the government to investigate the decline in allotment provision. While this report, like the Thorpe Report forty years previously, had little impact on the movement, the zeitgeist had begun to change and by 2004 the



Fig. 4: “All the usual veg” (Loughton Potato Grounds Allotment site, Loughton Essex).

National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG) saw an increase in its membership and the reappearance of waiting lists (Rees 2004, 3). NSALG attributed this renewed interest to Monty Don’s television programme about allotments (<http://www.farmgarden.org.uk/>), the work of the Allotment Regeneration Initiative, which advises with the regeneration and the creation of new allotment sites, and a ‘recent realisation by the government that we are rapidly becoming the fat people of Europe’ (Horrocks 2004, 11). In addition, allotments were being championed as a way of working towards a carbon zero future by localising the production and distribution of food. Consequently, many schemes for regenerating or updating existing sites, as well as the formation of new sites and societies, were instigated (Kenny et al., 2009, 29-31,33,36-37,39,41). In fact, waiting lists remain very high with an ‘average of 57 people waiting for every 100 plots’ (Campbell and Campbell 2011, 2).

As a response to these waiting lists, many innovative urban agricultural projects have

sprung up, such as the Skip Garden currently located adjacent to King’s Cross Station (London). This project is a vegetable garden in a skip that is moved to a new location when its current location is developed. Small areas of derelict land have also been reclaimed, such as the sites at Camley Street near St Pancras Station. The land surrounding the Camley Street Industrial Park has been planted with fruit trees, vegetables and even a grape vine. Local residents, most of whom have little access to other urban agricultural sites, utilise these facilities. The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens (<http://www.farmgarden.org.uk/>), in conjunction with local community groups, also works to empower local people, often in deprived areas, through projects involving the provision and support of urban agriculture.

What is Grown?

In response to the question ‘what do you grow?’, the answer is invariably ‘all the usual veg’ (figure 4). However, such a generic answer often masks the variety of the vegetables and fruit grown. Apart from the more

common produce, such as tomatoes, potatoes, onions, leeks, parsnips and beans, many plot holders grow soft fruit, often because it is economically advantageous. Some plot holders enjoy the challenge of cultivating non-local and exotic produce, such as goji berries and lingonberries. Plot holders from minority ethnic backgrounds often take the opportunity to grow produce, which is part of their cultural cuisine, such as Bangladeshi sheem beans and lau (pumpkins).

One plot holder, who has meticulously documented his yields over a number of years (Table 2), values his vegetable crop at £650, although this amount does not take into account the value of the fruit, which is relatively far more valuable than the vegetables (Iddison 2008, 1).

Year	2004	2005	2006	2007
Total (Kg)	128.1	224.9	307.5	363.8

Table 2: Iddison's allotment yield 2004 – 2007 (Iddison 2008).

Plot Holder Motivation

Without exception, all of the plot holders I spoke to saw allotmenting as a hobby, with benefits. Nobody professed to be motivated primarily by economic considerations, although it is unlikely they would have admitted it, even if it had been the case. Becoming an allotment holder was sometimes the result of a change in lifestyle (illness, or retirement perhaps), but more often it was a way of life instilled at an early age; Iddison believes 'toddlers and sub-teens [who] are exposed to the routines of cultivation enjoy an active outdoor life' (Iddison 2009, 93).

Amongst those factors revealed as having had the greatest influence in encouraging people to become plot holders was the enduring impact of the Dig For Victory campaign. Despite the fact that it is over seventy years since it was launched, it has become an icon of the Second World War, with a reach that extends across generations. JC worked

on her father's wartime allotment, where she 'enjoyed weeding the rows of vegetables, or picking the runner beans and peas', an occupation which she still enjoys (JC pers. comm., 19/3/2009). Many older plot holders began growing food as part of the wartime school curriculum. AM was at school in Huddersfield (1941 -1945) and, because she had 'enjoyed gardening at school,' she went on to work in horticulture. 'Now, since the age of 60, I have been, and still am, an enthusiastic allotment holder' (AM pers. comm., 29/7/2008). Another allotment holder recalled how his headmaster marched his class to the allotment to 'supervise our digging.' He believes that this experience was fundamental to his lifetime of allotment holding (WW pers. comm., 15/3/2009). 'Maureen' recalled, as a six year old, riding to the allotment on the crossbar of her father's bicycle, where they were going to 'Dig For Victory.' She helped him by watering the plants with a tin can filled from the river, which ran alongside the site. Despite being very tired, her father encouraged her by telling her 'just one more can'. Far from putting her off, these experiences led Maureen to a commitment to allotmenting that has lasted all of her adult life ('Maureen' pers. comm., 15/3/2009). These stories are typical of those relayed by many older plot holders who were children during the war years; it is a legacy that has stayed with them.

Some people take up allotmenting with very specific aims. PC, for example, set out to recreate a DFV plot. Iddison, on the other hand, wanted to provide the majority of his fruit and vegetables 'with an emphasis on variety and quality' (Iddison 2008). Others become plot holders more by accident than design. Retirement and redundancy, for example, appear to be motivating factors in taking up allotmenting. GP became an accidental plot holder when she temporarily looked after a friend's plot. That was twenty-seven years ago and she has been doing it ever since (GP pers. comm., 1/4/2011). Another plot holder was forced to retire through ill

health. His wife was fed-up with him moping around the house and told him to go and do something. His plot has become his passion and he is on it all day, everyday (R. Backhouse pers. comm., 21/6/2011).

Reasons for Allotment Demand

Allotments have gained prominence in recent years because of their adoption by environmental pressure groups, social welfare organisations and the 'chattering classes', who are 'reacting to ideas that our industrial food system is "unsustainable"' (DeSoucey and Fine 2007). The media, above all, has politicised food, especially in regard to healthy eating (and obesity) issues and the relocalisation of food production and distribution. In part, the growth in allotment waiting lists is attributed to 'eco-conscious city dwellers [who] want control over exactly what's going on their families' plates for dinner' (Coughlan 2006).

These 'eco-conscious city dwellers' appear to be responding to the zeitgeist of the twenty-first century and the message of sustainability. DeSoucey and Fine assert that there is also a moral dimension to all of these concerns, an 'affinity for goods characterized by their symbolic, rather than necessary, characteristics' (DeSoucey and Fine 2007). Organic, non-genetically modified foods, are perceived to be nutritionally superior and better-tasting than foods produced by non-organic, large-scale agribusiness (www.bbc4551034). Allotments give the plot holder control over both economics and production and the plot holder can mitigate transportation and storage and also has control over waste. For most plot holders, nothing 'gets thrown away because it is too small or blemished' (Iddison 2008, 6). Furthermore, allotmenters are able to achieve a measure of sustainability by composting and collecting their own seeds (Iddison 2008, 4, 14). However, not all plot holders are typical of these 'eco-conscious city dwellers' and it is possible that, because of the different demographic, inner-city urban agriculture

is more heavily influenced by sustainability issues. Backhouse believes that while some suburban plot holders 'are concerned about food provenance' (R Backhouse pers. comm., 21/6/2011) it is not that many. He thinks the current spike in demand for plots is mostly driven by the poor economy, as it has been in previous recessions.

Allotments offer both tangible and intangible benefits. They provide a space for exercise or rest, companionship or solitude, contemplation or work. Not least of all, they supply healthy food and, accordingly, many plot holders regard allotments as a hobby with benefits.

The Relationship Between Plot Holders and the Community

The relationship between plot holders and the wider community is demonstrated in a number of ways. During the 1930s and 40s, many societies had very successful social committees who arranged regular events such as day outings and annual dinners, usually to raise funds for local hospitals and other charities (NHAHA mins, 2/12/1938, n.p). In addition, benevolent funds were established to assist members and others in the community who had fallen on hard times through unemployment, sickness or other unforeseen circumstances (NHAHA mins, 2/5/1938, n.p). During the 1930s, the Society of Friends (SOF) supported horticultural shows in the belief that they gave the unemployed an opportunity to exhibit their skills, at least in growing food and flowers, and that they raised the standard of production through competition. For many whose lives otherwise held few pleasures, these shows were highly anticipated social events (SOF Archive).

Today, many allotment sites host events and shows which are intended to reach out to local communities and involve them with activities associated with the allotment. One such festival in Ilford/Redbridge attracts around 1000 people and involves local charities and community groups along with tea

and homemade cakes, home-grown produce, music, activities for children (such as a vegetable spotting competition) and a tour around the site. In these contexts, allotments as both a public and private space, 'yield new relations within society and between society and nature' (Klingle 2003, 99).

Allotments as Cultural Heritage

Many allotment societies are in possession of documents relating to their history and, accordingly, the history of their area. These documents include an assortment of manuscripts, letters, receipts, maps, plans and leases. They have become a 'new landscape for the historically minded to explore' (Samuel, 1994, 5). These documents are important because they are part of the material culture that is 'instrumental to how people create, experience, give meaning to, negotiate and transform their world' (Dobres and Robb 2005, 161).

In the last few years, the revival of interest in allotments has prompted some plot holders to investigate the origins of their allotment site(s) and use these data to market their sites' histories, in effect commodifying their heritage. Hill Close Gardens in Warwick 'has uncovered details on some of the Warwick families who gardened at Hill Close' during the latter part of the nineteenth century and tells their story on its web site (www.hillclosegardens). Cross Houses Allotments in Shropshire offers 'public tours of the allotments and its historic environs' as part of its heritage open days (Moffett 2008, 11). St Anns [sic] Allotments in Nottingham has been successful in its attempt to have its site Grade II* listed as the 'oldest and largest area of Victorian detached town gardens in the world' (www.staa-allotments.org.uk). By listing its site, St Anns is, effectively, adding another layer of protection against any future changes, especially by those who may seek to develop the site. Many urban allotment sites, because of their sizes and locations, often in prime residential areas, have enormous value as building sites. Even

where these sites have statutory status (i.e., they are situated on land acquired by a local authority specifically for use as allotments and therefore cannot be sold or used for other purposes without government consent (Cross 2006, 3)), their protected status is, by no means, absolute.

Manor Garden Allotments in Stratford (East London) were closed to make way for the 2012 Olympic Park. In response, artist Thomas Pausz has built an allotment hut which stands next to the Royal Albert Hall in West London. It houses an exhibition about the site and its users, as well as oral histories of the allotment holders. By keeping memories of the allotment alive and in the public eye, those involved in the enterprise are helping to ensure that the promise made by the authorities to allow plot holders to return after the Olympics will not be forgotten. By politicising heritage in this way, Pausz is inviting the wider community to participate as a stakeholder. The more these spaces are valued, the more likely a community is to fight for their survival. Heritage shared is, as Lowenthal said, heritage strengthened (1999, 9).

There are many ways in which heritage contributes to the value of allotments, whether through its material culture or the sites themselves. By commodifying their heritage, such sites as Cross House and St Anns are able to invoke a spirit of inclusiveness, and thereby place a greater value upon their presence in the community. This is a form of social construction that repurposes the allotment site as material culture and makes it more widely available.

Conclusion

Recent research by Burchardt and Cooper (2010) has challenged the long-held assumption that the primary purpose of rural allotments was the alleviation of hunger. Notwithstanding that my study has covered a later period than that discussed by Burchardt, Cooper and Thorpe, it has also shown an underlying demand for allotments by 'hard-

core' plot holders, whose primary purpose in having an allotment was recreational. That is not to say that the supply of food in times of shortage or economic hardship (functional demand) has been unimportant; it just has not been paramount.

The fact that the movement has survived the twentieth century despite the loss of considerable land in some cases, and battles to hang on to land in others, shows that allotments are valued. Their ebb and flow in popularity has been a consequence of functional demand in times of privation; at the end of war or in times of high employment, that functional need can be seen to dissipate. Ultimately, it is the recreational plot holders that have sustained demand for allotments and have thus enabled the movement to continue. The motivation of the hard-core plot holders is consistent, and derives from a view of allotmenting as a hobby with benefits. According to Zweig, a hobby is an activity that gives a person 'something to love and something in which to find freedom' (Zweig 1952, 150). Indeed, the Thorpe Report found that 'love of gardening as a hobby' was, by far, the first and foremost reason people gave for wanting an allotment (Thorpe 1969, 149). For the functional plot holder, by contrast, it is the changing zeitgeist that drives demand. For example, in wartime, allotments are an important commodity because they provide something in short supply (food). In the 1930s, they provided not only food but also a means for useful creative labour during a time of enforced unemployment (SOF Archive 10/2/1932).

The *raison d'être* of Thorpe's Inquiry Report (1969), was to move the allotment system away from its (perceived) working class origins and bring it more into line with middle-class values by turning allotment sites into leisure gardens. The report emphasised the recreational use of allotments over and above their functional aspect, and in this way hoped to create more demand for allotments. Perhaps one of the reasons the Thorpe report ultimately had so little impact was because it

failed to realise the multiple ways in which allotments were valued: allotmenters did not make a distinction between recreational and functional use. For the most part, allotments, as they stood, offered a 'socially structured situation in which the agents' interests [were] defined and with them the objective functions and subjective motivations of their practices' (Bourdieu 1977, 76). The sites in my case study area have changed little over time, probably because these sites reflect the values of the community they serve. Change is, in effect, unnecessary or unwanted.

The benefits of allotments are both tangible and intangible and include a space for recreation, exercise and, if desired, an opportunity to network. However, allotments also offer a space for contemplation and/or solitude and the chance to indulge in the hobby of growing one's own food in an idiosyncratic way and for personal reasons. Allotments and other urban agriculture projects also offer an opportunity for excluded groups or individuals to participate and become involved in a project. In this way, allotments can contribute to a sense of self as well as community and, accordingly, they can help to shape lives and encourage social integration.

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