

Otford Allotments Association



Golden Jubilee Newsletter 2004

Souvenir Edition

Some thoughts on the allotment

Allotments are a heritage of a 'charitable past'. So said Professor Thorpe in his Inquiry Report of 1969. It is difficult to trace any pattern in the early establishment of allotments, or, he says, even an early definition of the word 'allotment'. History is hampered by lack of records and differing local customs. In the Middle Ages it is known that some benefactors bequeathed areas of land to improve the lot of the poor, but as rent was usually charged the '*poor old poor*' often failed to benefit! When Lords of the Manor enclosed land in Tudor times with many tenants losing common rights, compensation was often given by specific 'allotments' of land. As these were usually attached to cottages, they were not really allotments as we know them today.

The mass enclosure of commons and open fields in the late 18th and early 19th century resulted in a great social upheaval and widespread poverty when the centuries-old agricultural system of the country was turned upside down. Countless thousands found themselves landless and impoverished. There was a great movement of population from the countryside to towns; by 1831 50% lived in urban areas with the rapid growth of towns and manufacturing industries.

The first Act of Parliament to set aside land for the use of a single individual as an allotment was in Wiltshire in 1806 (perhaps we should celebrate this bi-centenary in two years time?). There was a slow spread of similar schemes, and some landowners provided allotment land for their workers. Some ten years or so later, in 1819, Parliament passed the first Public Act to make specific reference to the provision of allotments for the poor. They empowered parish wardens to let up to 20 acres of parish land to individuals at a 'reasonable rent'. By 1833 it is thought that about half the parishes in England and Wales had allotment schemes in spite of some opposition from farmers and land owners. The provision of these allotments was often accompanied by stringent rules. Some prohibited working on a Sunday; some included a requirement that every tenant should attend church regularly, conduct himself with propriety, and bring up his family in a decent and orderly manner!

The provision of allotments, mainly in rural areas, grew in an 'erratic and spasmodic' way (Thorpe). There was no consistency in the size of plots. In Cumberland there were plots of 15 acres each, although the average size nationally appears to have been between $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ an acre. Very big compared to today. Rents, too, varied from area to area, from £2 an acre in Essex to £6 an acre in Hampshire. However, a Government committee in 1843 recommended that no allotment should be greater in size than a man could cultivate in his leisure moments. This reference to 'leisure moments' indicated an unease amongst the governing class that the provision of allotments might induce labourers to neglect their work. Some agreements forbade the allotment holder to cultivate his plot between the hours of 6am and 6pm without permission.



The growth of allotments had been mainly through private efforts and generous landowners. However, an Allotments Act became law in 1887. This laid down for the first time that local authorities were compelled to provide land for allotments where a demand was known to exist. Thus began a great social movement. By 1895 there were 482,901 plots in Britain. Some demand! The First World War gave a new impetus to the extension of the allotments system, especially in towns. I wonder what today's government would make of an account written in 1919 which stated that the policy of *'squeezing as many houses as possible upon each acre of ground.... threatened to throttle the every-man-a-gardener campaign....'*? Between the wars allotment land decreased, but in 1939 there were still 570,000 individual plots. The Second World War saw the great surge in the home-growing of vegetables, and also in the keeping of livestock. Necessity was the spur, but many in the allotment movement today have their roots in that 'Dig For Victory' fervour that gripped the nation. The years after 1945 saw a gradual decline. Economic necessity faded and recreational habits changed. Supermarket shelves provided easy access to a world-wide range of vegetables all the year round. Despite this, Britons still loved their gardens. There had always been a big following for broadcast programmes, even amongst those without gardens. Remember Mr Middleton and Fred Streeter? The advent of TV gardeners such as Percy Thrower and Geoff Hamilton revived this interest. It might be true to say that today there are more people knowledgeable about husbandry and horticultural techniques than ever before – due to the media.

In Otford the initial allotment site consisted of an area east of a hedge, which is now the boundary fence of Otford Builders Merchants (OBM), which stretched part way across the present Recreation Ground. The land was owned by Lord Mildmay, of Shoreham Place. Many will remember the spectacular burning down of his Manor, which was beyond repair due to the ravages of the death watch beetle. The Parish Council bought the land they had rented, and later Mill Meadow which is now the lower allotments. OBM did not exist; the site was owned by J.H. Nash, a local builder, whose foreman lived in a cottage there, with a storage shed in the garden. All this was largely hidden behind a hedge and tall trees. The allotments were moved back to their present eastern boundary and the newly-formed Otford Sports Association created a football pitch separate from the cricket field. Mill Meadow was bought to compensate for the loss of allotment land. What a bonus for those who have had the pleasure of gardening in that beautiful spot looking down the Darent Valley!

The Parish Council Chairman, Frank Weston, suggested a self-management committee for the allotments, and the OAA was formed under the able leadership of Eddie Fordham. Apart from surrendering some land for the tennis courts when the Tennis Club moved from Telston Lane in the early 60's, the land area has remained the same. There have been some alarms; pressure for extra village car parking space; a housing scheme; etc. But Otford allotments still hold their own, a green oasis near the centre of the village, despite a fluctuation over the years in the number of cultivated plots.

The arrival of Sparrows Builders caused some bitterness when the old hedge was ripped out without notice and concrete stanchions erected on what clearly seemed to be well within the boundary of the allotments on the eastern side. This had been Parish land in living memory. Unfortunately for us, as Sparrow knew, it was not recorded in the Land Register. Village protests were to no avail. A rowdy public meeting of protest at Sparrow's development, which many believed to be out-of-scale and unsuitable for the High Street, was also fruitless. The Parish Council accepted a 'straightening of boundaries' and we have endured the narrowed roadway ever since.

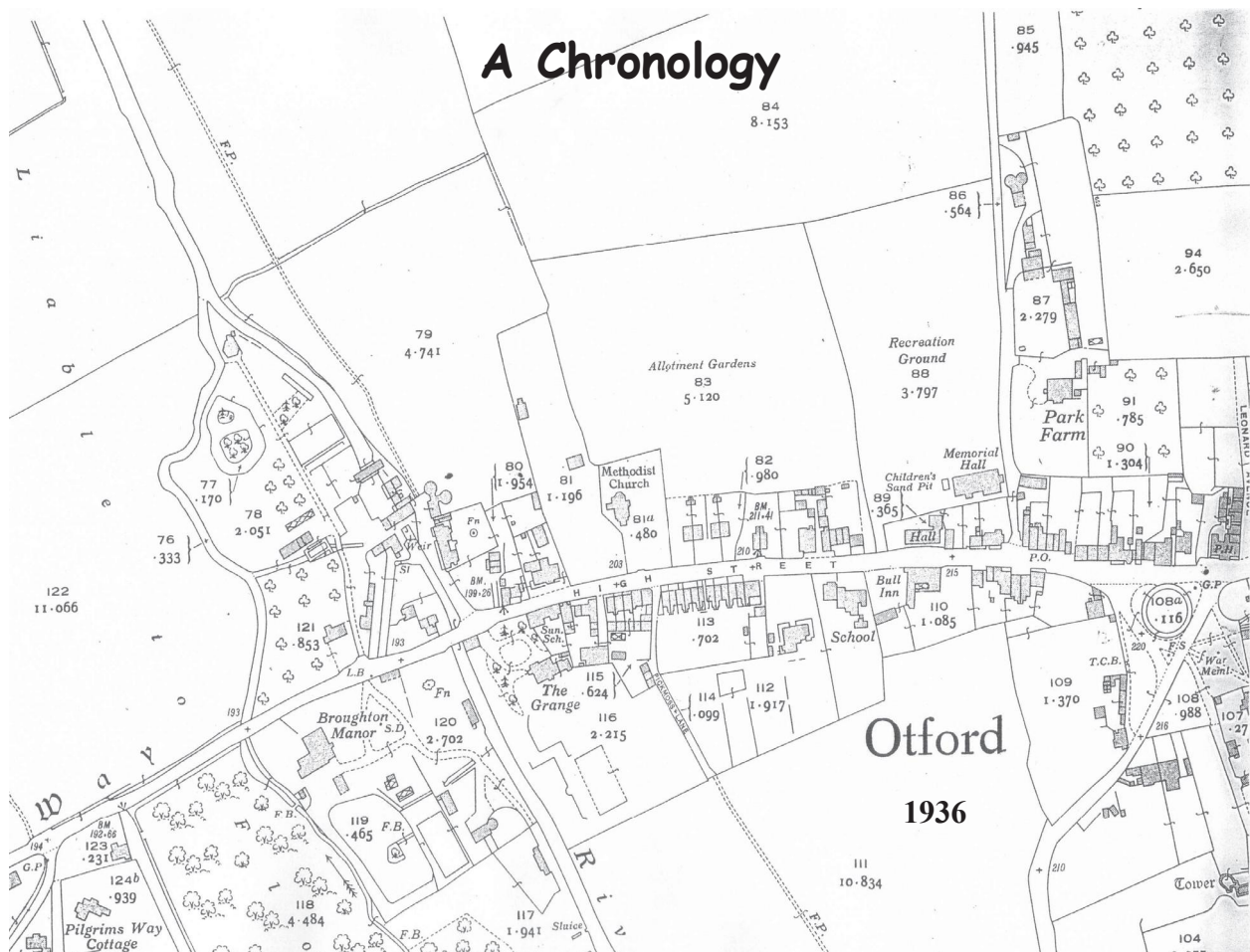
The Allotment Association has enjoyed the membership of some eccentric and memorable characters, and some wonderful gardeners. Fred Graves, a real 'Man of Kent', stands out in my memory. Although he probably left school aged 12, he had a deep knowledge of the art of gardening. He became a County Allotments judge, and his own plot, had we been able to enter it into the competition, would certainly have won many prizes. Eddie Fordham, winner of the County Cup; and Bevis Bloomfield of Mill Meadow who planted the orchard and could be seen cutting the Village Green at first light so that he could add the grass cuttings to his compost. Ted Hewitt, our own Champion Cup winner. Arnold Sharrocks, Treasurer, who changed our rent year from Spring to Autumn and had so much trouble convincing some of our older members that they were not paying rent twice over! 'Blackie' Blackburn, secretary for many years, unforgettably involved in all matters concerned with village life. Jim McCarthy, our first truly 'no-digging' organic gardener.

What would the original Victorian allotment holders, ruled by the Vestry, make of us today? I believe they would gaze in wonder and admiration at the variety and quality of the vegetables, the tools available for the job, the neatly cut grass, and, not least, in the social and democratic mix of men and women now working the land.

The land, of course, is there for ever. The Otford garden plots have not always been there, but they existed before our Association was formed fifty years ago. Those eyes watching from the past would hope to see, as we do, that our small part in the love and care of the land will go on and on in a never ending story, marching on through the centuries to come.

The parsnip seed may fail from time to time, the carrots become sproggy and the potatoes slug-eaten. That's the challenge – and we love it!

Ken Gunderson (Chairman)



1887: Vestry minute 'Allotments were available to all parishioners, as an amenity encouraged by national legislation about this time, and one which a majority of Otford villagers avail themselves' [reference a].

1888: Resistance to a main sewer through Otford because 'All Otford cottages had gardens and allotments and they wished to utilise every thing that can be so utilised in the way of manure' [a].

1895: At the second meeting of the newly-formed Otford Parish Council (OPC) allotments on the agenda [a].

1914 - 1917: Soldiers billeted in Otford. Military use of recreation ground for 'camping, tethering and training' after which it was converted into allotments [a].

1950: Lord Mildmay died and his estate was broken up. The OPC borrowed £525 from the Public Works Loan Board on an 80 year basis at 4¼% interest and purchased the land [b]. Allotment land to the East side was taken to make the football pitch independent from the cricket pitch. Mill Meadow was purchased to make good the deficiency. There were many spirited meetings with the dispossessed allotments holders at the time but matters were concluded satisfactorily. There was no water on site.

1953: Mr Weston, Chairman of the OPC, suggested the OAA be formed to manage the allotments. Eddie Fordham was the first Chairman.

1954: Mr O'Neill was appointed as the first Parish Agent, and he drew up agreements and collected rents which at that time were 7/6d (37½p) for 10 rods.

1957: The Otford Allotments Association Cup was purchased (first competition winner was Mr BS Bloomfield).

1962: The OPC sought further extension for the Tennis Courts and took redundant allotments (which reflected a decline in land use) in the North East corner by consent of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food - again displacing some tenants. Water being now laid on raised the rents to ten shillings (50p) per annum which resulted in some plot holders leaving!

1979: The Blackburn Shield for the best small plot was inaugurated. It was named in memory of Charles Blackburn (Blackie) who was Secretary from 1963 to 1975.

2004: The OAA has 62 active members throughout the age spectrum, with many lady gardeners now tending plots (unlike the early years). All members are enthusiastic growers of flowers and vegetables.

Parish Agents over the years have been Mr O'Neill, Mr Warburton, Mr Mildred, Mr Denton, Mr Sharrocks, and, of course, the longest serving (for 32 years) being Ted Hewitt. Barbara Hine continues the good work today.

Never let a weed see a Sunday!

I had an allotment at Otford for about 35 years and I was the Council Agent for about 32 of them. I won the OAA 'Best Plot Cup' for about 11 out of 12 years in that time (having loaned the silver to Ken Gunderson for one year by accident).

One tenant I let an allotment to many years ago cultivated part of it and then did no more. So I called and advised him that there was a waiting list and either he cultivated or gave it up. I gave him 2 weeks to get moving or it would be re-let. Nothing was done, so I called and gave him one month's notice after which I would re-let the plot. Well, he went raving mad, and threatened to take me to the House of Lords - I said thank you very much, that's one place I have always wanted to go. With that he slammed the door in my face and smashed all the glass in the process! The neighbours came out thinking there had been a break-in....

Hardly had I recovered from that when the other next door neighbour came out and said she wanted to talk to me. She had asked another allotment holder if she could borrow his scythe and he had said 'No, I don't lend my scythe to anyone'. Unfortunately, I had to tell her the same (scythes being very personal tools an' all that) to which she replied 'You men are ALL alike' and again a door closed heavily on me. Altogether a very interesting afternoon!

A few weeks later a tenant was walking his dog as darkness fell. He came up from 'Snobs Corner' (as Mill Meadow was known) and was heading towards the High Street when he saw a man take two watering cans from my plot. Thus forewarned, the next time I saw the thief I asked him for them back, but he denied having them. The next day he came up to me with two galvanised buckets and asked if I would like them as I had 'lost my cans'. I said that I would have them but that I had not lost my cans - they were stolen. So I had to make the best of a bad job on that occasion.

One Sunday morning an allotment holder asked me if I would like to buy his old wheelbarrow for ten shillings as his wife had bought him a new one for his birthday. I said 'Yes, it might be handy'. So I paid him and put it in the OAA shed. On Monday morning a man came to the allotments and said they were re-surfacing the tennis courts and over the weekend somebody had taken their wheelbarrow. I said that if I saw it I would let them know. Luckily it was in the shed!

Many years ago a lady had a plot and in no way must she be stung by a wasp or a bee. Unfortunately the man with the next door plot put a beehive on it, complete with a swarm. As it happened, the queen bee would not settle down and the swarm flew away. Next day the poor woman came to me and said she could not stay as there were too many bees swarming around - she would have to go home and abandon the allotment. I said let's go and have a look and when we got there she said 'There they are! Hundreds of them! EEK! EEK!' Well, I could not see them, and armed with my 'insider knowledge' I explained that the hive was empty and boldly took the top off to show her. Fortunately, they had not returned overnight! With that she carried on gardening, but it just shows what imagination can do when you are jumpy over anything.

One thing that has puzzled me for many years is why do so many people plant broad and runner beans upside down? I asked a couple who were planting runners on their plot and they said I was wrong. So to convince them we planted half the row 'my way' and half 'theirs' - first beans up proved who was right. Several weeks went by and he came to me and said mine were up but his were not (problem solved!). The secret is that the mark where they were joined to the pod goes to the bottom - where the root is - so there!

One chap came to me and complained his plot was useless and could he have a better one. There was one over the path opposite he fancied. Well, he took that one and cleaned it out and

then complained about that also. He claimed that for two years his parsnips had not come up. I asked to see the packet and the seeds were at least 5 years old but he still claimed they were viable. So I gave him some of my seeds, and they flourished. THEN he had the cheek to moan that if I had given them to him earlier he would not have had to change his plot! You cannot win as the Council Agent and President of the OAA....

Now Otford Allotments were on television about 10 years ago. One Friday morning I was working on the cricket square and a man walked over and said 'Good morning - may I have a word?'. He could have a word and so I soon found out he was from Carlton Television and he was looking for a person in Otford who had lived in the village a long time and had done a lot for the village and people. I looked at him and said 'You have just found him!'. We sat on the seat on the recreation ground and talked about what I had done and how long I had lived in the village. Then we walked round the allotments and I showed him mine and he was impressed. 'You have no weeds' he said. 'Simple', says I, 'Never let a weed see a Sunday! That settles 'em once and for all'. We had another chat and he thanked me for giving him so much time, took my name and address and said I would be hearing from him. A few weeks later the camera crew came down at 9am one morning and a few hours later I was on TV as a celebratory!

I did mention earlier Snobs Corner. Well, it really was. One chap had 45 rods and used to be down there at 5 am, go home about 8 am for breakfast and then off to work only to be back in the early evening. All the plots were expertly managed with the pathways and car park cut and trimmed every week (a tradition I understand Terry and Joan Smith continue to this day in Mill Meadow). The County best allotment competition, and the County Shield for the best six plots were won in the 1960's by Otford allotments through such endeavours in the past.

Cheerio for now, and regards to all my friends in Otford, yours,

Ted Hewitt (ex OAA President & retired Parish Council Agent)

UNEXPECTED HARVEST IN MILL MEADOW

As I struggle with the weeds on my patch in Mill Meadow, I often lean on my fork and gaze at the Darent Valley stretching away to the North. What a gem in this overcrowded age! What a pathway for the Roman Legions marching into the country, trading bows and arrows with the locals based on the fortifications on Polhill to the West! Or, later in our history, millers, busy grinding their corn powered by the mill stream, selling and bartering their wares with the people of Otford. Well, this Spring I hit on proof of this trade. Proof that would go down in local history with a flourish (and may have even resulted in my allotment being dug for free if the archaeologists had been called in for an excavation). In short, I found a Roman coin. I was ecstatic!

The coin clearly had a head on one side, and on the obverse some digits indicating considerable value. Around the periphery on both sides were many characters, obviously in Latin. This was it! I had struck gold! I rushed round telling all my fellow allotmenters of my find, but not letting them get more than a glimpse of my good fortune..... After all, they might want a slice of the action, and they already beat me on the vegetable-growing front, SO THIS WAS MINE!



Now, I know you are not supposed to meddle with coins by cleaning them, etc. But I just could not resist taking this find home (safely wrapped in my grubby hanky) and giving it a quick wash with liquid soap under the hot tap, using a soft tissue to gentle the action. Quelle Horreur! After a few minutes, the coin shrank to half its thickness and a third of its diameter, losing Nero's head in the process. Latin phrases and markings of value simply dissipated before my very eyes! I was left with a sorry disc, about the size of a farthing.

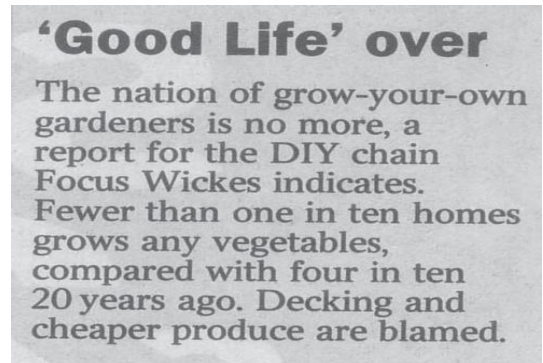
Well, all right then, I now believe it is one of those punch-out discs from an electrical conduit box. Probably escaped over the fence from OBM. In fact, I now think I will re-sow the darn thing in the hope of fooling the next generation of keen vegetable growers. Unless, of course, it has rusted away by then. But if I keep on weeding hopefully, who knows what awaits in the next clod of earth?

Roger Clay (Sec OAA)



BEWARE ALL YE SHEEP WHO STRAY....

(AND HAVE THEY TOLD THE BADGERS, FOXES, PIGEONS, SLUGS, CATERPILLARS, FLEA BEETLES AND RABBITS?)



'THE TIMES' 04.06.04

Out with the old - in with the new!



Over the allotment fence...

I have an allotment adjoining the Recreation Ground and sometimes I am subjected to comments from the Public. For example, I grow 3 rows of tomatoes, 2 cordon type and 1 bush. The bush type are not staked. *'That poor gentleman cannot afford enough sticks for his third row.'* I always leave several long runner beans on the plants for seed. *'You should be ashamed at leaving perfectly good beans on the plant when somebody could enjoy them.'* Good for the blood pressure, isn't it? Gordon Darby

The joys of hard work...

Gardening, you either love it or hate it. We both love it and having an allotment is a real joy. It was hard work to take an overgrown plot and turn it into a productive one, but the vegetables we produce are reward enough! We have also made a great many friends who we chat with, swap hints, tips, seeds and plants, etc.. We like to come down early in the morning as there are always jobs to be done, weeding, hoeing, planting, etc. or just having a walk round the fields. We have enjoyed our 5 years here and hope to enjoy many more.

Terry & Joan Smith (current OAA Cup holders)



Our first ten months with the Otford Allotments Association

Do you believe in coincidence? We were watching our favourite garden programme one Friday evening (2003) and it featured allotments somewhere in the Midlands, we believe. Anyway, it soon became apparent that as well as producing splendid crops the allotment holders also enjoyed a wonderful spirit of community (like the *'good old days'*). The following day (Saturday) we popped into Otford Village Hall for a cuppa and discovered it was 'Open Day' on our allotments. With the TV programme fresh in our minds we enjoyed a conducted tour followed by a delicious cream tea and became the proud tenants of our very own plot. Since then we have met some very friendly people, enjoyed a wonderful social evening and worked like SLAVES to keep up with the weeds. We have reaped much friendship and now hope to reap lots of vegetables!

Ray & Pat Jolly



The Parish Council Agent's corner...

Having gardened on an allotment for some 15 years I was delighted when asked to become the Parish Council Agent following Ted Hewitt's retirement after 32 years in the job. A hard act to follow. 'Allotment or Parish Council Agent' is not as grand as it sounds, but providing you enjoy allotment gardening the responsibility is quite gratifying. The Agent represents the Parish Council who are the Landlords. On their behalf I ensure that all tenants are happy with their gardening and abide by the rules of the Agreement governing the tenancy of their plot. My biggest responsibility is collecting all the rents once a year (in this case 62) and re-letting any vacant plots when available, ensuring that the income matches the plot size under consideration! I also sit on the Otford Allotments Association committee as a co-opted member; thus I have a good understanding of all matters affecting the allotments in general. I maintain the membership records and edit the OAA newsletter (as a sideline). Phew!

Barbara Hine

Some thoughts from our President....



The only way to
travel!

Congratulations to the Otford Allotments Association in reaching your 50th year of managing our plots. I have been happy to have been involved with the Association being an allotment tenant for some 40 years and serving on your committee for some 30 years, mainly as your past Treasurer.

Over the years, we have seen many changes both in the incursion to our plots (my first plot is now the public Tennis Court), the development of OBM and the many problems that produced and, of course, the ebb and flow of tenants which at times reached a critically low level of let plots.

I am so pleased to see now we have a full list of tenants made up of many ages and with both sexes being well represented. My message to you all is to continue to enjoy your gardening and the fellowship of your fellow tenants and remember, do not be frightened to ask us older gardeners for advice whenever you need it!

Gordon Darby

Quite a card (see below, we hasten to add!)

| No. | | | | Name <i>Mr. G. Denton</i> | | | |
|----------|-------------------|----------------|----------|---------------------------|----------------|--|--|
| Date | Amount £ s. d. | Received by | Date | Amount £ s. d. | Received by | | |
| 14/6/61 | 1 6 | AB | 31/10/76 | 50 | AB | | |
| 14/3/62 | 1 6 | AB | 15/6/77 | 50 | JAC | | |
| 10/4/63 | 1 6 | AB | 21/10/78 | 50 | JAC | | |
| 7/4/64 | 3 - | AB | 14/10/80 | 50 | EMH | | |
| 1/5/65 | 3 - | AB | 3/12/81 | 1.00 | EMH | | |
| 20/5/66 | 3 - | AB | 16/10/82 | £1.00 | CRD | | |
| 2/4/67 | 3 - | AB | 14/11/83 | £1.00 | EMH | | |
| 1/4/68 | 4 6 | AB | 19/10/85 | £1.50 | CRD | | |
| 30/9/69 | 3 - | AB | 10/10/86 | £1.50 | CRD | | |
| 30/9/70 | 3 - | AB | 10/10/87 | £1.50 | CRD | | |
| 30/9/71 | 3 - | AB | 26/2/89 | £1.50 | CRD | | |
| 30/9/72 | 0.25 | AB | 14/10/89 | £1.50 | CRD | | |
| 7/10/72 | 0.75 | JAC | 13/10/90 | £1.50 | CRD | | |
| 10/74 | 0.75 | JAC | 12/10/91 | £1.50 | CRD | | |
| 10/74 | 0.75 | JAC | 17/10/92 | £1.50 | CRD | | |
| 10/74 | 0.75 | JAC | 9/10/93 | £2.50 | CRD | | |
| 10/74 | 0.75 | JAC | 8/10/94 | £2.50 | CRD | | |
| 10/74 | 0.75 | JAC | 6/4/95 | £3 | CRD | | |
| 10/74 | 0.75 | JAC | 7/10/96 | £3 | CRD | | |
| 10/74 | 0.75 | JAC | 22/10/97 | £3.50 | CRD | | |
| 10/74 | 0.75 | JAC | 24/10/98 | £3.50 | CRD | | |

1.—NAME.—The Name of the Association shall be THE OTFORD ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION.

2.—OBJECTS.—The objects of the Association shall be :

- (1) To promote the interests of allotment holders and gardeners and to take joint action for the benefit of members.
- (2) To co-operate with any Committee set up by the Government, local authorities and other bodies, to further the interests of allotment holders.
- (3) To co-operate with any central committee, local authority, national or district body having as their objects the provision of lime and fertilizers for allotment holders and of seeds, potatoes, fertilizers, tools, etc., for unemployed and partly-employed men, old age pensioners, etc.
- (4) To ascertain the requirements of unemployed and partly-employed members; to arrange distribution of seeds, etc., and to collect and bank any monies due in connection therewith.
- (5) To conduct negotiations in respect of land.
- (6) To take such steps as may be required by the local authority for the good management and cultivation of allotments.
- (7) To protect members from damage, trespass and theft.
- (8) To arrange for instruction in horticulture; also lectures discussions, exhibitions and competitions and to distribute literature.

3.—MEMBERS.—The Association shall consist of such allotment holders and gardeners resident within the district of OTFORD, whose applications for membership are approved by the Committee.

4.—ENTRANCE FEES AND SUBSCRIPTIONS.—Every member shall pay an annual subscription of 1/6, or such other sum as may be determined by a General Meeting. Subscriptions shall be payable in advance.

5.—ARREARS.—Any member who is one month in arrear with his subscriptions shall be held to have ceased to be a member, unless there are special extenuating circumstances.

6.—OFFICERS.—The Officers shall be a President, Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary and Auditors, who shall (with the exception of the Auditors) be *ex-officio* members of the Committee.

7.—COMMITTEE.—The affairs of the Association shall be conducted by a Committee of Management of not less than 8 members. The Committee and other officers shall retire at the Annual Meeting, but shall be eligible for re-election. Unless otherwise determined, a quorum at Committee Meetings shall be not less than 5 members. Casual vacancies shall be filled by the Committee, and the members so appointed shall hold office until the next Annual Meeting following.

Gilbert Denton's membership card. Note the change of rent day in 1968 when the Treasurer, Arnold Sharrocks, changed the start of the gardening year to the 1st November and nearly started a riot!

Some tools for the job:



Early financial days in the Association...

| Otford Allotments Association | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|---------|--------|---|---------|
| 1954 | Receipts | | 1954 | Payments | |
| Jan 1 | To Members Contributions: | | Jan 1 | By the National Allotments & Gardeners Society Ltd: | |
| | | | | Purchase 1 fully paid share | 2 6 |
| | | | | Rale and contribution cards | 1 5 0 |
| | H Sammers, G Foster, R Thatcher, R Bashford, B Alexander, E Osborne, F Ellis, S Gilham, S Prosser, S Baker, V Twiner, E Martin, J Relf, A Emery, P Turner, S Harrison, C Smith, F Beadel, A Pott, T Hillier, F Godden, E Jenkins, W West, C Casiot, R Bangay, W Usher, J O'Neill, B Bloomfield, H Sadler, H Hook, G Hadrill, N Naylor, A Kerr, G Pocock, A Pocock, G Turner, A Quittenden, E Brown, C Casson, E McCarthy, E Fordham, A Wickens. | | May 1 | Affiliation fees 1954 | 1 0 6 |
| | | | Nov 27 | Postages circulation notices convening Annual General Meeting | 4 0 |
| | | | | Balance being: | |
| | | | | Deposit in PD Savings a/c | 4 4 0 |
| | | | | Cash in hand | 11 0 |
| | | | | | 4 15 0 |
| | = 42 @ 1/6d | 3 3 0 | | | |
| Oct | Otford Horticultural Society | | | | |
| | Donation re Bank Holiday Village Fete | 4 4 0 | | | |
| | | £ 7 7 0 | | | £ 7 7 0 |

'Not everybody knows that...'

(Myth and wisdom through the ages)

My Dad used to say:

- 'Sow dry, plant wet'.
- 'One year's seed is seven years weed'.
- 'Dig little and often'.
- 'Make haste slowly'.
- 'Bury bananas skins near roses'.
- 'A weed is a plant for which no-one has yet found a use'.
- Shallots: 'Plant on the shortest day; lift on the longest'.
- On cleaning vegetables: 'You will eat a peck 'o dirt afore you die'.

The key to long life, it seems, is not to do too much.

Always plant runner bean seed where they can hear the church clock.

Sow your seeds when the sun is shining down the row.

Bury a stick of rhubarb here and there on the cabbage plot to defeat club root.

On crawling creatures:

- 'If it moves slowly, step on it;
- If it doesn't, it will probably kill something else, and you missed it anyway'.

Lupins and tomatoes will control couch grass.

Nettles hasten the decomposing of the compost heap.

Never throw old leather shoes away. Bury them in the garden.

The common foxglove stimulates growth and disease resistance in other plants, and grown near new potatoes, tomatoes and apples will improve their storage qualities.

Fred Graves used to say the 22nd May was the date for sowing runner bean seed in the open ground. But that was before global warming...

When digging a trench for your runner beans, line the bottom with brown paper or old newspapers. Soak well. Discarded copies of the OAA newsletter will do equally well.

If you can get hold of soot, scatter it round the plot edges. Slugs and snails loath it!

Before digging up, or picking, the plant should always be 'saluted', and told for what purpose it is needed, and, if possible, for whom, thus pacifying it and ensuring its co-operation.

Keep a water container well topped up and sit a large sack of nettles inside to make an excellent feed. Use on everything and at all times and hence save a fortune on shop-bought juice!

Germinate difficult seed between damp sheets of kitchen roll before sowing.

To spray roses crush a garlic section, add one very tiny drop of washing up liquid and mix with water in a hand sprayer. This will clear the bugs and deter others. Harmless to wildlife and SO CHEAP!

Sowing parsley seed on Good Friday will help its germination.

Never put canes by your runner beans before they are well up: they may take fright when they see how far they have to grow!

Good Friday has always been the traditional day for planting the first potatoes - despite it being a moveable date!

Blue plastic bags and long canes by your greens deter wood pigeons.

Moles: There are many theories about getting rid of moles. Ted Hewitt reckoned he was the champion mole catcher as they always emerged at noon on the dot. The friendly cat from 'The Horns' caught 2

moles on my plot - but I can't remember if it was mid-day. One certain exterminator, I have heard, is to place in the run a transistor radio tuned to Radio One!

In Lincolnshire, it is said, farmers used to take off their trousers in the field and sit on the ground to test the temperature of the soil. On the more inhibited Otford Allotments, we suggest a bare elbow will do!

The life span of a Chelsea Pensioner is 7 or 8 years above the National average.... But then, allotments are available at the Royal Hospital.

(Contributors too numerous to mention but thank you all very much indeed!)

(**Secretary:** A few years ago I was helping our Vice-Chairman to plant two donated buddleia under the wall in Mill Meadow. We had dug out a load of nettle roots and I bagged them ready for disposal. However, when I said I would get rid of them 'down the tip', Colin was horrified. He took them off me, and marched off to his plot *'to replace the nettles that had been damaged by weed killer'* (!). So I asked him to explain his passion for nettles in a few words for this special newsletter, and here is the story...)

In Praise of Nettles

'Stinging nettles', a member of the URTICACEAE family. A nasty painful weed or a useful, natural plant whose sting can be relieved by dock leaves, if you can find them? (Tradition has it that docks always grow near nettle patches especially for just such an emergency).

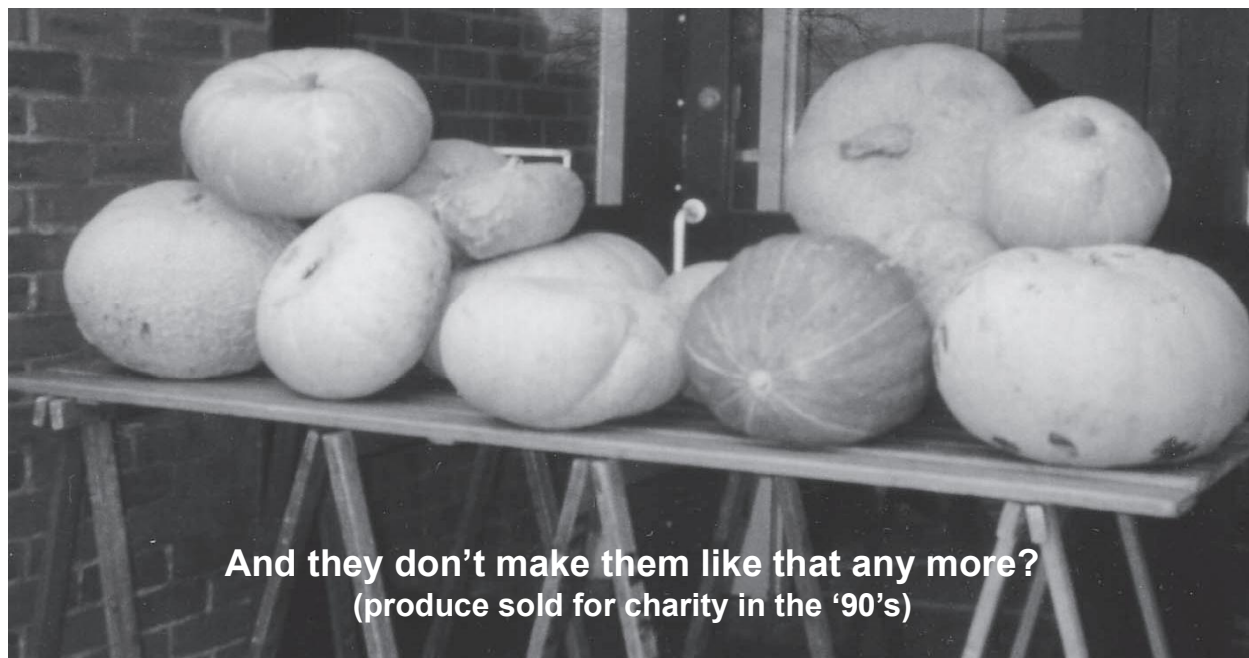
For many years I cultivated a patch of nettles for the benefit of wildlife, particularly as a 'host' for moths and butterflies. They also acted as a 24-hour 'all-the-year-round' practical deterrent to unwanted 2-legged visitors! Some two years ago I found to my horror that my patch had been treated with weed killer (in error, I might add). Gradually, by transplanting and feeding, the patch is recovering.

The common nettle has been used throughout history, from the Bronze Age cloth made of the fibres from its thick square stems to today's 'medicinal' source for beta carotene, vitamin 'C', calcium, iron, and potassium. Nettle leaves are also used in making tea, wine, beer and soup which, depending on your taste, can be a real 'tonic' and 'pick-me-up'. Relief from hay fever, nettle rash, asthma and prostate symptoms is possible with this marvellous plant. A balm from the juices has been known to help in growing new hair after total loss from shock. In Japan an extract from the flower pollen has been used to reduce urinary problems. And a fresh bunch of leaves hung in the larder will serve to keep the flies away...

So, not really the useless weed the secretary imagined!

Colin Bruce (Vice Chairman)

try: <http://www.thefoody.com/drinks/nettlebeer.html> for some real fun!



And they don't make them like that any more?
(produce sold for charity in the '90's)

A minute with the Secretary

'When the Great Ones depart, at last, to their dinner

The secretary stays, getting thinner and thinner,

Racking his brains to record and report

What he thinks they will think that

THEY OUGHT TO HAVE THOUGHT!'

anon

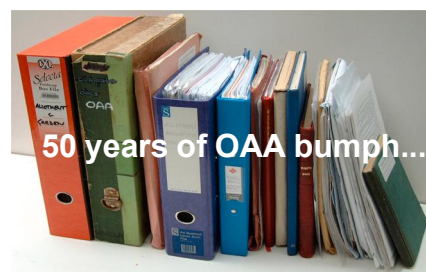
True enough, I fear, apart from the bit about getting thinner and thinner! Now for the confessional. My gardening career has been rather chequered. Vegetable growing for me started when I was given the cane at school for not weeding my plot well enough. That set me back over gardening for the best part of 30 years, despite the good example set by my Father (his worn out spade and fork is in the 'Tools for the Job' photos – mine are the 'hardly used' variety alongside).

Eventually I acquired an allotment in Chipstead – which took 3 years to reach any hope of growing anything. Then the 'Great Flood' arrived, and my allotment was taken as part of a drainage ditch scheme. A kind lady offered me a plot in the depths of her back garden, and we farmed happily there, battling with the woodpigeons, harvesting the odd crop once the weeds were under control. Then the lady moved. End of try 2. A few years passed, and I signed up for a plot in the allotments along the Bradbourne Vale Road. Until I fell foul of a fellow tenant with a shot gun who kept riddling my plot with bits of rabbit. The resulting furore ended in me resigning from there in protest – branded a 'rabbit lover'; the lowest of the low!

Planning for retirement (always have a plan) I started haunting Otford allotments in the hope of a spare plot. On such a mission I met the Chairman at the gate one day – who hinted that Otford Allotments 'went on round the corner'. One look at the Darent Valley from 'round the corner' plus much encouragement from John Hilder and Gilbert Denton settled the matter, and I was clamouring at Ted's door without further hesitation for a patch in Mill Meadow. Not only a fantastic view, good fun from the people round me, and the weeds finally coming under control – we also manage to grow the odd vegetable occasionally (and what TASTE). And when I was asked to 'take a few notes at committee meetings' I felt highly honoured. What a 'honey trap' that has turned out to be! Thank heavens for computers because I really cannot match the lovely copperplate hands so lovingly displayed in the minute books of the past (text improved when the meetings moved from 'The Bull' in 1957).

But I have also learned how much goes on 'behind the scenes' both in committee and from supportive members to keep the plots alive in Otford. More power to your elbows all of you! Hic finis fandi...

Roger Clay



The Mad Gardener [c]

Officers of the Otford Allotments Association over the years...

President: Mr Garthwaite, Mr Graves, Mr Fordham, Mr Hewitt, Mr Darby.

Chairman: Mr Fordham, Mr Bruce, Mr Gunderson.

Vice-Chairman: Mr Bloomfield, Mr Hewitt, Mr Bruce.

Treasurer: Messrs. Foster, Potts, Alexander, Harvey, Warburton, Mildred, Denton, Sharrocks, Cook, Darby, Davies.

Secretary: Messrs. Foster, Bloomfield, Holton, Ball, Mildred, Blackburn, Darby, McCarthy, Gunderson, Bruce, Dilley, Denton, Mrs Shaw and Clay.

Dates for your diary:

National Allotments Week: 9th - 15th August

OAA 'Open Day' (and grand Equipment Store opening ceremony)

Saturday 14th August - coffee, cream teas and fun!

OAA AGM

23rd October (9.15am rents; AGM at 9.45am)

References:

[a] 'Otford in Kent' (A history) Dennis Clarke & Anthony Stoyel. ISBN 0 9503963 0 3

[b] 'Fifty Years On' (A diary of the years from 1952 to 2002). Longmore Press Ltd

[c] With apologies to the 'Collected Verse of Lewis Carroll', p354, Macmillan & Co Ltd, 1932.

This newsletter is sold by donation in aid of the Otford Allotments Association fund-raising for the new equipment store due to be 'opened' on Saturday, 14th August during National Allotments Week as part of the OAA's Jubilee celebrations.