

York's **Allotment** **Heritage**

Ross Wilson



Introduction

Travelling across Britain, through its cities, towns and villages, it is almost inevitable you will be confronted with what appears to be patchwork quilt effect in a corner of a field or behind a row of houses. Sometimes this is only occasionally glimpsed from a train or a car, or perhaps it forms a regular occurrence in your everyday route. Allotments have been a significant feature of the landscape of this country since the nineteenth-century. Though on occasion allotments can be passed without a second thought, this patchwork quilt of land is highly important. Allotments have a significant history for the towns and villages where they are situated and for the individuals who tend them. This history has gone largely unrecognised but the value and importance of allotments should be acknowledged and celebrated. It is within the last hundred years especially that allotments have played a significant part in local and national history. Allotments have been essential in times of war, in times of high unemployment and have recently come to attention as possible ways of helping the environment. In York allotments deserve a place alongside any other feature of this historic city. The way in which citizens of York have cultivated allotments is essential to the story of York in the twentieth-century. This project will seek to rectify the neglect of the history of allotments in the city by showing how allotment sites in York have developed since the 1900s. It will show how allotments have expanded, shrunk and how the provision and use of allotments has altered depending on the requirements of the city, its citizens and the individuals who work on their own allotments. This is a story which encompasses a great deal of different perspectives and reflects the way York itself has altered and developed. The importance of allotments for leisure, welfare, family life, community life and for the wider environment in York is demonstrated in this history. York's allotment heritage is significant. As we dig up the past, we find a rich layer of experiences and opinions from allotment holders past and present, we observe how allotments have grown in the city, and we can appreciate the results of allotments for York and its citizens.

Origins: The 1908 Allotment Act

2008 marks the centenary of the Allotments Act of 1908, a piece of legislation which has had a profound effect both on landscape of York and the relationship between the City of York Corporation and its citizens. The Allotments Act (1908) was set in place by the newly elected Liberal government as part of their raft of social legislation. It was designed to aid the poor and the less well-off especially in the industrial towns. The Act called together the previous pieces of legislation regarding allotments and stated in certain terms that local authorities have a duty to provide allotments for their own resident citizens. This unprecedented stipulation was contained within section 23 of the Small Holdings and Allotments Act of 1908. Section 23 states that if allotment authorities 'are of the opinion that there is a demand for allotments...in the borough, district or parish the council shall provide a sufficient number of allotments to persons...resident in the borough district or parish and desiring the same.' In determining demand an authority was advised to take into consideration 'a representation in writing by any six registered parliamentary electors or rate payers.' The Act goes further than any other piece of social welfare legislation at the time, as under Section 25 local authorities were given power to compulsorily purchase land for allotments if land cannot be acquired by private agreement.

This act was to have a significant impact on York when it became law, but the history of allotments in the city and in the country goes back much further. Allotments were a feature of cities such as Nottingham, Newcastle and Birmingham from the seventeenth-century. Though these allotment sites were intended to be used by the wealthier middle-classes in the city, for instance the so-called Guinea Gardens in Birmingham, the name deriving from the price of their rent, would have been too expensive to be used by the urban poor. The idea of allotments as a form of welfare for poorer citizens began to emerge from the middle of the nineteenth-century as concern regarding the living conditions of slums in industrial towns and cities grew. Allotments were believed to provide factory workers and labourers with an ability to be out in the open and thereby benefit from exercise as well as provide themselves and their families with a cheap source of fresh food. Allotments were also considered a healthy occupation and a means of discouraging perhaps less constructive vices such as

drinking and gambling. The legislation which had previously controlled the provision of allotments in Britain was the 1887 Allotments Act, similar to the 1908 Act it however ensured the development of many privately owned allotments. The 1887 Act states that authorities must consider appeals for allotments if six registered electors or ratepayers petition the authority in writing, however it places no obligation onto the authority for the provision of allotments itself, stating that allotments should only be provided if they can't be obtained by private means. Privately owned allotments were and are still common in many parts of the country. Whether operated by wealthy businessmen or companies these in general provided allotment sites for their employees. Railway companies particularly opened up land next to railway lines for use as allotments.



Fig.1: Pencil drawing of an allotment garden of the early 1900s.

In York however, the rise of allotments in the city is associated with the Rowntree family, who viewed the provision of allotments for their workers and the city's poor as a moral obligation. The first allotments in the city were provided by the Rowntree family in the

latter half of the nineteenth-century, other individuals also looked to providing allotments for their workers. The amount of allotment land however was limited; in 1899 there were only roughly 120 plots of varying size in the city, though in main they usually measured approximately 300 square yards. Nevertheless the number of allotments in the city soon expanded and in seven years allotment plots numbered over 450. Allotments were a luxury however and were mainly let to the well-to-do working man who could afford what was for example the 10 shillings a year rent for a Rowntree allotment in the early 1900s. Allotments were set up in association with the Adult Schools run by Rowntree's in the Leeman Road and in Acomb. These sites ran their own competitions for vegetable and flower growing and provided a means for working men to gain access to land, an increasing problem with the areas of poor housing in York at the time. However some allotments were restricted to members of these schools or employees of the landlords, further limiting the possibility of some of York's poorest citizens obtaining an allotment site. In 1906 there were 8 allotment sites in York.

District	Landlord	No. of allotments	Size of allotments
Haxby Road	Rowntree and Co.	104	345 sq. yds.
Poppleton Road	Leeman Road Adult School	94	345 sq. yds.
Poppleton Road	Acomb Adult School	76	345 sq. yds.
Burton Lane	Mr. Hornby	30 (approx)	0.3-2 acres
Layerthorpe	Mr. Mansfield	32	0.4 of an acre
South Bank	Mr. De Bing	60	180 – 720 sq. yds.
Nunthorpe	Mr. De Bing	30	180 – 720 sq. yds.
Clementhorpe	Mr. Waddington	30	100 – 400 sq. yds.

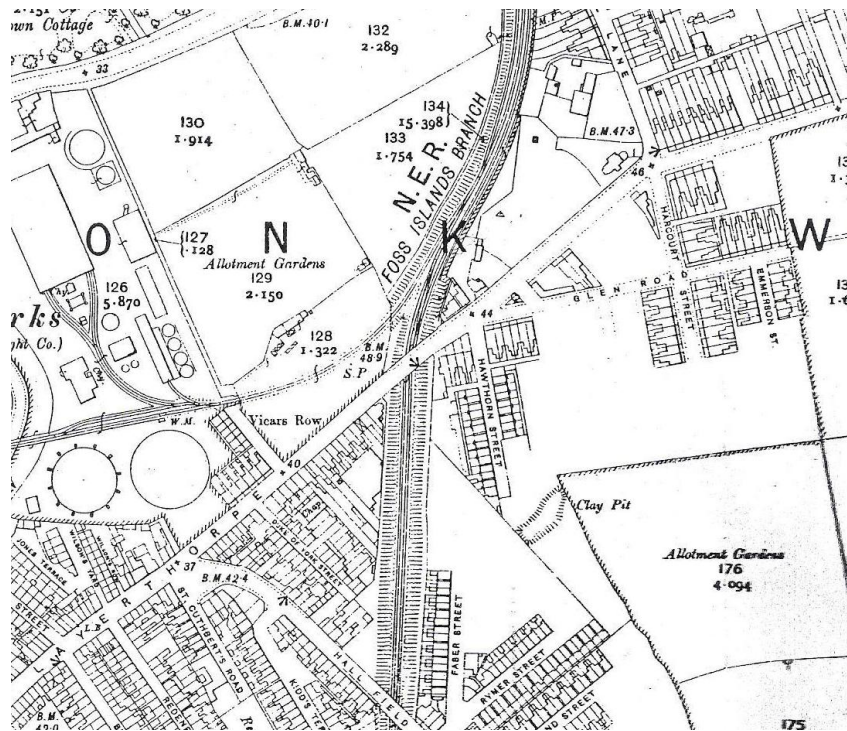


Fig.2: Mr. Mansfield's allotments in Layerthorpe, 1909 (copyright Ordnance Survey)

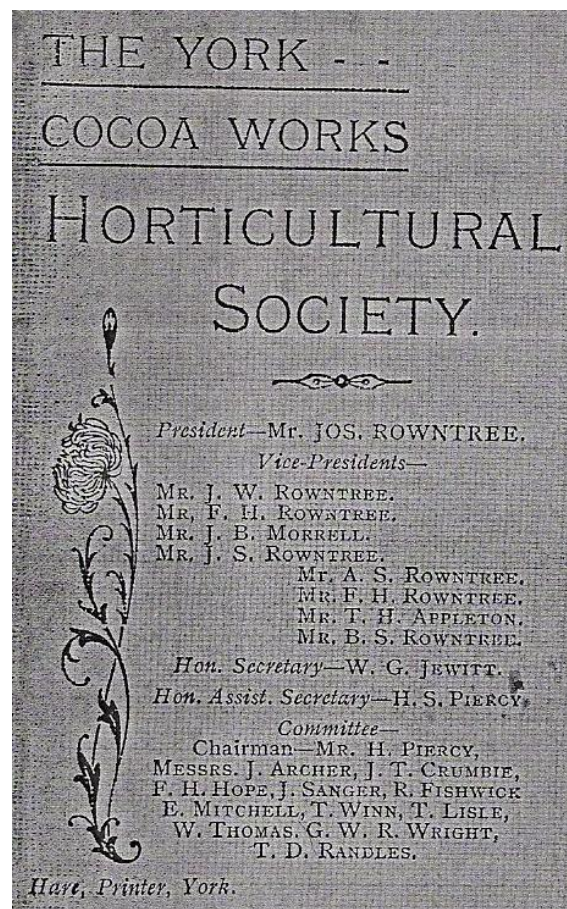


Fig.3: Rowntree's allotment society.

The Corporation Allotments

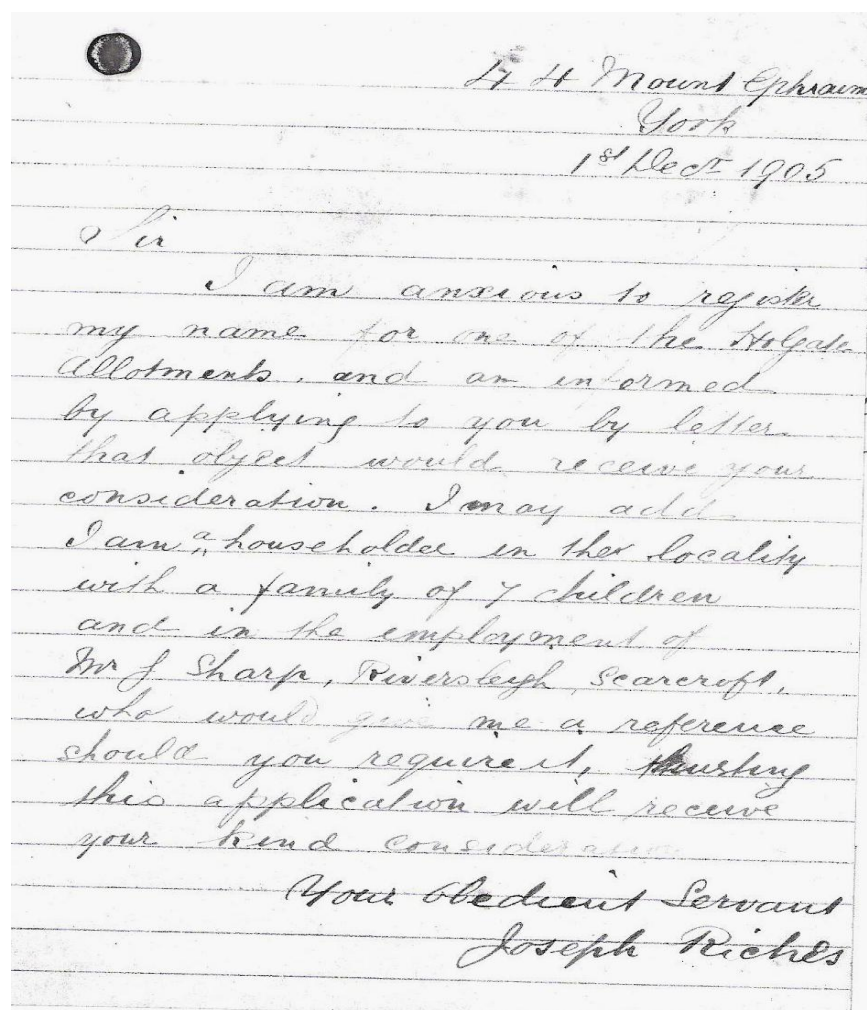
The presence of these allotment sites in the city and the fact that they were over-subscribed demonstrates the huge appeal allotments had to many of York's citizens. The knowledge of allotment sites elsewhere in the country also led many to consider whether it was time that York had its own Corporation owned and run allotment sites. Councillors began to ask questions of this possibility of the Estates Committee. Councillor Fred Morley wrote to the Town Clerk on the 6th of December 1904 asking about the Corporation's duty and ability to provide allotments for city's working poor. The main point of change occurred however earlier in August 1904 when residents of the Holgate area, with a knowledge of the 1887 Act, petitioned the Corporation to provide an allotment site in their area. The Town Clerk received a letter from the 'citizens of York, resident in the Holgate District', signed by over 20 ratepayers and electors, applying for land on or near Holgate, 'for the purpose of providing allotments.' The Corporation had evidently not considered this eventuality occurring, of its citizens demanding allotments be provided for themselves, and therefore began a hurried consultation process. Having no experience of setting up or maintaining an allotment site, other boroughs and cities that had already set up allotment gardens were researched. Areas such as Nottingham, Derby, Sheffield, Bridport and Swindon were examined as to the methods of providing allotments and importantly the contracts between individual tenants and the Corporation. The main assistance for this process however came from the allotments already in the city operated by Rowntree's. Arnold Rowntree, known to take a keen interest in the company's allotment gardening was written to asking for his opinions on the way allotments should be set out. One of main conditions expressed by Arnold Rowntree in his response was that allotments should never be too far away from the residences of the tenants, with 20 minutes travelling considered the maximum. The Rowntree allotments were used as the template for the Corporation allotments, even down to the stipulations of the contracts.



Fig. 4:Arnold Rowntree

Whilst the Corporation was concerned with investigating the operation of managing allotments the search was on for all important question of where to place them. The residents of Holgate had been the most ardent in their demands for allotments but trying to find suitable land in the area proved difficult. The residents showed their frustration in a letter to the Town Clerk in January 1905 written by Mr. Andrew Moody of 64 Murray Street, York, on behalf of the residents of Holgate asking what had been done and to push the matter of allotments further. An area of land near the Holgate Beck had been identified by the beginning of 1905 held by Reverend J. Topham and Mrs. Roberta Grant Lawson from the Corporation. The land had been rented to the Reverend Topham to provide recreational facilities for the residents of Holgate and had been used primarily as a football field. The Reverend Topham was written to in January 1905 asking if he would be willing to give up the tenancy so the land could be used for allotments. He replied in February signalling his and his co-tenant's intention to allow the land to be used for allotments 'for these worthy men.' The Reverend Topham and Mrs. Grant Lawson were served notice to quit the land by March 1905, though the Corporation received a late bid for tenancy from another group. In May 1905 the Town Clerk was sent a letter stating that the York and District Football Association were intending to ask for tenancy of the Holgate Fields which were also known as St. Paul's Football Ground. The Corporation kindly informed the organisation that the land was to be made into allotments however, and the City Engineers were informed to start work laying out the site.

The Town Clerk was advised to advertise the availability of plots in the local newspapers and was inundated with requests from residents in the Holgate area asking to be considered as a tenant for the site. Some chose to use this opportunity to state their worthiness for an allotment; one individual wrote how he was retired and needed the occupation, another that he had been resident in the area for many years. Some took the opportunity to find out more about the allotments asking what could be grown on them, how long the tenancy would be for and one individual who inquired whether the plot would be big enough to keep pigs. This particular gentleman was quickly informed by the Town Clerk that the keeping of pigs on the site would not be allowed. Some like Mr. Joseph Riches drew attention to their need to provide for a large family. Mr. Riches, resident at 44 Mount Ephraim, worked as a labourer in the Scarcroft area and with 7 children wanted to take on a plot at the new site in Holgate.



44 Mount Ephraim
York
1st Decr 1905

Sir

I am anxious to register my name for one of the Holgate Allotments, and am informed by applying to you by letter that object would receive your consideration. I may add I am a householder in the locality with a family of 7 children and in the employment of Mr J Sharp, Riversleigh, Scarcroft, who would give me a reference should you require it, ~~trusting~~ this application will receive your kind consideration.

Yours Obedient Servant
Joseph Riches

Fig.7: Letter from Mr. Joseph Riches applying for an allotment at Holgate, 1905.

Work was completed quickly and by January 1906 the first tenants were able to take their plots. One of the first given was plot 3 to Mr. John Hallam of 60 Lindley Street, his contract dating from January 1st 1906. The demand for allotments was so high that by September 1906 all the plots on the site had been rented. The rent for the plots was still high however with many of the average-sized plots charging 10 shillings and sixpence annually. Many petitions were directed to the Town Clerk in the first few years of operation asking for a reduction in rents though this was never granted. A list of the original tenants however suggests that most of these men were from Holgate's working classes. Occupations of the men are listed as Engine Driver, Seaman, Mechanic, Smith as well as a number of individuals classed as Labourers, such as Mr. J. Riches, who took possession of plot number 48 on the Holgate site. The allotment holders quickly formed themselves into the Holgate Allotment Holders Association and felt confident enough to demand further assistance from the Corporation. In March 1906 plot holders requested a fence along the side of the path leading to the football field. 'As during the football matches held since the allotments were opened the players and followers have strayed on to the ground already dug over, and particularly on the hedge side, have stood to watch the play and tramples the soil down.' The letter of complaint contained 47 signatories, nearly all the tenants of the site. The experience of keeping allotments was new to many tenants as the running of an allotment was new to the council. Some tenants found they had taken on more than they could cope with, or family and work commitments meant they were unable to work the plot. Those willing to let go of their tenancy began a process of transfer, where they would write to the Town Clerk indicating their desire to be released from their contract but giving the name and details of a friend or acquaintance who was willing to take the allotment on. Between 1906 and 1911 nearly 21 transfers took place all for a variety of reasons. Mr. W.J. Stride who had acquired his plot himself by transfer from a Mr. C. Wilson in October 1907, in January 1908 wrote to the Town Clerk requesting his tenancy to be transferred to another as having acquired his plot on the anticipation of being married, he was unable to get a house in the vicinity, and he was now living in Clifton.



Fig.8: Holgate Road before 1910, the Fox Inn is on the left, the allotments are behind the trees on the right.

The impact of Corporation owned and run allotments in the city was substantial. Residents saw for the Corporation's duty to provide its residents with allotments being fulfilled. This observation encouraged residents in various other parts of the city to form themselves into associations and start writing to the Corporation requesting allotments be made available in their areas as well. Citizens in the South Bank and Burton Stone Lane areas were persistence in their attempts to get the Corporation to provide allotments for their districts. Oscar Rowntree writing in the Yorkshire Gazette on the 25th of August 1906 stated;

'There is no doubt as to the popularity of allotment gardens, and if land is available the Corporation should have no difficulty in widely extending them in different districts in York... A glance at the map of York would lead one to believe that in the Haxby Road, Layerthorpe, Bishopthorpe Road and Heslington Road districts land could be acquired for the purpose of allotments if so desired.'

Oscar Rowntree referred to the 1887 Act as providing the means whereby residents could ask for allotments to be provided; though he was quick to acknowledge that the Act had been superfluous in this instance, as the land had already been owned by the Corporation. Nevertheless referring to the need for 6 ratepayers or electors to petition the Corporation, he stated that the 'machinery for securing

allotments must be set in motion by those who desire to have them.’ An anonymous comment in the same paper however drew attention to the problem with the 1887 Act, which is that the knowledge of this right might not be available to the working man, and the bureaucracy of the Corporation would certainly repel and confuse potential inquiries. Nevertheless the benefits of allotments provided by the Corporation could now be seen by all citizens of York. Oscar Rowntree defined the three principal values of an allotment to a working man;

- 1) If a man puts labour into it he can add materially to his weekly wage from its produce.
- 2) He is always sure of a good supply of fresh vegetables.
- 3) The cultivation affords pleasure and healthy exercise to one who may have been cooped-up all day in some factory or other place of business. In addition his family will undoubtedly derive great benefit where they help its cultivation.

The allotment even in its earliest appearance in York was not seen as a solely male preserve, women and children were also encouraged to take part in the activity, though women were restricted to traditional roles as housewife and mother.

‘Gardens...bring the wives and children into the scheme of recreation and it is no mean blessing to bestow to associate the whole family with the husband’s and father’s use of his leisure hours. Nothing appeals more strongly to the man than the sight of the flowers and fruits that have grown up under his own loving care; many a mother wearied by the monotony and drudgery of household cares, finds renewed health strength, and brightness while spending the cool of the evening in the midst of such delightful surroundings; and children learn early to associate their happiest hours with the soil’ (Yorkshire Gazette, 25/6/1906)

With the assistance of the whole family the produce of an allotment could be substantial. When carrying out their initial investigations into providing allotments for the city the Corporation asked Arnold Rowntree what the tenants of the Rowntree allotments mainly grew. It appeared vegetables were the main concern for allotment gardeners at the beginning of the twentieth century. Flowers

and fruit were also important but the main of the allotment was given over to the cultivation of root vegetables. The amount of produce estimated that could be grown by one man in a year in 1906 on a privately owned allotment site measuring 345 square yards was considerable.

Vegetables: 42lbs of brussels, 2 bunch of carrots, 24 celery sticks, 7 bunches of lettuce, 2 bunches of onions, 39lbs of peas, 8 bunches of radishes, 18 savoys, 50 cabbages, 96 cauliflowers, 12lbs of French beans, 8 bunches of mint, 14 bunches of parsley, 320lbs of potatoes, 9 bunches of rhubarb, 4 bunches of turnips.

Fruit: 3lbs of gooseberries, 6 quarts and 2lbs of raspberries, 9lbs of red currants, 17lbs of strawberries.

Flowers: 245 bunches of flowers, 60 iris blooms, 7 lily blooms, 2 bunches of polyanthus, 38 rose blooms, 16 tulip blooms, 2 bunches marguerites, 1 bunch of daffodils.

It is perhaps unsurprising that in a city where Seebohm Rowntree's study of only a few years previously had highlighted a third living in poverty that such a potential resource was desired by many. Oscar Rowntree in 1906 stated that 'there is no reason why allotments should not be available in every district in York if so desired, for the town is not too large to make this impossible.' Holgate allotments gave residents a glimpse of what could be possible in their own areas. Their case for further Corporation allotments in York was further strengthened by the passing of the Allotments Act in 1908. Citizens now recognised that it was the Corporation's obligation to provide its residents with allotments. This legislation also led to the establishment of a committee within the Corporation whose sole responsibility was to oversee the creation and management of new allotment sites in York. Consisting of 6 councillors and aldermen, The Small Holdings and Allotment Committee sat for the first time on January 6th 1908 and their role at this meeting was clearly defined;

'...the Committee report to this council as to the obligations and powers of the (1908) Act and other matters, with a view to this council delegating to the Committee such of its powers and duties as may be deemed expedient.'

The site at Bustardthorpe

The committee instructed the Town Clerk in March 1908 to advertise in the local newspapers for individuals and association interested in acquiring an allotment to make themselves known to the committee. The residents of South Bank were the first to respond to this advert requesting an allotment site in their area. There still appeared a problem with communicating to York's citizens of their rights to petition the Corporation for allotments. On the 27th April 1908 the Town Clerk reported that he had sent out 113 application forms for allotments and that up to the present only 48 had been returned, still primarily from the Bishopthorpe Road and South Bank District. The committee therefore focused their efforts on providing this area with allotments. This proved highly problematical as the committee soon found many land owners reluctant to sell or lease land that was to be used for allotments. In the following months sites around Campleshon Lane and Knavesmire were considered but their owners wanted to high a price for them. A site at Bustardthorpe owned by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, behind the grandstand of the racecourse was briefly considered, but thought too far away to be suitable. Land around Burton Stone Lane was thought about but the Corporation was unable to reach an agreement with the owners. This process was frustrating for both the committee and interested York residents. The Town Clerk even wrote to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries asking for guidance in the matter describing the 'great difficulties, practically insurmountable' they had encountered in their search for land that could be used for allotments. The Ministry wrote back reminding the committee of their obligation to provide residents with allotments if demanded and their power of compulsory purchase. Emboldened by this response the committee turned once again to the problem at hand, though the land at Bustardthorpe was again prominent in the minds of the committee. The committee asked the City Engineer in July 1908 to draw up possible plans to be presented to the newly formed South Bank Allotment Holders' Association. On the 31st of August 1908 the City Engineer submitted his report.

'The Bustardthorpe site provided 152 plots, the areas of which are for the most part $\frac{1}{4}$ rood (approx. 300 sq. yds.) sections. Of the above number of plots 31 are larger than a $\frac{1}{4}$ rood, varying from an area of

321 yards to 630 yards. Provision is made for 2 main roads 10 feet wide and 80 yards apart with five cross roads, 7 feet 6 inches wide and 40 yards apart. It is proposed to make these roads with ashes only...12 stand pipes fed from the Water company's main, with sunk tubs for the storage of water...Cost: £373-5-0.'

This report would appear to be in vain however as the South Bank Allotment Holders' Association dismissed it, stating that the Bustardthorpe site was indeed too far away from local residences to be practicable. Whilst further areas of land were considered near the York Barracks and the Burton Lane District, the committee still seemed unable to secure land for allotments. A further response from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries however pushed the committee into a decision. With the expectation from Government and local citizens to act the committee chose a site to be the second Corporation allotments in York. This was the Bustardthrope site, and negotiation with the owners, the Ecclesiastical Commission began to secure the fields in question. This again proved a drawn-out process as the Ecclesiastical Commissioners representatives initially advised their clients not to sell or lease to the Corporation if the land was to be used for allotments, as the land was considered to have a value for building upon. The committee informed the representatives of their powers of compulsory purchase and this obstacle was removed from negotiations. From March to July 1909 correspondence ensued between the two parties as to the nature of the allotment sheds allowed on the site. The plot holders shed were thought by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners to be 'of a very unsightly appearance and might be objectionable to the surrounding houses.' They proposed 'tool-boxes' measuring 4 feet by 2 feet to be used on the site, a proposition the commission rejected as unworkable. By August 1909 the parties had come to agreement as to terms and conditions, and the Ecclesiastical Commissioners waived their original concerns and consented that tool sheds and poultry were to be allowed on the allotments. On the 28th of September the two parties signed a contract to lease the land for an initial contract of 21 years at an annual rent of £48-12s-6d. The land measuring over 9 acres was designated in the contract as being procured under the 1908 Allotment Act and specifically for the residents in South Bank. Correspondence stated

A detailed map of the Ashcroft area, showing the Grand Stand P.H., Race Course, and Old Gravel Pits. The map includes a compass rose, a scale bar (0 to 1000 feet), and labels for '86' and '87'.

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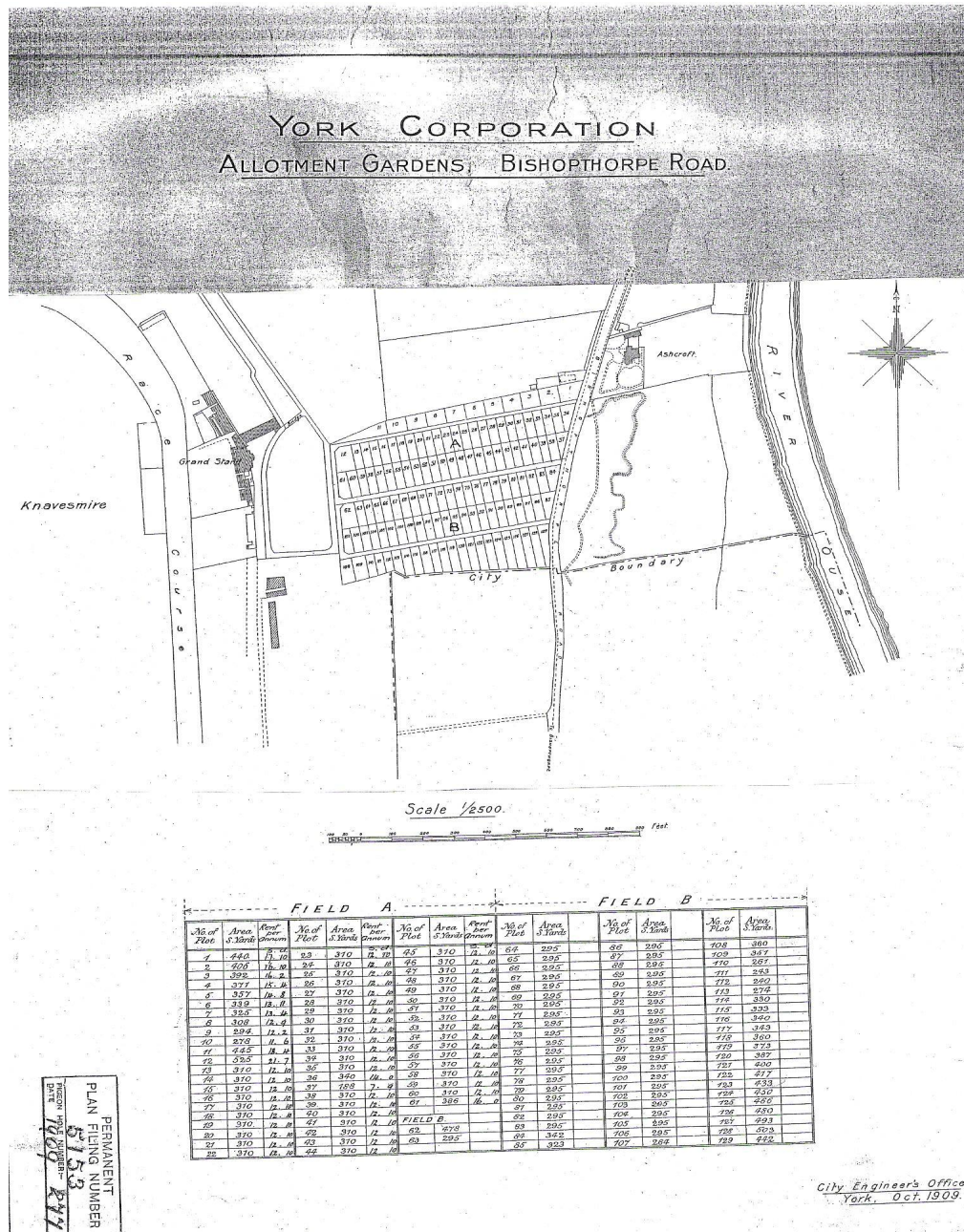


Fig.10: Original allotment site at Bustardthorpe, 1908.

On the 25th October 1909 the City Engineer again laid out plans for the newly acquired site. It was decided to provide approximately 129 allotments on the two fields, with the plots varying in area from about 160 square yards to 477 square yards, though the bulk were set out as 300 square yards. 3 roadways were planned with direct access from Bishopthorpe Road. Taps and water butts were also planned. The estimated cost of this was placed at £280-13-0. To ensure the allotments were not operated at a loss the committee suggested that the yearly rent was to be in the region of 15 shillings for an allotment of a quarter rood. The provision of tool sheds for the allotment holders

was considered which would raise the rent by an extra 5 shillings, though the committee declined plans and stated that individuals were free to erect their own sheds providing permission from the committee was obtained. A month later after suggestions that the rent to be charged was far too high, the committee agreed that rent should be set at 12s/6d for an allotment of a quarter of a rood (300 square yards). On the 15th March 1910 the vice-chairman of the committee reported that the new allotments on Bishopthorpe Road were let by ballot on Monday the 14th of March at the Guildhall, and to suit the convenience of applicants the allotments were divided into two sections; a) the Bishopthorpe Road section for those residing in that locality, and b) the Knavesmire end section for those residing in that locality. Most of the applicants were for the Bishopthorpe Road section. The result of the ballot was that of the 29 allotments in the Bishopthorpe Road section 20 had been taken, and of the 32 allotments in the Knavesmire section 11 had been taken. The vice-chairman also stated that only one of the two fields acquired had as yet been appropriated for allotment purposes, but that the second field was available if the demand for more allotments should arise, after the letting of those still remaining of the first field. Demand was high and it was only a few years later in January 1911 that this further section was opened out for new tenants.

BISHOPTHORPE ROAD Allotment Holders' Association

Schedule of 4th Annual Show, 29th July, 1914.

LIST OF OFFICERS.

President :—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Mayor of York
(Councillor H. Rhodes Brown.)

Vice-President :—The Sheriff of York (R. Newbald Kay, Esq.)

Patrons :—

His Grace the Archbishop of York; Arnold S. Rowntree, Esq., M.P.; J. G. Butcher, Esq., K.C.; M.D.; Viscount Helmsley, M.P.; Urban H. Broughton, Esq.; Jos. Rowntree, Esq.; Ald. S. W. Meyer, J.P.; Ald. Norman Green; Ald. Sir J. Sykes Rymer; Councillors J. B. Morrell, O. F. Rowntree, S. H. Davies, G. Sharp, and G. H. Mennell; W. Reginald De Burgh, Esq.; Harold C. De Burgh, Esq.; J. W. Procter, Esq., J.P.; W. F. H. Thomson, Esq., J.P.; B. S. Rowntree, Esq., J.P.; Rev. Canon Argles; Col. Meysey-Thompson; Dr. Raimes; R. Thompson, Esq.; L. C. Paget, Esq.; Sir A. Kaye Butterworth; Col. Wilkinson, D.S.O.; Major C. E. Wood; W. Northall, Esq., and C. E. Scott, Esq.

Chairman :—Mr. J. P. Gent.

Vice-Chairman :—Mr. S. Cram.

Committee :—

Messrs. E. Warrington, J. W. Collins, T. Acomb, I. Bowland,
F. Birkett, W. Dwyer, A. Pratt, W. H. Barker,
J. Ashcroft and G. H. Cooper.

Fig.11: Bishopthorpe Allotment Holders Association programme
1914.

The construction of the allotments on Bishopthorpe Road, on what was to become known as the Bustardthorpe site named after the area which lies between the city boundary and Middlethorpe, marked a new period of relations between the Corporation and its citizens. The Corporation now found that its residents were now demanding a service; to provide and maintain allotments in the city for the benefit of York's working families. Owners of allotments in the Bishopthorpe area were quick to form themselves into an association, organising shows for plot holders to exhibit their produce. This was not only a matter of pride for the individuals but also for the Corporation, who took a great interest in their achievements at Bishopthorpe and Holgate. On the 19th August 1911 the Yorkshire Gazette reported on the first of these shows at Bishopthorpe, marvelling at the speed in which only two years after the site and the Bishopthorpe Road Corporation Allotments Holders' Association was formed a competition was being held for their produce at the South Bank Adult School. The high regard for what was thought of as an indication to the Corporation's commitment to providing allotments can be seen in the membership of the Bishopthorpe Road Association. Not only were all the allotment tenants members but the Lord Mayor was president and the City Sheriff was vice-president, not to mention the Archbishop of York who was also a member: a very illustrious association indeed. The exhibition of produce was based on 40 classes, with 30 classes restricted to Bishopthorpe Road Allotments only. It was reported that the standard of competition was high. 'Some particularly fine vegetables were shown – huge vegetable marrows and cabbages, potatoes of good size and quality, and kidney beans and peas also being noticeable.' It is important to bear in mind the significance of working classes being able to cultivate their own piece of land in York. This was a privilege which had been perhaps unthinkable for many in the city. The open spaces of York today are a marked contrast to the beginning of the twentieth-century when much of the land was held in private ownership. At the Bishopthorpe Road show in 1911 this was drawn attention to and demonstrates the lack of public ground at the time. It was highlighted that between Clementhorpe and the footpath opposite the allotments there was no way of getting to the riverside without trespassing.



Fig.12: Bishopthorpe Road at Clementhorpe, 1911.

The discussions between the Allotments Committee and the Associations of the sites at Bishopthorpe Road and Holgate were no different than they are today. There were complaints about dogs being exercised on the Bishopthorpe site, for which the committee erected a sign. There was continuing debate over whether the Corporation should supply water to both sites and not be refunded by the tenants. There was also discussion over whether poultry should be allowed on Holgate, as some tenants had already set up hen runs on their plots. Though the keeping of hens was not allowed in the tenancy agreement the Corporation permitted this to continue. That was until other plot holders on the site complained that the hen runs attracted vermin which were damaging their plants. The situation was eventually solved in January 1914 when those plot holders at Holgate who wanted to keep poultry agreed to relocate to the other side of the allotment site on land rented by the Reverend Topham, where proper hen runs could be constructed. The first eviction of a tenant from a Corporation allotment was also carried out in this year, as the committee acted against a Mr. J. Berry in April 1914 who owed rent and had let his allotment site go uncultivated. The committee served notice and Mr. Berry was evicted a month later. While these everyday complaints were addressed the committee was still searching for more land on which they could build another Corporation allotment. Residents in the Walmgate ward petitioned for allotments in April and July 1913 and the City Engineer was asked to enquire over the possibilities of renting land from the Pasture Master of Walmgate Stray; though he received a negative response. The committee efforts however received a boost

however with the purchase of land on the Fulford Field Estate in January 1914. The Corporation had successfully applied for a loan of £2050 to buy the land. The majority of the money £1650 was to be allocated to the setting up of a school for mentally and physically handicapped children, whilst £400 was used to set up allotment on the river-side of the property. This allotment site which today is known as Fulford Cross was to provide allotments for those in the Hull Road area who had been persistent in their attempt to secure allotments for their area. Work on the Fulford site however was delayed as work was halted on demolition in April 1914, as the committee became unsure of sufficient funds to lay out the site and if enough new tenants could be found. Work was still postponed in August 1914, when the crisis in Europe ensured Britain's entry into the conflict and the beginnings of the First World War. The conflict had a dramatic effect on allotment gardening in the city, most of the allotments we have today in York date from this period, making them in effect war veterans.

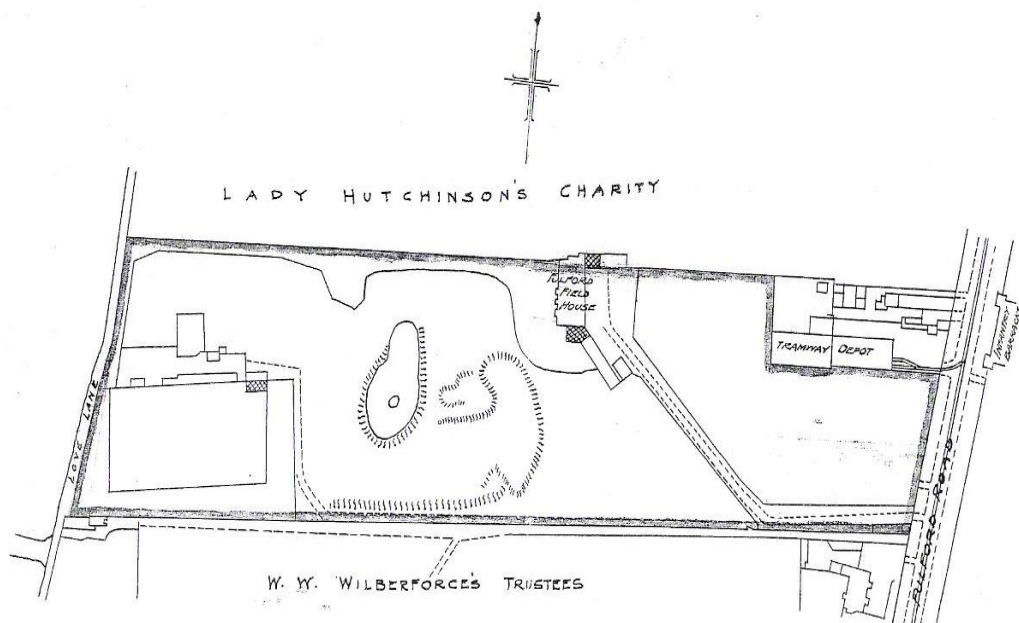


Fig.13: Fulford Field Estate, the section turned over to allotments is the Western edge of the property (1914).

The First World War

The impact of the war on allotment gardening around Britain and in York was not immediately known. The committee did however begin to get requests from women whose husbands had either been called up or volunteered. On the 8th October 1914 a letter from a Mrs. North was received, the wife of an allotment holder at Bishopthorpe Road whose husband was on military service, she asked to be relieved of the rent of the allotment for the present half-year. This request was granted by the committee. The threat of German U-boats cutting off the supply of food to Britain became a growing concern as increasing numbers of ships were lost to these campaigns. The Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) of 1914 had given powers to local authorities to through the Ministry of Agriculture and Fishing to occupy unused areas of land for allotment purposes. The nation-wide expansion of allotments during the war was remarkable, from roughly 600,000 plots in 1914, by 1918 1.3 million allotment plots had been laid out. The National Government of Herbert Asquith had also by early 1915 advised local authorities to set up committees to investigate and set up possible sites for cultivation. York set up its own committee and began expanding its allotment sites in the city. By March 1915 allotments had been put in place at the Fulford Fields Estate and also at a site on the Acomb Road, on what today is known as Green Lane Allotments. The committee in York began inquiring as to potential allotment sites in the city. The Retreat Hospital was asked if they had land which could be used, and sites on Walmgate Stray and Hob Moor were considered. The need for an increase in the production of food in Britain was pressed upon the committee by the Ministry of Agriculture. On the 13th January 1916 a letter from the Ministry of Agriculture was read to the committee reiterating the need for as much food to be produced, the Ministry inquired as to state of allotments in the city and if more could be done to cultivate the land. The committee responded accordingly. Steps were taken to increase the number of allotments to improve food supply for the city and for the nation. This goal was assisted by the North Eastern Railway Company who in 1916 arranged the laying out of 78 allotments on land on the Acomb Road, to the east of the Corporations existing allotments. They would let these to their own workers initially and would then offer them to the public. On the 29th December 1916 the committee met to decide which sites to

consider for allotments to increase food production. Areas were to be immediately investigated and arrangements made to plan out allotments.

The sites considered were; Hob Moor, Hospital Fields (Albermarle Road), Upper Scarcroft, Glen Estate, Low Moor, Millfield Lane, Alma Terrace, the ground near Wiggington Road Railway Bridge (Wiggington Terrace), Fulford Field, Beresford Terrace, Bishopthorpe Road, Poplar Street, Linton Street, Chesnut Avenue, Lime Avenue, Football Field near Field View on Burton Stone Lane, Burton Stone Lane and on the Haxby Road.

It was considered that upwards of 470 allotments, each about 300 square yards could be provided on these. The committee also specified that due to the pressing need allotment holders should be restricted, stating that two-thirds of their plots should be given over to growing potatoes. The need for productivity on allotment sites was aided by the Ancient Society of York Florists who in 1917 suggested that their organisation award a prize for the highest yields obtained from the City's allotments. The committee gave the society 5 guineas to encourage this scheme. The committee and York's citizens were quick to respond to the call for an increase in food production. By the 11th January 1917 some 516 applications had been received for War Allotments in various parts of the city, and 134 had already been allotted. Whilst the rule regarding the setting aside of the majority of an allotment for potatoes was kept in place, local bylaws were suspended and allotment holders in the city were permitted to keep pigs and chickens on their plots, providing that they were properly housed. The new National Government of David Lloyd George issued the Cultivation of Lands Order Act of 1917 which urged local authorities to step up the cultivation of necessary foodstuffs. By late 1917 the Corporation had set up War Allotments throughout the city. Many of these sites have since disappeared, but during the conflict they were essential in maintaining the war effort.

- Alma Terrace, Fulford.
- Beresford Terrace, South Bank.
- Bull Lane, Heworth.
- Glen Gardens, Heworth.

- Poplar Street, Clifton.
- Hob Moor.
- Scarcroft Hill.
- Albermarle Road, South Bank
- Birch's Field, Hull Road.
- Millfield Lane.
- Carr Field.
- Hempland Lane, Heworth.
- Field View, Burton Stone Lane, Wiggington Road.
- Upper Cromer Street and Cromer Street.
- Chapel Flat, Hull Road.
- Green Lane, Acomb.
- Friend Retreat, Heslington Road.
- Campleshon Lane, South Bank
- South Bank Avenue and Thompson's Field.
- Water End, Clifton.
- Knavesmire Crescent.
- Howe Hill, Poppleton Road.
- Gas Works Field, Layerthorpe.
- Abbey Street, Clifton.
- Bootham Stray on the Wiggington Road.
- Sturdy's Field, Hull Road.
- Briar Lane, Fulford Road.
- Murray Street, Holgate.
- New Lane, Holgate.
- Low Moor, Walmgate Stray.
- Asylum Lane, Bootham Stray.
- Leeman Road.
- Huntingdon Road.
- Bishopthorpe Road.

The scale of land taken up for allotments in the city was immense. On the 12th April 1917 it was reported that as a result of the committee's action in carrying into effect the Orders of the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries for the provision of allotments the following had been achieved.

Number of allotments provided – 1091

Number of allotments now being worked – 1057

Assuming that most of these allotments were the average 300 square yards plot, the amount of land equated to over 65 acres, roughly a tenth of the area of the city of York. It was believed at the time that these figures for York were superior on a population basis to those of any other northern city or borough. The Corporation offered potato seeds for those taking on an allotment and the rents charged were kept low to ensure as much land as possible was worked. A dramatic change in social attitudes also occurred during these years. Women had from early on in the war played a vital role in hospitals and support positions on the battlefronts. Women also contributed greatly to the production of food during wartime. The Women's Land Army were essential in maintaining food supplies by working on farms throughout the country. Women also increasingly took on allotments to aid the war effort and to increase food supply. Whereas allotments had been regarded as a solely male preserve, women now began cultivating these sites. Allotments were now a common feature in the city and 1917 marked an apparent revolution in the provision of Corporation allotments. Although brought about by war-time conditions, in little over twelve years the Corporation of York had set in place a legacy of providing allotments in the city, and a permanent change in the landscape of York.

The Interwar Period

The impact of this change was felt in the immediate post-war period as York's citizens had grown a taste for allotment gardening and were reluctant to give up the privileges they had acquired during wartime. Councillor A.G. Watson who sat on the Allotment Committee for many years, wrote in the Yorkshire Gazette on the 25th August 1926, that the war 'had revived the demand for land, and given permanence to a movement which is one of the good things that the war gave us.' The position of allotment tenants was also strengthened by the passing of the 1922 Allotments Act. This Act was established to provide allotment tenants with some security of tenure, laying down specific periods of notice and compelling most allotment authorities to appoint allotment committees, and provided tenants with greater compensation at the termination of their tenancy. A further act in 1925 also reinforced the obligation of local authorities to provide allotments

for their citizens and to find suitable alternative land if an allotment site is developed. Despite these acts the Corporation were set a difficult task of negotiating with land-owners to lease or purchase the land they had acquired for War Allotments. The powers granted to the committee concerned with allotments by the war-time Cultivation of Lands Order Act was to cease in March 1923. After this date the Corporation could no longer hold War Allotment sites legally. The period of the 1920s and 1930s in York was one where allotments appeared and disappeared as the Corporation held onto some sites, build new sites and lost others. All this carried on during periods of high unemployment for the city and the country, and allotments would also come to play a part in this process as well.

The desire for allotments was rising, as early as February 1919 residents on the Poppleton Road had asked the Corporation for a site in their district. It was decided by the committee to meet the needs of residents by using the 1908 Allotments Act to retain some of the land used as War Allotments. It was these efforts which secured most of the allotment sites that exist in York today. On the 15th October 1919 the field used as allotments during the conflict near Hempland Lane, Heworth, containing over 6 acres was sold to the Corporation for £430. This site still remains today as does the site at Low Moor, also used as War Allotments and obtained by the Corporation from the Pasture Masters of Walmgate Stray. The permission of the Army was needed before this purchase however as the military didn't want the football field of the 4th Yorkshire Regiment being interfered with. The site covering nearly 11.95 acres was nevertheless obtained by the Corporation, who leased it for fourteen years originally at a yearly rent of £59-15-0. There was also an extension to the original Low Moor site in March 1923, as the area of land behind the Imphal Barracks was also leased by the Corporation. By 1925 the allotments at Glen Gardens had been secured, the site was originally purchased by the Corporation in 1912 to be made into a recreation park for local residents which were built before the war. During the war however the southern part of the land was converted into allotments, and permission was obtained by from the Parks Committee that the use of the land for allotments was continued. The allotments in Burton Stone Lane were secured leased to the Corporation in 1921. The area used as War Allotments consisted of two areas; one piece of land adjoining Burton Stone Lane measuring over 6 acres and another near Wiggington Road of over one acre. The

land was leased from the Foeffes of All Saints Pavement in York for 14 years at £42 per year.

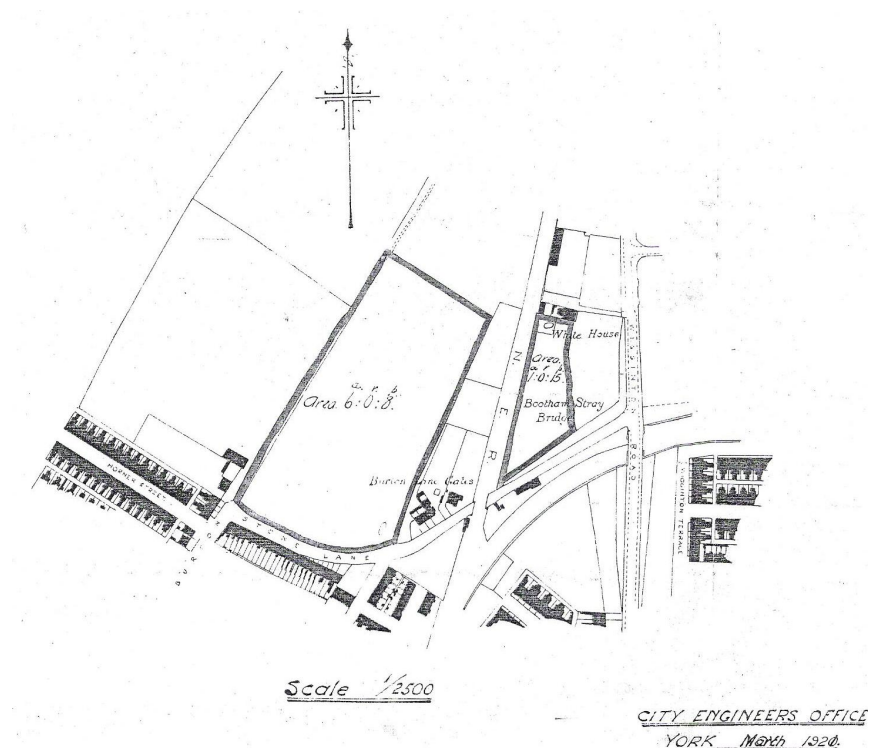


Fig.14: Burton Stone Lane allotments 1920s.

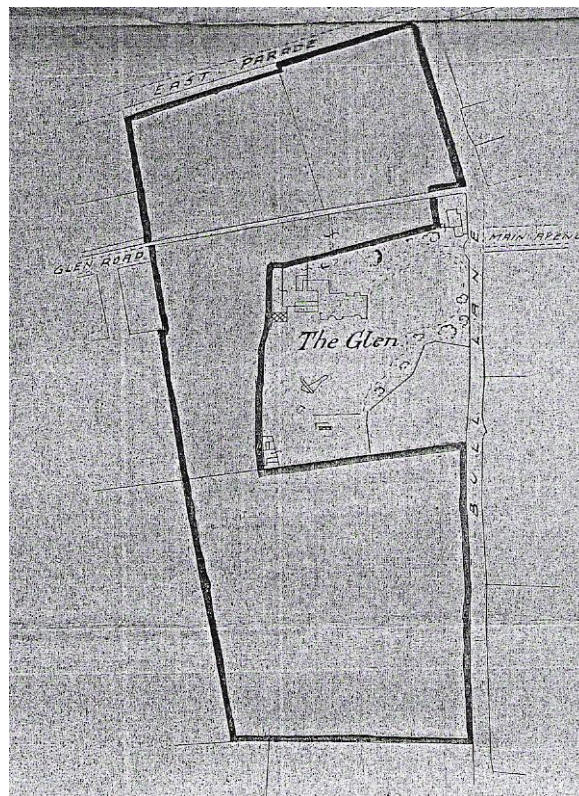


Fig.15: Original plan of the Glen Estate in 1912, the lower section was converted to allotments during the First World War.

Whilst these allotment sites still exist in York many sites used as War Allotments have now disappeared. Some such as the allotments in Bull Lane, Campleshon Lane and parts of Field View on the Wigginton Road were closed down for housing or building works. Other sites were leased by the Corporation after the war but for one reason or another were not maintained. Moorland Road in Fulford for instance, was a quite substantial allotment site leased by the Corporation in 1921. The site covering two fields measuring 11.5 acres altogether was let for 7 years at £75 yearly rent, and then again in 1928 for 5 years. Problems occurred when this agreement came to be renewed in 1932 as the landowner a Colonel Key was only prepared to let one of the fields, and use the other for grazing cattle. Whilst the site at Moorland Road was large not all the plots were taken, indeed, out of 157 plots 57 were unoccupied. The Corporation desired to maintain both fields knowing the disruption closure of tenancy would bring to the plot holders. No agreement could be reached by the parties and the Corporation eventually agreed to quit both sites and find new plots for their tenants elsewhere. The Corporation found great difficulty in keeping sites for tenants and securing long-term leases. On the 7th May 1921 an agreement to lease 12.16 acres called Chapel Field Flats on the Hull Road from Mrs. Elizabeth Barstow and Mrs. Frances Amy Barstow was agreed. The land had been wartime allotments and a 5 year lease at £60 a year rent was entered into. The allotment holders who had long petitioned the Corporation for allotments in their area were concerned about the length of tenure. Forming themselves into the Hull Road Allotment Association they urged the Corporation to seek a longer lease and guarantee their site. Upon entering into discussion with Mrs. Elizabeth Barstow's representatives in 1926 however the Corporation were informed that due to Mrs. Barstow's 'great age' only a yearly contract could be offered. The Corporation not wanting to cause their tenants distress by such a short notice though it better not to take the offer and the site was closed down in 1928.

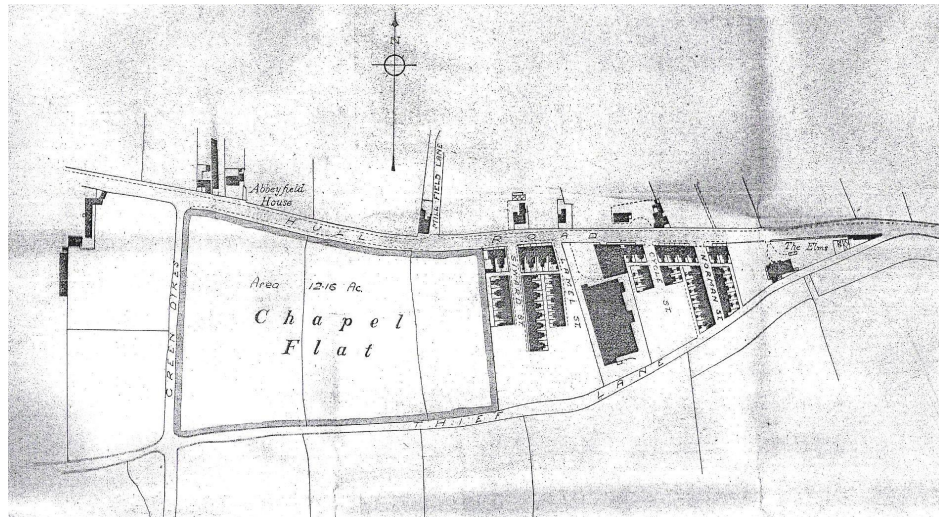


Fig.16: Chapel Flat allotments, 1921.

Some attempts to secure allotments by the Corporation were more successful however. The War Allotments on Millfield Lane were held onto throughout 1920s and 1930s. On the 7th February 1923 the Corporation agreed to lease property at Millfield Lane from Charles Walker of the White Swan Hotel, Coppergate. The site containing about 1.5 acres was taken on at £12 per year. Mr. C. Walker was written to on the 30th November 1920 asking to retain the land taken for allotments under the Cultivation of Lands Orders 1917. Mr Walker agreed to this sale in March 1922 but the sale was protracted because of he had sold part of the land already to a Mr. Batty. The Corporation was eager to secure new lands for allotments so after much negotiation in November 1922, 7 acres were leased from Lord Deramore in Heslington for 14 years at £30 a year. The lease marked something of a diplomatic coup for the Corporation as Lord Deramore had initially rebuffed attempts by the Corporation after the First World War to provide permanent allotments on his lands, stating that land inside the city boundary was available and his lands were valuable grass lands for milk cows. Problems arose with Lord Deramore's current tenant however a Mrs. Sarah Elizabeth Kelly of Lawrence Street. Mrs. Kelly used the field for crazing cattle but on being granted an extension to her tenancy in July 1924 by the Corporation she immediately let the field to gypsies. The Corporation informed Mrs. Kelly this was not part of their granting an extension, though they were forced to wait until they the Corporation could take occupation of the land themselves. Along with these gains other sites which had been War Allotments such as those on Clementhorpe, Heslington Road, Leeman Road and the

Gas Works Field were closed to be used for other purposes as the Corporation lost its powers to hold such lands and no arrangements could be made with the landowners. The Corporation were in danger in-fact of holding onto some War Allotments for too long, and they were threatened with legal action in 1925 over their apparent reluctance to vacate the allotment site at Knavesmire Crescent. The dispute was settled however and the plot holders offered places on the Bishopthorpe Road allotments extension. Some sites such as those on the Wiggington Road were much reduced in shape with the building of Crichton Avenue and the extension to Burton Stone Lane in the 1930s. Despite the difficulties in holding onto War Allotments during peacetime it was during the 1920s that allotment gardening peaked in York, as by 1926 the Corporation owned or leased 173 acres, constituting 2393 allotment plots. It is also important to note that these allotment sites throughout the difficult periods of the 1920s and 1930s always operated at a profit for the Corporation. The allotment sites paid for themselves and were a considerable asset to the city.



Fig.17: This map of Heworth from 1930 shows the large amount of land taken up for allotments during the interwar years (copyright Ordnance survey).

It was during the 1920s and 1930s that York witnessed a steady rise in the number of unemployed. Global economic conditions after 1929 especially entailed the opportunities for work in the city began to

fall. Although the Government introduced a national scheme in the early 1930s to provide allotments at a reduced rate for the unemployed, their sponsorship of the scheme soon ended. The City of York Corporation, decided to continue the scheme in the city. In February 1931 the allotments committee decided that unemployed men should not be required to pay the first half year's rent in advance on the signing of the tenancy agreement. The scheme was a success and the committee went further later that month by agreeing that any unemployed man taking an allotment should be allowed a rebate of rent to the 30th June 1931, though he would be required to pay the half-year's rent due on the 1st July, this payment was postponed to anytime before the 30th September 1931. Many responded to this scheme and by the 7th May 1931 it was reported that 78 new plots had already been let to unemployed workman. On the 28th of May 1931 the Parks superintendent reported that there were now a total of 121 individuals assisted under the unemployed allotments scheme. The following year in May 1932 a further 160 plots had been let through the scheme. The allotments committee with the cooperation with the Allotments Associations in the city also ran schemes where reduced-price seeds could be bought and tools could be obtained.

Though requests for the provision of free allotments for the unemployed were turned down by the Corporation in 1933, further schemes were introduced to aid the unemployed such as the ability to pay their allotment rent in weekly instalments. By March 1933 a total of 260 allotments had been taken up by unemployed in York. These plot holders were still expected to keep up the cultivation of their allotment however, though failure to pay the rent on these plots would appear to be met with a degree of understanding. On the 8th December 1932 the Parks Superintendent was informed that 26 unemployed men had failed to pay anything for their plots. The Superintendent was told he was not to supply these men with seeds unless given a reasonable explanation. Councillor A.G. Watson reported that 'the value of allotments during periods of unemployment cannot be over-emphasised. Apart from the net gain to the household of the produce grown, it helps in no small degree to save a man from the moral and physical deterioration which inevitably follows prolonged spells of unemployment like the present' (Yorkshire Gazette 25/9/1926).

Seebom Rowntree's second survey of York carried out in 1935-1941 drew attention to the value of allotments during these difficult

times, as they could provide a valuable source of supplementary income for families. This was considered especially the case for 'the unemployed, the widowed, the elderly or those too sick to work.' But it is worthwhile to note that they were used by those in regular work as well. Indeed, the popularity of allotment gardening grew and grew during the 1920s and 1930s despite or perhaps because of the harsh economic conditions. In 1939 the city Corporation had 18 parcels of land in all covering 104 acres, even more than during the First World War. These were usually divided into the traditional 300 square yard plot with rent charged at 12/s a year. The amount of people holding tenancy of allotments in York was substantial.

1935 – 1,270 plots owned

1936 – 1,080 plots owned

1937 – 1,110 plots owned

1938 – 1,094 plots owned

A noticeable feature of the 1930s was the political campaigns of groups such as the Ramblers and the Youth Hostel Association to open up more land for public use, and allotments were considered as part of this process of the public ownership of land. Allotments began to feature significantly in the lives of people in York as a leisure pursuit and as a hobby as opposed to a way of improving their economic condition. Although the Depression of the 1930s caused many to seek allotments to lessen the burden, the 1930s especially was also a time when more and more people were seeking pastimes, gardening was one of the most popular of these. The 1920s and 1930s was a time when Allotment Associations in York flourished. These groups provided allotment gardeners as well as their families with social events, a community to belong to, as well as assistance in the purchasing of seeds and tools. Active associations organised competitions for their members to exhibit their produce. Tang Hall Allotments Association, Scarcroft, as well as Burton Stone Lane held competitions at least once a year and exhibited usually in around 30-40 classes. Tang Hall Allotments Association by the 1930s was still a relative newcomer to York's allotment associations, as construction work on the estate was only begun after the First World War. By 1936 however the association was thriving providing a pivotal role in the community highlighted by the variety of social events which occurred with their annual shows.

The fact that Tang Hall had such a flourishing allotment association proved the many who argued that the estate would cause a decline in allotments in the city wrong. Tang Hall was conceived as part of the Garden City movement promoted by local authorities and the Government from the beginning of the twentieth-century. These schemes were designed to solve the housing problem afflicting the country. Estates were built on the edges of towns and cities with the idea that country and urban living could be combined. Houses were built with gardens instead of the traditional terraced house yard, and housing estates were set out with green open spaces for the residents. This inclusion of gardens in house designed appears merely to have heightened the enthusiasm of gardening as a hobby and thereby the take-up of allotments in the city.

13th SUMMER SHOW

To be held in the PAVILION and GROUNDS on
SATURDAY, AUGUST 12th 1939.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC 4-30 p.m.
ADMISSION — ADULTS 2d. CHILDREN 1d.

MEMBERS ONLY.

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Class.
 1—6 POTATOES, round.
 2—6 POTATOES, kidney.
 3—2 CAULIFLOWERS.
 4—2 CABBAGES.
 5—6 TOMATOES.
 6—3 BEETROOTS, round.
 7—12 PODS OF PEAS.
 8—12 KIDNEY BEANS.
 9—6 ONIONS, dressed.
 10—6 ONIONS, spring sown, undressed.
 11—12 RUNNER BEANS.
 12—12 SHALLOTS, not seedlings
 13—2 CUCUMBERS.
 14—3 vases of SWEET PEAS, 9 stems per vase, named, no foliage.
 30—GARDEN BOUQUET, not to exceed 16 inches across.
 31—FLORAL DISPLAY, not table, space allowed 3ft. x 3ft.
 32—BOUQUET of SWEET PEAS, not more than 16 inches across.
 33—FRONT GARDEN COMPETITION, for “Horsman Bowl”, Portion of Garden facing front window, Corporation tenants only
 34—BEST CULTIVATED GARDEN. The whole of the Garden to be judged. Open to all Members.
 35 GIFT CLASS, one Pot Plant. FREE ENTRY.</p> | <p>Class.
 15—Vase of SWEET PEAS, 6 stems, named, one variety.
 16—Vase of SWEET PEAS, 16 stems no foliage.
 17—6 ASTERS, annual.
 18—6 GLADIOLI.
 19—3 GLADIOLI.
 20—6 CARNATIONS.
 21—6 DAHLIAS, decorative.
 22—6 DAHLIAS, Pompone.
 23—6 Stems of STOCKS.
 24—6 ROSES.
 25—12 PANSIES or VIOLAS.
 26—6 SPRAYS of ANNUALS 3 var-
 27—3 BUTTON-HOLES. [eties.
 28—1 LADY'S SPRAY.
 29—Vase of CUT FLOWERS, arranged for effect.
 36—1 WHITE LOAF, 12 hours old.
 37—3 TEACAKES, 12 hours old, fruited with Currants only.
 38—1lb. JAR OF NEW SEASON JAM, homemade. Rasp. or Strawberry
 39—NEEDLEWORK, any Garment made by Exhibitor. [only
 40—KNITTING, best Knitted Article.
 41—EMBROIDERY, best Fancy Worked Article.
 42—Member's Children only. BUNCH OF WILD FLOWERS, no ferns, arranged by Entrant.</p> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
- MEMBERS' WIVES ONLY. Entry Fee 3d. each Entry.**
Entry Fee 6d.
Entry Fee 6d.
Entry Fee 1d.

Fig.18: Tang Hall allotment show programme, 1939.



BURTON LANE AND DISTRICT
Allotment Holders' & Tenants' Association,
YORK.

ELEVENTH ANNUAL SHOW
- of -
Flowers & Vegetables

to be held on
Saturday, August 20th, 1932

in the
Adult School, Falsgrave Crescent

ADMISSION FREE

PATRONS :—

The Lord Mayor of York (Ald. R. H. Vernon Wragge.)
Coun. A. D. Naish ; Coun. G. W. Halliday ; Ald. J. B. Morrell ;
Coun. E. Temple ; Coun. E. J. L. Rymer ; Coun. Mrs. Crichton
Coun. Lucas ; Coun. Dodsworth ; Mr. H. E. Bloor.
Mr. A. S. Rowntree ; Mr. B. S. Rowntree ; Mr. J. W. Dow ;
Arthur T. Hattee, Esq.

ENTRIES CLOSE THURSDAY, AUGUST 18th,
and should be sent to the Honorary Secretary :
ERNEST E. TEE,
238. Burton Stone Lane, York.

Fig.19: Burton Stone Lane Allotment Association programme,
1932.

These competitions were big events for participants and also very stressful; one elderly York allotment tenant recalled his experiences of watching one of these shows as a child. 'I've found that people who exhibit deserve a medal for carting them to the show. Because if you grow maybe twenty, it's a difficult job trying to cart twenty big chrysanthemums. These are beautifully, bold shaped flowers, but you only have to touch them and the petals fall off and it's ruined. I remember a couple who had been carrying these to the show and you could see it hadn't gone right and they'd ruined five or six along the way down. And when he came in his face was red and his neck was bulging and it was obvious he wasn't in the best of temper. He said to his wife, "put those down there", and she was fed up with it all and banged them into three great big vases. This caused two of the blooms to be knocked and all the petals fell off. So that was the last

straw and he said, “do you know I’d rather be in hell with the devil showing chrysanthemums than with you here?” She replied as politely as possible, “Well don’t worry you’ll have plenty of opportunity one day!” Many of York’s allotment holders who could remember these times recalled the spirit and friendliness of the sites and the allotment associations. “But there was a real atmosphere with the allotment association. I can remember going to the ones in Acomb called Green Lane. But in those days, the early days, they were all working men, and one fellow would always be there and at half past ten he’d ring a bell and in his little hut he had a primus stove and everyone sat down and had a brew and there was a real spirit about it.”

The competitions within and between the city’s allotment sites were strong throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Winning competitions was a matter of pride not just for the individual, but for their own allotment site and indeed wider community. The most prized competition in York for allotments during this time was the highly-coveted Arnold Rowntree Rose Bowl. This silver trophy had once been awarded to the best allotment on the Rowntree’s allotments, but in 1924 Mr. Arnold Rowntree donated the trophy to the Corporation so it could be competed for by the all York’s allotment gardeners. The trophy was awarded to the individual who owned the best-kept allotment site. The winner of the trophy faced tough competition due to the high number of allotment tenancies in York at the time. The trophy however was repeatedly won by plot holders on the Glen Allotment site. Repeatedly from the 1920s to the 1950s individuals from Glen would successfully compete for the trophy. The most prolific winner was Mr. Fred Bowes who achieved the feat of winning the trophy back-to-back ten years running, and as a tribute to his achievements the Corporation rewarded him with the actual trophy in 1955. Mr. Bowes plot, number 44 at Glen continually impressed the judges over the decade with its style, appearance and production. A number of other competitions were available to allotment holders during the 1920s and 1930s, such as the Yorkshire Gazette Horticultural Society Competition. Open to all allotment holders it was a huge event in the calendar both for allotment holders and York’s citizens. Plot holders were able to exhibit their vegetables and fruits in a variety of classes and win trophies and cash prizes for their efforts.

The Second World War

This dedication to allotments would once again be needed as on the 3rd September 1939 Britain declared war on Nazi Germany. The drive for available land to be put under cultivation was far more rapid during the first few months of the Second World War than the previous conflict. On the 28th September 1939 the committee considered a request from the Ministry of Agriculture who informed them to do everything possible to increase cultivation. At the time nearly 390 allotment plots were unoccupied in York, and a concerted press campaign was launched to rectify this situation. The need for land to be used to maximise food production was quickly realised by the National Government. These orders filtered down to local authorities and in York the Housing Committee were soon asked to tell tenants to keep their gardens in a state of cultivation. During this time of anxiety the allotment committee still listened to their tenants' complaints and suggestions. Even one from the tenant of No.1 Alma Grove Allotments who successfully asked for compensation after a public air raid shelter was constructed on the plot. The need for people in York to begin considering how they could aid the war effort was made very clear at the outset of the war by the Government and the Corporation. Everyone was considered to have a role to play. Allotments and gardens, backyard poultry, pig clubs and the like all could make their own contributions. In August 1939, the Minister of Agriculture launched the 'Grow More Food Campaign', which became known as its subtitle 'Dig for Victory'. The Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries used the National Allotments Society to assist. Most of the allotment associations in York were affiliated to this national body and instructions regarding the need for cultivation were soon made clear to gardeners. This process marked a greater degree of control over allotments than witnessed previously. Several national bodies were set up to promote allotments and high-productivity; by October 1939 the Domestic Food Producers Council was established to stimulate production, which became the Allotments and Gardens Council. These organisations worked with local associations, with the distribution of seeds especially, to ensure everything possible was done to gain high yields of produce on allotments.

Local authorities had been given powers under the Cultivation of Land (Allotment) Orders 1939 and 1941, to take possession of any

unoccupied land which could conveniently be used as allotments. They were also permitted to use for allotment purposes any land in their own occupation, such as parks or open spaces. York's Corporation lost no time in wielding this power, taking the area in Manor Drive, Heworth, under cultivation by December 1939. On the 15th of July 1940 the Parks Superintendent was given instruction to endeavour to get all suitable vacant land in the city put under cultivation, with the request given to gardeners that no more than 5% of their plot should be used for flowers. In the first years of the war the Corporation struggled to find enough gardeners for their plots as many people were already employed in the war effort in one way or another. By the 5th September 1940, only 2 or 3 applications for allotments had been received whilst there were 60 vacant plots. These problems were alleviated somewhat with the offer on the 28th November 1940 from the organising secretary of the North Riding of Yorkshire Branch of the Women's Land Army suggesting the employment of members to cultivate any vacant land. By this time the number of vacant plots numbered 46. By February 1941 however the tide had changed as the Corporation received 153 new applicants for allotments. By March 1941 new lands were put under cultivation on Knavesmire, alongside the wall on Albermarle Road, and the land belonging to York Rugby League Club on Haxby Road was also ploughed and used for cultivation. Regulation 62A of the Defence General Regulations 1939, also gave local authorities the power to occupy and cultivate any available and suitable land. On June 12th 1941 the Corporation announced that the Rose Bowl was to be awarded not for the best-kept allotment but for the best garden in terms of war-time food production.

The 'Dig for Victory' campaign was hugely successful across the country. After four months since its launch in September 1940, 7,600 demands for publicity materials were received by local authorities. Five million publications were issued including stickers, posters, leaflets and even 'Notes for Sermons', were distributed in 1940 in response to public interest. In 1942 over 10 million leaflets for the 'Dig for Victory' campaign were distributed across the country. Shows, demonstration plots, local 'Dig for Victory' weeks, radio talks and every other possible medium were used to spread the message. The results can be seen in the growth of the number of plots across the country.

Year	Number of Plots	Acreage
1939	814,917	95,700
1940	1,044,829	116,877
1941	1,365,740	138,096
1942	1,451,888	142,808
1943	1,399,935	136,820

It was officially estimated that by 1944 the produce from gardens, allotments and similar plots of land represented 10% of all food in Britain. This produce was used to maintain the standards of nutrition, to supplement the rationing introduced in 1940 and to aid the war effort. York played its role in this process, taking up more areas of the land in the city to be cultivated and hosting its own ‘Dig for Victory’ week in the city in February 1942. The event however was not a success. Many of the city’s major buildings had been taken over by the military, and the Corporation when informed of the necessity of hosting this event, replied it had no-where available. The Co-operative Hall was eventually designated a suitable site and promotional materials and displays were erected in the Hall for the citizen’s of York. The event was not however a resounding success as few chose to attend the show. The Corporation were not convinced of the necessity of the ‘Dig for Victory’ week, and when York’s turn arose again to host this event in October 1942, they successfully argued for an exemption on the grounds of a previous poor response. This is not to suggest that York’s contribution to the ‘Dig for Victory’ week was anything but substantial. Many of York’s allotment holders remember friends and families being involved in the war-effort by working on their allotment and supplementing their rations. One gentleman recalled that on the old Bustardthorpe Allotments that, ‘there was a man who used to keep pigs on his allotment during the war and all the residents in the area would leave out their scraps so they could be boiled down and used as swill.’

The actual figure for the amount of land taken on as allotments was immense, over 73 acres of the city of York was used for allotments. By late 1944 allotments covered the city.

Permanent allotments

New Lane, Acomb: 2.246 acres

Bustardthorpe: 11.850 acres

Green Lane, Acomb: 5.030

Hempland Lane, Heworth: 6.050

Holgate: 4.400

Howe Hill, Poppleton Road: 1.840

Total: 31.416 acres

Land rented for Allotment purposes

Low Moor: 11.75 acres.

Wiggington Road: 1.75 acres.

Total: 13.50 acres

General Purpose and Allotments

Alma Grove: 0.250 acres

Fulford Road: 2.920 acres

Glen: 3.880 acres

Hempland Lane: 4.640 acres

Hob Moor: 2.590 acres

Hospital Field, Albemarle Rd: 2.370

Nunnery Lane: 9.400

Scarcroft: 9.400

Various plots on housing estates: 2.250

Total: 28.55 acres

Grand total: 73.466 acres

After the war allotment gardeners in York were offered the chance to possess new tool sheds on their sites. These tool sheds were particularly distinct in that they were reused Anderson air raid shelters. On the 18th of July 1946 the Parks Superintendent offered the shelters as tool sheds to allotment holders in the city, with the cost of erection being £5 a shelter. Scarcroft Road allotments were chosen to be a testing ground for the use of these shelters and they can still be seen on many plots on Scarcroft and indeed allotment sites today.

Allotments in York after 1945

Allotments have changed substantially in York since 1945, not only in their size, shape and even location, but also in the people who use them. After the war the large allotments used to ensure food production were scaled down as other interests such as housing, education or transport held sway. In many ways the history of York's allotments after 1945 are one of competing for space and attention, as a variety of other factors such as housing, education and transport have all competed for funding and importance. Whilst retaining some form of their World War One heritage, many of York's allotment sites have altered. From 18 sites in the 1920s, the number of allotments today in York is 16. During the 1940s and 1950s many allotment sites altered in their size. The site of Carr allotments was reduced to a fraction of its original size as a large housing estate enveloped it during the 1940s and 1950s.

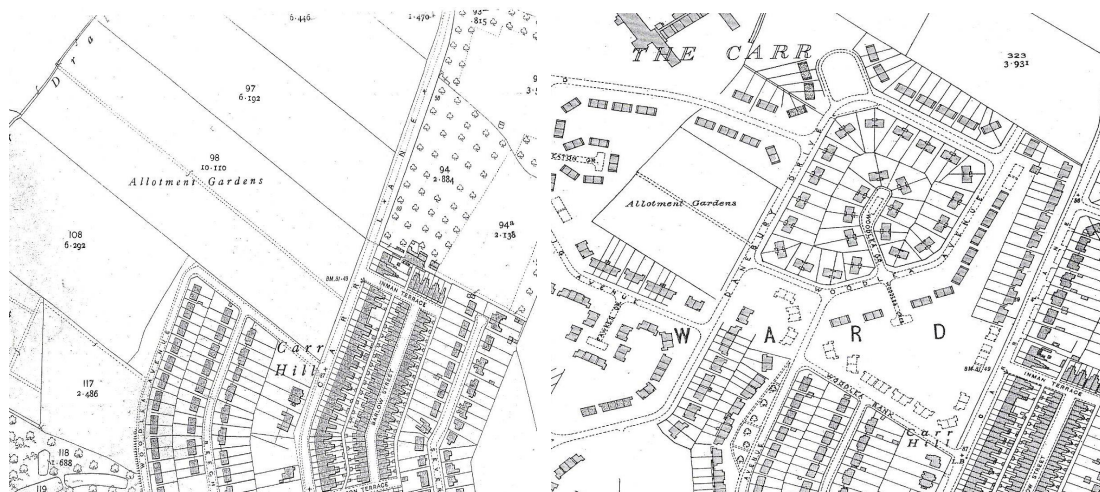


Fig.20: Carr allotments, the map on the left is from the 1930s, the map on the right is from the 1950s (copyright Ordnance Survey).



Fig.21: Aerial photograph of Carr allotments from the 1950s, the allotments can be seen in the centre of the photograph

The Wiggington Road site was divided further as Rowntree's successfully campaigned for a portion of the site to use as a car park for its employees in 1960. Perhaps the most significant development was the relocation of the Corporation's flagship allotment on Bishopthorpe Road, known as Bustardthorpe. The development of York Racecourse entailed new areas were needed for car parks for race-goers. The fields behind the grandstand appeared ideal for this purpose and after consulting with all the groups concerned the Corporation gave permission for the car park to be built in 1962. Tenants of the site were relocated to the new Bustardthorpe site set up during the Second World War further down the road. Tenants were however aided by the Allotments Act 1950 which required the Corporation to give a full 12 months notice to plot holders and for tenancies to expire during the winter months so work would not be lost. Bootham Stray received a facelift, as acting upon complaints that the site had become dilapidated the Corporation in 1969 ordered the site to be cleared and new plots to be measured out. The allotments at Fulford Cross were also changed, as sections were given over for the, proposed but never initiated, construction of a 'folk-park' in 1972.

Before the loss of the original site, Bustardthorpe allotments were also home to one of the most famous of York's allotment holders, George Russell. It was on his plots at Bustardthorpe that Mr. Russell developed what would become the world-famous 'Russell Lupines.' With the help of his assistance Sonny, Mr. Russell bred lupines in a variety of colours, attracting the attention of many of the national Garden Companies, who attempted to tempt Mr. Russell into giving them the seeds and information for growing what became known as 'Russell Lupines.' His allotment site also provided the destination of many a Sunday afternoon walk, and local York residents still remember being taken down to see the flowers when they were children. One allotment holder remembered, 'my father on a Sunday morning we used to go for a walk down there just to look at the lupines.' Another allotment tenant remembered the large number of allotments in the city after the Second World War. Having returned to York after being evacuated to the nearby countryside, he recalled how he had to make his way through the allotments at Low Moor and the now vanished Heslington Road site to get to school in the 1950s. 'I used to walk across when I was at school but in the school assembly they'd say, "people were on the allotments last night, now keep off, don't go on the allotments." I used to walk across the allotments and they used to chat to me...I said we've been told not to come down here. They said, 'you can come down here anytime you like mate. It's these young hooligans, pulling things up.' The problems of vandalism on allotment sites would therefore seem to be older than a modern-day phenomenon.

It isn't just the size of allotments that have changed, York's allotments have altered considerably in their demographic make-up since 1945. The influential Thorpe report on allotments in 1969 showed that 62% of allotment holders were aged 40 or over, typically male, retired manual worker and that over 50% of allotment holders had held them since 1945. Social movements in the 1960s and 1970s however have altered this situation. Women in York began to take on allotment plots for themselves or their families. The change was not easy as many women entered into what was a solely male preserve but women now make up the majority of allotment holders in the country. One of the first women in York to take on an allotment in York described the experience of being the only female allotment tenant.

‘The men were very wary, and they used to mutter, ‘give her three weeks’, but I stayed at it, and then they’d say , ‘give her a few months’, but I stayed at it, then they said, ‘give her a year’, but then after that I was accepted on the site.’ I think they used to be suspicious about me because I grew flowers. They would grow chrysanthemums but not cottage garden flowers like me. There were some who were patronising. But the man next to me, he was wonderful: he used to give me all sorts of advice.’

The rise in concern for the environment and ‘green politics’ during these decades caused many to start to reconsider their stereotypes of allotments and begin to get involved with allotment gardening. A contributor to this movement was the book *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson published in the early 1960s. In her book Carson drew attention to the growing use of pesticides in commercial food production. Carson warned of the disastrous results of such unrestricted use of chemicals, stating that not only would it kill of wildlife but also eventually humans, who would be poisoned by the toxins. The ideas expressed in this book hit a current of concern throughout society within Britain and abroad. The result was an increasing regard for locally produced, fresh produce, grown without the need for heavy-duty chemicals. These concerns led to a broadening of the types of people who used allotments, as once seen as the preserve of the working-classes large numbers of professionals decided to sign up for an allotment to ensure their family was provided with food unpolluted by pesticides.

This movement is perhaps also expressed in the BBC television series *The Goode Life*, where the two main characters escape their jobs to grow their own food on their garden and their allotment. Young families, single men and women were attracted by the idea of allotments for these same reasons. York was similarly effected as environmental groups in the city took an interest in allotment gardening. York Friends of the Earth even set up a scheme to encourage gardening in the city through their ‘Garden-Sharing Scheme’ set up in the summer of 1976. The scheme paired together individuals with available land but not the ability or time to cultivate it, with those who were without any available space. An arrangement between the two parties would be devised where the individual donating their time and skills would be entitled to a share of the

produce from the garden or a piece of land they could use for themselves. Allotments as well as private gardens were shared through this scheme. The desire for allotments during this period is evidenced in the waiting list of 70 individuals in 1975, and the Corporation's decision to build 12 new plots at Hempland in the same year (Yorkshire Evening Press 16/10/1975).

Despite this enthusiasm York's allotments witnessed a downturn during the 1980s, fewer people applied for tenancies and a number of plots fell out of use. This was repeated across the country as allotments seemed to fall out of fashion. Vandalism and neglect became the blight of allotments in York and Britain in general. Steps have been introduced to reverse this decline however and today York's allotments are undergoing a resurgence. This is partly due to the growing interest in the community offered by allotment sites and their value in providing all residents with leisure pursuits, fresh food or just a green open space to escape the congestion of the city streets. A further incentive has been the realisation of the effects of global warming and developing idea that individuals can take part to make a difference to this process. The notion of 'sustainable development' has been repeatedly mentioned in connection with allotments. The 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro brought in a commitment by advanced countries to promote 'sustainable development' at a local level. Allotments are part of this process as they enable individuals to create for themselves 'sustainable lifestyles' reducing their own footprint on the environment. Food grown not far from your own home is a highly beneficial alternative to that bought from supermarkets and shipped across the world. Not to mention the costs of growing as opposed to buying are substantially cheaper. York's allotment gardeners have responded to this movement as many stress the importance of growing their own food rather than rely on imported food in supermarkets. One person commented, 'vegetables come from all over the place nowadays. Spring onions from Mexico, potatoes from Egypt, you don't know how many air-miles these vegetables have flown.'

Allotments today

The way in which allotments in York are valued and experienced has changed since they were first set up at the beginning of the twentieth century. York's allotment tenants now use their plots for a

variety of reasons, but on the whole it is the physical and mental well-being that allotment gardening induces that attracts tenants. One tenant said, 'it's an escape. To come and be with nature. To get away from work.' The financial benefits of allotment gardening are appreciated by many, as most gardeners manage to provide healthy amounts of basics, such as potatoes and onions for themselves. But for others this advantage isn't important; 'it costs me money to have an allotment, but it's a lifestyle thing, getting out doing stuff. It's just my bit of space, if I am under stress I can come down and it's better. You're doing something and you have something to show for it and share with it as well.' Eating the results of hard labour in the allotments, with family and friends, is for many the significant motivation in spending long hours at the weekend and evenings working on allotment plots. 'I don't do shows. For me the best judge is my knife and fork', one tenant stated. Unsurprisingly therefore many of York's allotment holders have chosen to garden organically, as one tenant commented, 'if you're sharing this food with friends or giving it to your family, it has to be organic.' Growing your own food in the way you want is very important to many tenants today and obviously it has a big impact on their diets. One tenant echoed the thoughts of many others when they mentioned that, 'it tends to shape the process of cooking, you start to think in terms of, "what have you got?" I don't want to buy parsnips when I go shopping because I will be eating parsnips galore come October time. You tend to eat a lot of things at a particular time, at the moment I should be looking like a strawberry for example.'

People might take up allotments to relieve stress, to get more exercise and to grow their own food, but a substantial part of allotment gardening in York is getting to know other people. 'Everyone is an individual, some people will share and give other people things, others are more private. But people are genuinely friendly', one tenant commented. York's allotment holders appear to have an unspoken agreement that they're all there together trying to work their plots as best they can; this results in a great degree of cooperation. One tenant was proud that, 'we all work together. If anyone's going away they'll say can you look in on my greenhouse for a fortnight. And if I want to go away for a day they'll look after mine. The lad next to me, I looked after his allotment when he went to hospital.' Another tenant commented that often there would be 'people coming down for the day bringing a picnic and getting to know each other. With the plots

split into smaller sections you tend to have people getting more friendly.’ This friendliness is important when the expansion of the popularity of York’s allotments has meant that many newcomers to the city from other parts of the world have also shared and appreciated the benefits of allotment gardening. Individuals from Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, China, Nepal and India have all taken the opportunity to use and benefit from allotment gardening in York. They have also contributed to York’s allotments by showing the different uses of allotments. ‘We had one woman from Hungary for a while and her plot was magnificent, it was so different from the English plots and so beautiful’, one tenant commented. Another allotment gardener recalled how the presence of a young Polish couple changed the atmosphere on the site. ‘They’d come and have a barbecue, and I suppose that’s not very British thing to do, but it was great, everyone got involved.’

This emphasises the value of York’s allotments to many groups. Allotments in the city are today tended by local schools, children with behavioural problems, disability groups and young offenders to name but a few groups. All these groups demonstrate that everyone can appreciate the benefits of tending to their own piece of land.

Conclusions

The history of York’s allotments is one which has shown the usefulness and practical necessity of providing citizens with land of their own. Allotments have aided York’s residents through the First World War and the Second World War, the depression of the 1930s, and now have a role to play in reducing our impact on the environment. The benefit of realising the heritage of allotments in York is realising the important role they have played in the city’s history over the last hundred years and the highly important role they can play in the next hundred years.

History of York's allotment sites

Name of Site	Origin	Altered and developed
Bootham Stray	Allotments were on Bootham Stray from WW1, but the present site appears to date from 1932 and is shown on maps before 1939.	The present site was cleared and laid out as allotments again in 1969 after complaints the site had become dilapidated.
Bustardthorpe	Original site laid out in 1908, though wartime extensions added in both wars.	The original 1908 site was relocated further down the road in Middlethorpe in 1962.
Carr	Originally occupying a large swathe of land off the Poppleton Road constructed during 1915.	Original site still exists though much reduced after a housing estate was built in the 1940s and 1950s.
Fulford Cross	Site bought in 1914, and turned into allotment during 1915.	Allotments were reduced at the site in the 1970s, though the original site remains.
Glen	Site bought in 1912 for recreation gardens, though taken as allotments during 1915.	Tang Hall School dining hall and housing have altered the size of the site, but it retains its original location.
Green Lane	Site taken up as allotments during 1915.	The site has remained roughly the same with new sections of housing being built around it.
Hempland Lane	Site used as War Allotments in 1915.	The site remains the same though altered slightly during the 1950s and 1970s.
Hob Moor	Allotments were placed on Hob Moor during WW1, though the present site appears on maps in the 1930s.	The site has remained unchanged.
Holgate	Allotments were constructed here in 1905.	The site has altered very little since its construction.
Hospital Fields	Allotments were constructed here during	The site remains virtually unaltered.

	1915.	
Howe Hill	The allotments date from 1915.	The site has remained roughly the same shape since its construction.
Low Moor	The site was taken as allotments in 1915.	The site leased in the 1920s has remained unchanged.
New Lane	The site was taken in as allotments in 1915.	Whilst a housing estate was built around the site, New Lane has remained unchanged.
Scarcroft	The site was taken in as allotments in 1915.	Though expanding during the 1920s the site remains the same.
Wiggington Road	This site was taken as a war-time allotment in 1915.	The site has undergone a lot of changes and now occupies a smaller area separated by Crichton Avenue Bridge and what was once Rowntree's car park.
Wiggington Terrace	The site was considered as an allotment during 1915, though it only became an allotment site during WW2.	The area of ground used as an allotment has remained unaltered.

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