

'When Plotters Meet':

Edinburgh's Allotment Movement
1921-2001

Caitlin O'Brian DeSilvey

Awarded the Degree of
Master of Science by Research (Geography)
University of Edinburgh
December 2001



Photo—Jan Smith

Edinburgh

WARRISTON, EDINBURGH

Edinburgh's Warriston Allotments, 1933. Scottish Allotments Scheme for the Unemployed, Report for Season 1934. *Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society-Victor Webb Archive, Glasgow University Archive Services.*

Copyright Caitlin DeSilvey 2002. All rights reserved.

Abstract

During the twentieth century, Edinburgh allotment holders engaged in repeated efforts to defend their gardens against competing land uses. Allotment movement appeals for security of tenure and municipal investment mobilised different strategic representations of allotments' functional and symbolic value. This thesis traces five interwoven narrative strands, which represent co-existing—but often conflicting—versions of the allotment. These strands of meaning and motive cohere around the following themes: poor-relief and social reform; recreation and leisure; urban ecology and town planning; land rights activism; and, patriotic national self-provisioning. Parliamentary allotment inquiries in 1921 and 2001 bracket my analysis thematically and chronologically. Methodologically, I combine material collected through archival research, ethnography, oral history, and advocacy efforts. In conclusion, I propose that Edinburgh's allotment movement has historically defined itself with reference to plural meanings and potentially inconsistent discourses. This ambiguous positioning may explain why allotments have often been conceived of as marginal, illegitimate uses of urban land—existing in the gaps between dominant discourses of recreation, leisure, and open space. The thesis traces the implications of ambiguity into the contemporary political situation, but closes by moving the frame of analysis from the scale of the committee chamber to the scale of the plot, a shift which suggests a differently inflected conclusion. At the level of the plot, the same multiplicity which fosters vulnerability in political representations may, paradoxically, give the allotment landscape an adaptive resilience and durability as a cultural form.

Preface and Acknowledgements

Is it necessary for me to write obliquely
about the situation? Is that what
you would have me do?¹

The garden exists not only as an idea, place, or action but as a complex ecology of
spatial reality, cognitive process, and real work.²

Susan Burns introduced me to my dock and thistle-choked allotment on a damp Saturday morning in September 2000. ‘It’s yours,’ she said, ‘if you want it’. The next weekend I clipped grass, turned up lost potatoes, and fastened a lock on the battered shed. Eleven months later, I harvest the fruits of the year’s labour and wait for my cucumbers to ripen. This thesis is the harvest of a parallel plot I have also been cultivating over the past year, a plot defined by scholarly digging and sifting. Although my muddy fingerprints are not on these pages, my peripheral allotment experience helped me breathe life into the archival material I consider here. When I write, I need only look as far as my allotment neighbours to remind me how complex and idiosyncratic a cultural landscape can be. A collective of young idealists grows organic potatoes and onions in the plot to my north. In the far corner, old-school plottolders John and George grow their vegetables in a linear ‘field system’—adapted from traditional strip cultivation methods. On my southern edge, Lynda’s low-maintenance plot produces broccoli and raspberries for her young family. Across the path, Ron (inspired by the islanders who bought Eigg) dreams about buying ‘our’ land back from the developers who are threatening to plant houses on our plots. These separate, but contiguous, plots form a constellation of different meanings and histories with their roots in some of the stories I will recount here. ‘When borders gain a paradoxical centrality,’ writes James Clifford, ‘margins, edges, and lines of communication emerge as complex maps and histories’.³ In a sense, my work on Edinburgh’s allotment geography pulls a certain type of marginal urban space into a ‘paradoxical centrality’.

¹ Rich (1995), 25.

² Francis and Hester (1991), 8.

³ Clifford (1997), 7.

The ‘complex maps and histories’ that constitute the physical form and the structure of feeling in the allotment emerge around certain shifting, but identifiable, themes.

In my effort to locate these themes in the archive and in the living landscape of Edinburgh’s allotments, a number of people offered essential guidance and support. ‘Caitlin’s from America’, Gilbert Clark explained to the plottolders we met on our allotment tours. ‘She’s doing a degree, on the history of allotments. She’s been so helpful to us—finding information, in the archive, about allotments. So we’re taking her around, visiting every allotment in Edinburgh, so she can write a proper history’. I uncovered the history of Edinburgh’s allotments to present it to contemporary campaigners in a form they could use—in their negotiations with the local authority, in presentations to the Scottish Parliament, and in their reflexive explanations of what they do and why they do it. In exchange, they shared their networks, their plots, and their stories. This thesis grew out of those reciprocal relationships. I offer it, with gratitude, to all of the allotment holders who trusted me to tell the ‘proper’ history, but particularly to Ali Black, Gilbert Clark, and Judy Wilkinson. More generally, the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society and the Federation of Edinburgh and District Allotment and Garden Association deserve appreciation for their willingness to open their archives and their meetings to a curious stranger.

Charles Withers looked on as I dug myself into a research hole using as many methodological tools as I could find; his critical insight helped me see far enough over the edge of the hole to write this thesis. Fellow students and Edinburgh friends shared ideas and epiphanies. Family and friends back at home kept me buoyed up with their remote, but potent, love. The staff of the Edinburgh City Archives and the National Archives of Scotland shifted many files that had been untouched since they reached the archive (and gave me permission to include some of the images that appear here). I am also grateful to the Edinburgh Development Trust, the Merlin Trust, and the Clan Donald Educational and Charitable Trust for their support.

Contents

Preface and Acknowledgements	ii
List of Illustrations	v
Introduction June 1921	vi
Chapter 1 Something to Do	1
Chapter 2 Rationalising Recreation	18
Chapter 3 Lungs, Land, and Loyalty	36
Chapter 4 February 2001	64
Conclusion In the Furrows	88
Appendix 1 Allotment Chronology	97
Appendix 2 Edinburgh Allotment Alphabet	98
Bibliography	106

List of Illustrations

<u>Figure</u>		<u>Page</u>
	Edinburgh's Warriston Allotments, 1933. Scottish Allotments Scheme for the Unemployed, Report for Season 1934. <i>Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society (SAGS)-Victor Webb Archive, Glasgow University Archive Services.</i>	title
1.1	Men plant, haul, and hoe. Scottish Allotments Scheme for the Unemployed, Report for Season 1936. <i>SAGS-Victor Webb Archive, Glasgow University Archive Services.</i>	1
1.2	Cover. Scottish Allotments Scheme for the Unemployed, Report for Season 1933. <i>SAGS-Victor Webb Archive, Glasgow University Archive Services.</i>	9
1.3	Edinburgh family in their plot at Warriston allotments for the unemployed, 1932. <i>National Archives of Scotland, File AF 66/100.</i>	10
1.4	A Quiet Smoke and Busy Housewives. Scottish Allotments Scheme for the Unemployed, Report for Season 1933. <i>SAGS-Victor Webb Archive, Glasgow University Archive Services.</i>	15
2.1	City of Edinburgh Allotment Amenity Certificate. <i>Edinburgh City Archives, File J41.</i>	21
2.2	City of Edinburgh Allotment Shelters. <i>Edinburgh City Archives, File J52/1.</i>	22
2.3	School Children, Kilmarnock. Scottish Allotments Scheme for the Unemployed, Report for Season 1939. <i>SAGS-Victor Webb Archive, Glasgow University Archive Services.</i>	25
2.4	Federation of Edinburgh and District Garden and Allotment Associations 1953 Flower Show and Garden Fete Programme. <i>Private Collection.</i>	27
3.1	Victor Webb notation. Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society 1952 Year Book. <i>SAGS-Victor Webb Archive, Glasgow University Archive Services.</i>	40
3.2	Scythe on the shed, Warriston Allotments, 2001. <i>Caitlin DeSilvey, photo.</i>	51
3.3	'Put Your Garden on War Service Today!'. Scottish Gardens and Allotments Committee Newsletter, February 1941. Issued by the Department of Agriculture for Scotland. <i>Edinburgh City Archives, File 3/11 DRT 14.</i>	56
3.4	'Dig On!' Flyer for Public Meeting and Film Show. <i>Edinburgh City Archives, File 144/6 DRT 14.</i>	58
4.1	'Occupation, Interest, Health, Food'. Scottish Allotments Scheme for the Unemployed, Report for Season 1942. <i>SAGS-Victor Webb Archive, Glasgow University Archive Services.</i>	74
4.2	Anderson shelter with lace curtain, Craigentiny Allotments 2001. <i>Caitlin DeSilvey, photo.</i>	83
5.1	Victor Webb Garden Journal, 1948. <i>SAGS-Victor Webb Archive, Glasgow University Archive Services.</i>	92

Introduction

June 1921

When plotters meet in leafy June,
let there be no illusions
what'er they sow, they will not sow
the seeds of revolutions.¹

In June 1921, a few thousand Edinburgh allotment gardeners thinned carrots, earthed up potatoes, and transplanted early leeks. Most of these plotters went about their work with little concern for the politics of their practice. They had responded to a wartime appeal for patriotic vegetable production; many of them continued to cultivate after the 'submarine menace' subsided. Soon after the war, however, the productive use of wasteland and recreational open space presented a problem. Edinburgh's Town Clerk described the situation:

With the termination of war the National emergency has passed, and the position has been materially changed, with the result that difficulties have arisen. On the one hand, most of the allotment-holders are desirous of retaining their plots and securing fixity of tenure. They have become interested in the work, have found by experience the benefit of having a supply of fresh vegetables, and have also discovered the advantages from a health point of view of this form of recreation. On the other hand, now that the war is over, there is a desire on the part of the public that the portions of the parks cultivated during the war should revert to the purpose for which they were acquired; some owners of ground either desire to have possession of it or wish to obtain a reasonable rent; and certain areas are urgently required for housing schemes and industrial development. It is extremely difficult to find other ground for allotment-holders who have to be dispossessed.²

The situation *had* materially changed. 'Resumption of ground' for building and other purposes was scheduled for over 100 acres of allotments established under the Defence of Realm Act (1917). Only a handful of sites was held under earlier legislation—the Allotments (Scotland) Act of 1892—and even their future was uncertain.

The post-war years set the tone for protracted negotiation between the interests of Edinburgh allotment holders and competing land users. This negotiation would get worked out on the

¹ Edinburgh City Archives (hereafter ECA), File 144/7 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee), SAGS Annual Conference Report, 12 June 1948.

² ECA, File J20/8, Report by the Town Clerk in regard to Statutory Provisions Relating to Garden Allotments, February 1920.

ground, but it would also move to Parliamentary committee rooms and Corporation chambers. In this thesis, I trace Edinburgh's allotment politics from 1921 to 2001, using two Parliamentary inquiries to bracket my exploration of key moments and themes. These themes include poor-relief allotments and the Depression-era Scottish Allotments Scheme for the Unemployed; war-time Dig for Victory efforts; 'gardening as leisure' discourses; and perennial, but uneven, appeals to ecological design and town planning principles. During the eight decade span I consider, wartime and economic crises periodically brought allotments into sharp focus, as landscapes where certain values were performed (and prescribed). At other moments, the meaning of the allotment was blurred and contested. Edinburgh's allotment history can be understood as a collection of 'plots' that are contiguous but not continuous, linked but not linear.

The story plotted here begins in the summer of 1921, when—with wartime allotment leases set to expire in two years or less—the allotments situation had become sufficiently thorny to warrant a governmental inquiry. On 17 June, the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Secretary for Scotland called on the National Union of Allotment Holders of England and Wales and the Scottish National Union of Allotment Holders (SNUAH) to present evidence at a deputation.³ The tone of these proceedings oscillated between celebration and consternation. Most assembled agreed allotments were an asset. Sir Kingsley Wood MP commented, 'I do not think it can be said that the allotment movement has been a "stunt" or a fad. It has now, at any rate, developed as part of our national life'. Likewise, all present accepted that the problem of 'security of tenure' loomed large. 'The two great needs of the allotment movement of the country', continued Sir Kingsley, 'still remain better plots and better tenure. The representatives of the movement here today recognise the claims for open spaces, the claims for playing fields, and for housing, but they are unanimously of the opinion that the present position of the

³ National Archives of Scotland (hereafter NAS), AF 43/154, Notes of Proceedings at a Deputation from the National Union of Allotment Holders of England and Wales and the Scottish National Union of Allotment Holders Received by the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Secretary for Scotland, 17 June 1921.

movement is not satisfactory and that a great deal more remains to be done'.⁴ What, exactly, was to be done?

Archibald Fischer, Edinburgh plowholder and SNUAH Secretary, suggested the formation of a committee 'to report as to what is required in order to properly develop [the allotment movement] as an integral part of our Social System and to establish it on a permanent basis'.

Fischer supported this demand with a statement on the value of allotments:

We do not need to urge at this time of day the immense value of the allotment movement as a national asset—its economic, educative, hygienic, recreative, and we would even go the length of saying, moral and spiritual value, is undoubted and admitted... We know that in these days of commercial stagnation, and Treasury embargo on expenditure, the very suggestion of financial help is anathema, but we would respectfully suggest that 100 pounds spent on establishing a permanent allotments in an area is worth, say 500 pounds of ordinary public health expenditure or perhaps 1000 pounds spent on police. Our appeal is for the people of the country, the ordinary citizen, especially the townsman, toiling through the day, throughout the week—year by year—give him a chance, an opportunity to spend his leisure in the open air, getting in touch with Mother Nature and the elementals of life, and you will have placed within his reach and within the reach of his children the means of brightening and widening their lives and climbing up a bit in life—not socially, merely, but inwardly.⁵

Fischer was not alone in his appreciation. Other claims for the redemptive power of the allotment emerged as complement and counterpoint. 'The allotment movement is a very necessary thing in town life', said the Secretary of the English National Union, and 'the development of allotments [should] be made concurrent with the development of towns', complementing rather than restricting other land uses. MP Ackland stressed the pragmatic value of the allotment as a tool for social control during times of unrest. 'No one will ever know to what a large extent we owe the peace which has prevailed during the dispute of the mining industry to the outlet which the men have had on their allotment ground', he mused.⁶

These comments contain a complex array of rhetorical assertions. Fischer, particularly, appealed to (and conflated) multiple discourses in his testimony: economic security and its connection

⁴ NAS, AF 43/154, Notes of Proceedings, 17 June 1921.

⁵ NAS, AF 43/154, Notes of Proceedings, 17 June 1921.

⁶ NAS, AF 43/154, Notes of Proceedings, 17 June 1921.

with health and hygiene; ecology and citizenship with their promise of moral and spiritual enlightenment; rational recreation and social welfare. He tempered his enthusiasm for the more subjective, intangible benefits of the allotment with a social accounting that measured the fiscal value of proactive allotment schemes. Allotments emerge from such testimony as a bizarre, rhetorically-diverse, amalgamated landscape where Mother Nature helped unemployed miners pick themselves up by their bootstraps while leading the children to a state of inner grace in a Garden City paradise.

If everyone agreed allotments offered a cure-all for social ills from malnutrition to mining strikes, what, then, was the problem? Land. Money. Security of tenure. ‘A man can have no real interest in a plot, nor get the best out of it’, testified Fischer, ‘unless he knows that it is his for as long as he wishes to work it’.⁷ Fischer and others located the security of tenure problem in the legislation surrounding allotment provision, most of which was contained in an 1892 Act, which was designed to provide allotments for rural labourers, not urban enthusiasts. The SNUAH President ventured: ‘all the [allotment] movement needs is a little legislation and municipal encouragement to secure almost unbounded expansion’. ‘The simplest would be to repeal all the existing Acts and pass a new and comprehensive Act dealing with the whole matter afresh and de novo’, suggested Fischer.⁸

New legislation would be meaningless, however, unless accompanied by municipal support. ‘Local Authorities are not doing what they should in relation to the movement,’ agreed Sir Kingsley. ‘Many of them are acting in what I venture to say is a selfish and shortsighted way, and despite the appeals of the allotment holders in the district in most cases nothing has been done’.⁹ The Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, Sir Arthur Boscawen, also pressed the need for ‘gingering up’ local authorities to take action. ‘It is far better for local Allotment Associations to batter at the door of the Local Authorities and get them to use their powers’, he

⁷ NAS, AF 43/154, Notes of Proceedings, 17 June 1921.

⁸ NAS, AF 43/154, Notes of Proceedings, 17 June 1921.

said, ‘than to come to us and ask us to give more powers’. Boscawen closed the meeting with a cautious (if circuitous) statement of support: ‘We wish to help the allotment movement and recognise its difficulties. Sometimes these difficulties are very great and if we appear occasionally to be wanting in sympathy it is that the practical difficulties render action impossible at the moment’.¹⁰ The meeting dispersed with a promise that a committee of inquiry would consider the matter further.

Slender particulars

I have used the testimony from the 1921 deputation to launch my own inquiry. As Edinburgh’s allotment politics unfolded during the twentieth century, the arguments and appeals presented by Fischer and his colleagues would appear again and again, often in unfamiliar disguises. In the archival record, it is possible to identify frayed and tangled threads of meaning, twisted into loosely coherent allotment discourses (with different strengths—or ‘plies’—depending on the historical and political context). Allotment as recreation and retreat. Allotment as green lung and ecological enclave. Allotment as self-sufficient urban small-holding. Allotment as patriotic proving ground. The records show these versions of the allotment co-existing, competing, and sometimes complementing each other. Allotment advocates drew on different characterisations to persuade the powers that be (or the public) of allotments’ functional and symbolic significance.

The records also reveal what I will call a recycling of rhetoric—an unexpected correspondence between the supporting arguments presented by allotment holders in 1921, and 1961, and 2001—as well as a recurring insistence on the integrated and multiple benefits of the allotment. ‘Spiritual, moral, social and practical’ values could not be teased apart. These observations contradict scholarly and popular interpretations, which often assume a more or less linear

⁹ NAS, AF 43/154, Notes of Proceedings, 17 June 1921.

¹⁰ NAS, AF 43/154, Notes of Proceedings, 17 June 1921.

progression from ‘allotment as poor relief’ to ‘allotment as ecological outpost’.¹¹ I am not claiming the discourses of value have remained static, or that there is an equivalence between the rhetoric of 1921 and that for 2001. But I do think it worthwhile to tug on the interwoven threads of historic meaning to see how they are attached to the politics of the here and now. How do different versions of the allotment invoke certain possibilities (and impossibilities) in the present? How have they contributed to the ambiguity and awkwardness that surrounds these spaces?

I used several methods to seek out answers to these questions: archival research, ethnography, oral history, and an impromptu form of ‘action research’ advocacy. The different methods produced a rich, but often unwieldy, body of research material. I began in the archives, guided by an initial interest in the Scottish allotment movement’s background history. In the Edinburgh Council Archives and the National Archives of Scotland I found documentation of ongoing agitation for ‘better plots and better tenure’. The material detailed the processes of persuasion through which people stepped outside their plots to frame and communicate meanings: to convince politicians, to influence policy, to rally around a common cause. This research allowed me to identify the rough outlines of different allotment *versions*, but it left me wondering about a level of experience not represented in the official record. The language used by allotment holders in the archived documents—superlative, rhetorical, exaggerated—shifted the frame of reference from the ground itself to abstract political and symbolic spaces. Reading the testimony of the men assembled for the 1921 deputation, it is easy to forget that they were talking about a real landscape made out of soil and sheds, plants and paths, populated with people working to grow food.

¹¹ A handful of allotment scholars have researched English allotment history, tracing the cultural evolution of the movement. See Couch (2000), Wiltshire et. al. (2000), Wiltshire and Azuma (2000), Crouch (1992, 1990), Crouch and Ward (1988), Thorpe (1975). My work builds on the foundation established by this work, but introduces a slightly different emphasis, focusing on a particularly Scottish history that is characterised by several simultaneous discourses of value.

An interest in the unarticulated sub-text, the background where meaning is located and lived, led me to conduct a series of interviews with Edinburgh allotment holders. During these interviews, I grew increasingly perplexed about how the information I was gathering could speak to the historic evidence I had unearthed. People openly spoke of their intimate experiences in their plots and their reasons for keeping allotments, but rarely did these reflections align neatly with the official record. I began to think about these tangled testimonies as *grounded truths*, contingent and embodied, located in specific plots and running parallel to the strategic representations. My interview experience made me more attentive to the historic grounded truths poking through the material in the archive. I noted instances when the grounded truth corresponded with the popular version (for example, allotments *did* alleviate poverty for many families), but I also noticed *inversions*—moments of uncertainty which hinted at a difficult fit between political rhetoric and the realities people confronted in their day-to-day practices. Stories broke through the gloss of representation to invert or contradict its assertions. A woman wrote a letter to the Council berating them for renting her husband a second allotment when he was incapable of paying the rent on their house. A man laughed at the Dig for Victory poster on the bus, bitter about a plot that had been taken over parkland shortly before the war broke out. These details intrigued me, although I was uncertain about how I could fit them into my analysis.

While I was planning interviews and visiting archives, I also began to attend meetings of the Edinburgh Federation (FEDAGA) and the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society as an interested observer. Within a few meetings, I had been drafted as member of the FEDAGA delegation to the Scottish Parliament Allotments Inquiry. This unexpected opportunity proved to be both delightful (many cups of tea in jovial company) and disorienting. Only in retrospect have I realised that my participation in those meetings exposed me to the very process that had created the material I was unearthing in my traditional research practice. The values Archibald Fischer exhaustively articulated in his testimony (and the other values articulated in the official record) were a translation, moving (geographically and epistemologically) from the rough

ground of the plot to the strategic space of the governmental inquiry. As a participant in the ‘strategy meetings’ for the FEDAGA delegation, I witnessed (and intervened in) the contemporary process of translation, the awkward movement from plot to politics, from grounded truth to version.

In this thesis, I have sifted through evidence gathered in archives, interviews, and government inquiries. As an interpreter and a writer, I have emplotted the raw material and shaped it into a coherent form. The transformation of research data into text involved weeding out unwanted material, cultivating some ideas, and throwing others on the conceptual compost. My work allots significance to select versions of the allotment which gained prominence at certain moments and then faded out, often to be revived later. I have not tried to cover all, or even most of, the ground that exists on this topic. Allotment history is riddled with what James Clifford calls the ‘impure, unruly processes of collective invention and survival’.¹² My plotted histories track some of these impure, unruly processes by shifting between the general—the panoramic view of the allotment landscape as seen from an overlooking hill or a committee room—and the particular—the intimate texture of each private plot. So, as James Agee remarked in his description of an Alabama landscape and its people in the 1930s:

[L]et me hope the whole of that landscape we shall essay to travel in is visible and may be known as there all at once: let this be borne in mind, in order that, when we descend among its windings and blockades, into examination of slender particulars, this its wholeness and simultaneous living map may not be neglected, however lost the breadth of the country may be in the winding walk of each sentence.¹³

In the following chapters, I tease out five ‘threads’ of Edinburgh’s allotment politics and locate them historically, through their political manifestations and, where possible, their practical effects. Chapter 1 describes Edinburgh’s allotments as moral and economic landscapes. Chapter 2 focuses on attempts to redefine allotments as recreation and leisure resources. In Chapter 3, I examine allotments’ relevance to urban ecology discourses, land rights rhetoric, and nationalist

¹² Clifford (1997), 2.

¹³ Agee (1939), 102.

self-provisioning. Chapter 4 layers these historic representations with evidence presented at the 2001 Parliamentary Allotments Inquiry. In conclusion, I reframe my inquiry to propose an alternative reading of the material. Appendices reconstitute the content of the archives in a movement chronology and a detailed register of Edinburgh's extant and extinct allotment sites.

I am aware that the task I have assigned myself is a bit counter-intuitive, since the very process of isolating different versions makes it difficult to see how they have influenced each other. Cross-pollination and contradiction will, I hope, become apparent in the telling. In the end, my claim hinges on the perception that several allotment versions have co-existed (in political, personal, and practical forms) over the past eighty years. My less certain claim is that this co-existence has real effects. There is a primary reading of decline of the allotment that can be boiled down to a simple formula: money talks; exchange value usually trumps use value. There are several secondary readings that invoke changing leisure patterns and an adoption of Garden City residential design. My reading falls somewhere between these valid and obvious interpretations: ambiguity matters. How it matters, and why it matters, should become clearer as I recount the following stories.

Chapter 1

Something to Do

The Scottish Allotments Scheme for the Unemployed illustrated its 1936 annual report with a series of line drawings of a man at work in his allotment. Shirt-sleeves rolled, cap firmly fixed, he hoes lettuces, lifts potatoes, feeds chickens, plants cabbage, and dumps manure from a wheelbarrow. The same caption graces each drawing: ‘Something to do’. Who was this man? The archetypal allotment holder—resourceful, male, working class (probably), a family-man. At his allotment site, he and other men secured a margin of economic independence by ‘supplementing’ the family income with fresh produce. In this chapter, I try to place this image in context, to trace some of the events and assumptions that construct this version of the allotment holder—and the allotment itself as a specific kind of productive, moral space. I also tease out some of the tensions between self-help and social engineering, and masculinity and dependency, embedded in this version.

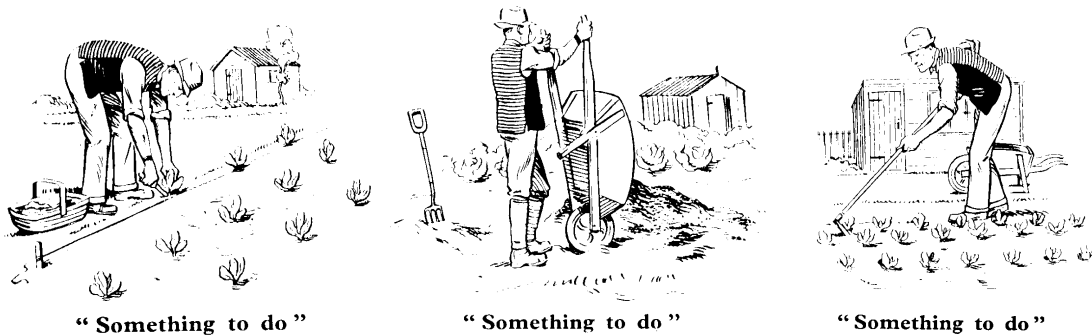


Figure 1.1 Men plant, haul, and hoe. Scottish Allotments Scheme for the Unemployed, Report for Season 1936. SAGS-Victor Webb Archive, Glasgow University Archive Services.

The labourers' allotment in Scotland

My research would be simpler if I could assume a historical parallel between Scotland's allotment movement and England's. Allotments in England developed as a response to post-enclosure rural poverty, through a curious fusion of philanthropic efforts and labourer land-rights activism. As the model caught on in the nineteenth century, employers and landowners often provided allotments to ‘deserving’ labourers, effectively rewarding and controlling their

behaviour with ‘gifts which might be ropes’.¹ Despite the edge of social engineering, labourers and reformers agitated for expanded provision into the 1880s. The Allotments Act (1887) was hotly contested by those opposed to obligatory provision, but it passed through the efforts of candidates elected on an ‘allotments platform’. By the end of the century, allotments had shifted to the industrial centres and been included in discourses of Garden City planning and rational recreation (connections explored in later chapters). The role of the allotment as a form of ‘poor relief’ (which offered a convenient escape valve for working-class unrest and a distraction from the temptations of the pub) remained strong in England into the twentieth century.

North of the border, landowners and labourers alike were slower to embrace the allotment cause. Witnesses to an 1889 House of Commons inquiry described Scottish allotment provision as patchy and dispersed, still a ‘novel idea’ in much of the country. They proposed various explanations for the lack of enthusiasm: higher wages among agricultural labourers; restrictive land law; a preference for wage labour over self-provision; and general unfamiliarity with the system’s potential benefits. Their testimony also suggests Scottish labourers had better access to garden ground than their English counterparts: farmers commonly provided ‘potato ground’ to their employees; mining cottages often included attached gardens; and the pendicle system of land use sustained a traditional link between tenanted cottages and detached parcels of arable land. A few witnesses testified to the existence of successful allotment schemes in some parishes, but none identified a need for legislation to promote additional schemes.² Despite this indifference, Parliament in 1892 extended the provisions of the English legislation to Scotland with the Allotments (Scotland) Act, which obliged local authorities to provide allotments for the ‘labouring population’ if six or more ratepayers came forward with a request.³

¹ Archer (1997), 36.

² British Parliamentary Papers, Agriculture 20, House of Commons, Report from the Select Committee on Allotments, Small-holdings, and Peasant Proprietors, 5 July 1889.

³ Scottish officials interpreted the term ‘labouring population’ to extend to ‘fishermen and all who live by manual outdoor labour’. NAS, AF 66/5.

Correspondence files of the Secretary for Scotland suggests the Act was perceived more as an irritant than as an opportunity.⁴ A year after the Act's passage, little had been done to implement it. A few local authorities received applications from interested citizens, but lacked the resources (and perhaps the will) to carry out what they called the government's 'experiment'. When the Secretary for Scotland proposed the distribution of an informational circular, one of his underlings cited a series of reports 'testifying that the Scotch labourer does not want an allotment—this seems so universally the case, that probably it is not worth while issuing a circular'. 'Demand does seem scattered and weak,' a colleague admitted in a subsequent memo.⁵ Evidence suggests that Scotland's allotment movement gained momentum as an urban, not a rural, phenomenon.⁶ And although working-class labourers benefited from the early schemes, they were not the only people to embrace the allotment cause.

In Edinburgh, interest in formal allotment provision quickened in the early 1900s. The North British Railway Company established thirty-six plots for their employees on wasteland in East Portobello in 1912, renting the plots out for a nominal yearly fee.⁷ Other railway and mining companies established some of the earliest urban allotment schemes in Scotland, though their efforts never achieved the popularity of similar English schemes.⁸ 1912 also saw the formation of Edinburgh's first voluntary allotment association—the Edinburgh Allotment Holders' Association.⁹ Citizen interest spurred Edinburgh to become the first local authority in Scotland to draft allotment regulations under the 1892 Act—albeit a full two decades after the Act's passage. Under the new regulations, the Corporation worked closely with the allotment association to establish and manage allotment sites in the Grange District. Major expansion of

⁴ NAS, AF 66/5, Internal Department of Agriculture memo, 31 November 1892.

⁵ NAS, AF 66/5, Memo to Secretary of State for Scotland, December 1893.

⁶ The 1851 Johnston's Plan of Edinburgh and Leith shows some precedent for urban allotments in Edinburgh, with several acres marked as the Patriotic Society's Allotment Gardens, just north of Dean Church, bounded by Comely Bank, Orchard Brae, and Queensferry. The Patriotic Society may date from the radical 1790s, when British loyalists sponsored voluntary schemes, enlisting support for their effort to protect Britain's social and political hierarchy. McLeod (1998), 66-67.

⁷ McDaid and Reid (2000), *Portobello East Junction Allotments*.

⁸ Moran (1991).

⁹ Further research into the origins of the Edinburgh Working Men's Flower Show (which appears in city records from the 1890s) may reveal the earlier existence of a 'Working Men's' allotment association like those operating in Dundee and Perth in late 1800s.

Edinburgh's allotment movement came only in the later years of the war, however, when patriotic cultivators took up plots by the thousands. The 1919 Land Settlement (Scotland) Act, responding to the popular appeal of the movement, opened up allotment cultivation to anyone, regardless of economic need or occupation. The details of this early history are cited to illustrate how difficult it is to locate the origins of Edinburgh's allotments in any straightforward campaign for 'allotments as charity'. They began, and they remained, places where different motives and meanings converged.

There is, however, a sense in which the placement of the allotment within categories of paternalistic social welfare provision set a pattern for how these landscapes were managed and maintained. The intention of the 1892 Act carried over into the regulations that the Edinburgh Corporation set for proper conduct and aesthetic standards: 'Every tenant shall cultivate his [sic] allotment garden wholly or mainly for the production of vegetable crops for consumption by himself or his family'.¹⁰ An allotment, the regulations averred, should respond to and provide for domestic economic necessity. Flower planting was implicitly discouraged. Self-sufficiency was encouraged, but regulations prohibited the sale of allotment produce to remove any prospect of competition with market-gardeners. The appropriate place to dispose of the vegetables was in the home, where the wife minded the children who were not allowed on the allotment unless under 'proper control' (dogs had to be on a leash). The council policed this space assiduously in the early years. An inspection at the Primrose Bank Allotments ascertained that the 'red hut, next to wall to be made green when repainting is required', the 'hen runs ... should be enquired into' and the 'light erection among the trees, presently untidy with old canvas and felt [should be] be tidied up'.¹¹ When Mr Stewart on Gorgie Road refused to reduce the height of his erection the Allotments Committee decided to 'terminate the lease at the end of the year' and assure that 'no other Corporation allotment will be let to him'.¹² Edinburgh's allotments were carefully controlled; allotment holders entered into an odd

¹⁰ ECA, File I 6/7, 1924 Edinburgh Allotments Regulations.

¹¹ ECA, Minutes of the Garden Allotments Sub-committee of the Public Parks Committee, 7 February 1925.

relationship of dependency and compliance, even as they engaged in a symbolic and practical display of self-reliance and independence.

Setting the heather on fire

The months drag along—and as each passes the sturdy workman gets more and more hopeless, loses heart—it is terrible to visualise—it must be far more terrible to experience. Now along comes this Scheme—Spring is here—there is a breath of hope in the air—and says “Here, my man, is a chance to throw off this paralysing lethargy and idleness...get into the open air, dig, work, plant—you will find heart again, and over and above that you will provide heaps of good nourishing food—ay, and flowers too, why not, for yourself and your wife and bairns”.¹³

Archibald Fischer, Secretary of the Scottish National Union of Allotment Holders (SNUAH), wrote the above script for the Secretary for Scotland to read in a BBC broadcast in the spring of 1932. Fischer’s appeal (which was rejected as not ‘suitable for its purpose’) promoted the Scottish Allotments Scheme for the Unemployed (SASU), a joint effort of the Scottish National Union of Allotment Holders and the Society of Friends. In this section, I explore the development of this scheme and consider how the propaganda created around it constructed a particular version of the allotment landscape.

The Scheme for the Unemployed developed in a turbulent social and economic climate. Between 1923 and 1930, Scotland’s unemployment averaged 14 percent. (The average would rise to 22 percent between 1931 and 1938, peaking at 27.7 percent in 1932.) Disgruntled workers staged Hunger Marches to London—and, within Scotland, to Edinburgh and Glasgow—to call attention to inadequate unemployment benefit and public assistance ‘relief’.¹⁴ In the wake of the 1921 miners’ lock-out and the 1926 general strike, many workers became active in the National Unemployed Workers’ Movement and the Communist Party. As tensions heightened and erupted in the streets and in meeting halls, post-war public housing development placed intense pressure on urban land and threatened to squeeze out allotments altogether. Between 1920 and 1930 the number of allotment plots in Edinburgh dropped from 5,000 to

¹² ECA, Minutes of the Garden Allotments Sub-committee of the Public Parks Committee, 23 June 1921.

¹³ NAS, AF 66/96, Allotment Gardens for the Unemployed-Formulation of Scheme, April 1932.

1,900.¹⁵ Allotment associations watched plots disappear with alarm, even as they sensed a general decline in interest amongst the public.¹⁶ The greatest problem facing the allotment movement remained security of tenure, a problem exacerbated by the higher value of land for building purposes and the difficulty in obtaining ground within a reasonable distance of large towns.¹⁷

At Edinburgh meetings in November and December 1930, association representatives, politicians, and interested parties met to discuss how the Land Utilisation legislation under consideration in Parliament could advance ‘allotments for the unemployed’ schemes in Scotland. They spent much time, however, pondering why Scotland’s allotment movement lagged behind England’s.¹⁸ The Secretary of the Scottish National Union speculated, ‘The English like salads more than we do’. ‘There is something to be overcome in Scotland,’ agreed Secretary of State William Admanson: ‘Apart from what the Bill can do, the general attitude to allotments and gardening has to be changed. One big thing is to teach our people the great value of using more vegetables and of eating fresh vegetables instead of those brought from a distance’.¹⁹ Archibald Fischer, with characteristic enthusiasm, brushed these concerns aside: ‘There is no need for going out with field glasses to look for lions in the way! That is what a lot of the local authorities have done. Even if there are lions in the way, they have got to be chased out of the way. We have got to get this scheme in hand and send it away with a rush ... to set

¹⁴ MacDougall (1990), 2.

¹⁵ NAS, AF 43/352, Minutes of proceedings for Agricultural Land (Utilization) Bill 1930, Allotments Conference, 22 November 1930. Edinburgh allotment campaigners pressed for adequate provision ‘in the densely populated and congested districts of the city’ such as St. Leonard’s Ward: ‘The residents nearly all belong to the poorer working classes and amongst them there has been during the last few years a large amount of unemployment. Since before the War there has been an Allotment Association for the district and the demand for allotments continues to be steady’. ECA, File 186 DRT 14, (Garden Allotments Grounds for Permanent Tenure, Public Parks Committee), Letter to the Under-Secretary for Scotland from the Edinburgh Depute Town Clerk, 26 December 1924.

¹⁶ Reasons given for the declining interest in cultivation included the provision of gardens in housing schemes; unemployment, especially in the coal-mining areas, leading to a lack of means for purchase of equipment; and the belief that the occupation of an allotment would lead to loss of unemployment benefit.

¹⁷ NAS, AF 43/352, Minutes of proceedings for Agricultural Land (Utilization) Bill 1930, Allotments Conference, 13 December 1930.

¹⁸ Meeting participants included local and county authorities, allotment-holders associations, market gardeners, the Secretary of State for Scotland and various other dignitaries.

¹⁹ NAS, AF 43/352, Minutes of proceedings for Agricultural Land (Utilization) Bill 1930, Allotments Conference, 13 December 1930.

the allotment movement in motion once again!’²⁰ The editor of the *North British Agriculturalist* offered a sceptical analysis of the December proceedings:

The conference on allotments, held in Edinburgh, did not cut much ice. While the official view was clearly stated, as it was meant to be, as an intended stimulation of interest in the Land Utilisation Bill, it opened the way for the advancement of considerable criticism. Admitting at once the circumscribed success of the allotment system, it cannot be claimed that in Scotland it has ever set the heather on fire. It was all very well during the war period, when many willingly went out of their way to avail themselves of allotments, and willingly worked them as a means of easing the strenuous conditions of living, the necessity for and the novelty of the system has long since disappeared. The offer of allotments does not appeal to the unemployed, who depended on the pledge of the Government to so develop industry that unemployment would be reduced to a minimum. There is no getting away from the fact that, in Scotland at least, many existing allotments have been given up.²¹

The better sort of working man

Despite the challenge posed by Scottish horticultural ignorance and indifference, the Scottish Allotment Scheme for the Unemployed began in 1932. SNUAH and the Society of Friends salvaged and extended a government effort that had been abandoned after one season due to ‘the paramount necessity for economy in national expenditure’.²² The concept of the scheme was simple: unemployed men received a discount on the cost of seeds, seed potatoes, fertilisers, and tools, as well as reduced rent on a standard allotment plot, which they were expected to cultivate and keep tidy. In this way, it was hoped, the ‘physical, mental, and moral stimulus of productive work would help to keep them fit for whenever the happy call to resume regular employment may come to them’.²³ The rhetoric surrounding the SASU scheme established the allotment as a reward and a refuge for the deserving poor. Allotments would help the unemployed man maintain his self-respect, his mental edge, and his masculine role as provider for a family of hungry dependants. The 1932 SASU annual report spelled out the benefits:

The problem of Unemployment to-day is more acute and more serious than it has ever been. In nearly every Town and Village up and down the country men and youths are spending their days in enforced idleness, wearied and fast becoming broken-spirited.... [T]here can be no alternative to Work as a revitalising force. The Allotments movement provides this essential in the form of interesting outdoor work, recreation, and pleasure.

²⁰ NAS, AF 43/353, Minutes of proceedings for Agricultural Land (Utilization) Bill 1930, Allotments Conference, 22 November 1930.

²¹ NAS, AF 43/352, clipping from *The North British Agriculturalist*, 18 December 1930.

²² NAS, AF 66/96, Allotment Gardens for the Unemployed-Formulation of Scheme.

²³ NAS, AF 66/96, Letter to the Editor, *Scotsman*, from JG Roberts, Secretary, Barrhead Allotments Association, 26 November 1931.

It does more than that. It assists men and their dependants materially, by enabling them to augment their domestic food supply with vegetables in plenty, which they could not otherwise afford. The cultivation of an Allotment Garden means food for the body and mind alike. The Scheme, moreover, is not in the nature of a dole or indiscriminate charity...This Scheme is being taken up all over Scotland by those unemployed men who wish to be effective members of the community, and have a real desire to work both in their own interest and in anticipation of re-absorption into industry proper.²⁴

In Edinburgh, the Scheme for the Unemployed was, by most accounts, a success. By 1934, a total of seventy four arable acres—in Granton, Warriston, West Mains, and Saughton—had been turned over to the scheme. Organisers instructed aspiring plotters to be present on opening days for the ‘allotting’ of plots. If they were lucky, they also received a pair of wooden sabots, ordered from Holland by philanthropist Louisa Wyndam.²⁵ The Corporation assigned ‘two skilled instructors’ to advise the allotment holders on proper cultivation methods and Councillor William McClaren worked closely with SASU to promote the scheme and find appropriate land.

At Warriston, unused land between the cemetery and the Water of Leith provided 174 plots. During the 1932 growing season, a typical 230 square yard allotment plot at Warriston yielded: 6 cwt. potatoes, 200 beets, 125 early turnips, 75 Golden Ball turnips, 100 Swede turnips, lettuce, peas, broad beans, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, Savoy, and parsley. The annual report that includes this proud list notes for the reader, ‘The men at Warriston did not start till 3rd May. Only about 6 men out of the 155 knew anything about gardening before starting’.²⁶ Photographs of the site—taken to promote the scheme and document progress—show an orderly, productive landscape, punctuated by neat sheds and populated by smiling workers. The cover of the 1933 SASU report (Figure 1.2) includes a snapshot of Warriston allotment holders wearing their new sabots. In another photo, an apparently grateful family poses on benches in front of their lace-curtained garden shed-cottage (Figure 1.3). These photos, and others reprinted in the SASU

²⁴ VWA, Allotment Gardens for the Unemployed, Joint Committee of the Scottish National Union of Allotment Holders and the Society of Friends, Report for Season 1932.

²⁵ NAS, AF 66/100.

²⁶ VWA, Allotment Gardens for the Unemployed, Joint Committee of the Scottish National Union of Allotment Holders and the Society of Friends, Report for Season 1932.

annual reports, reveal a domestic, decorative aesthetic juxtaposed with the productive rows of potatoes and cabbages.

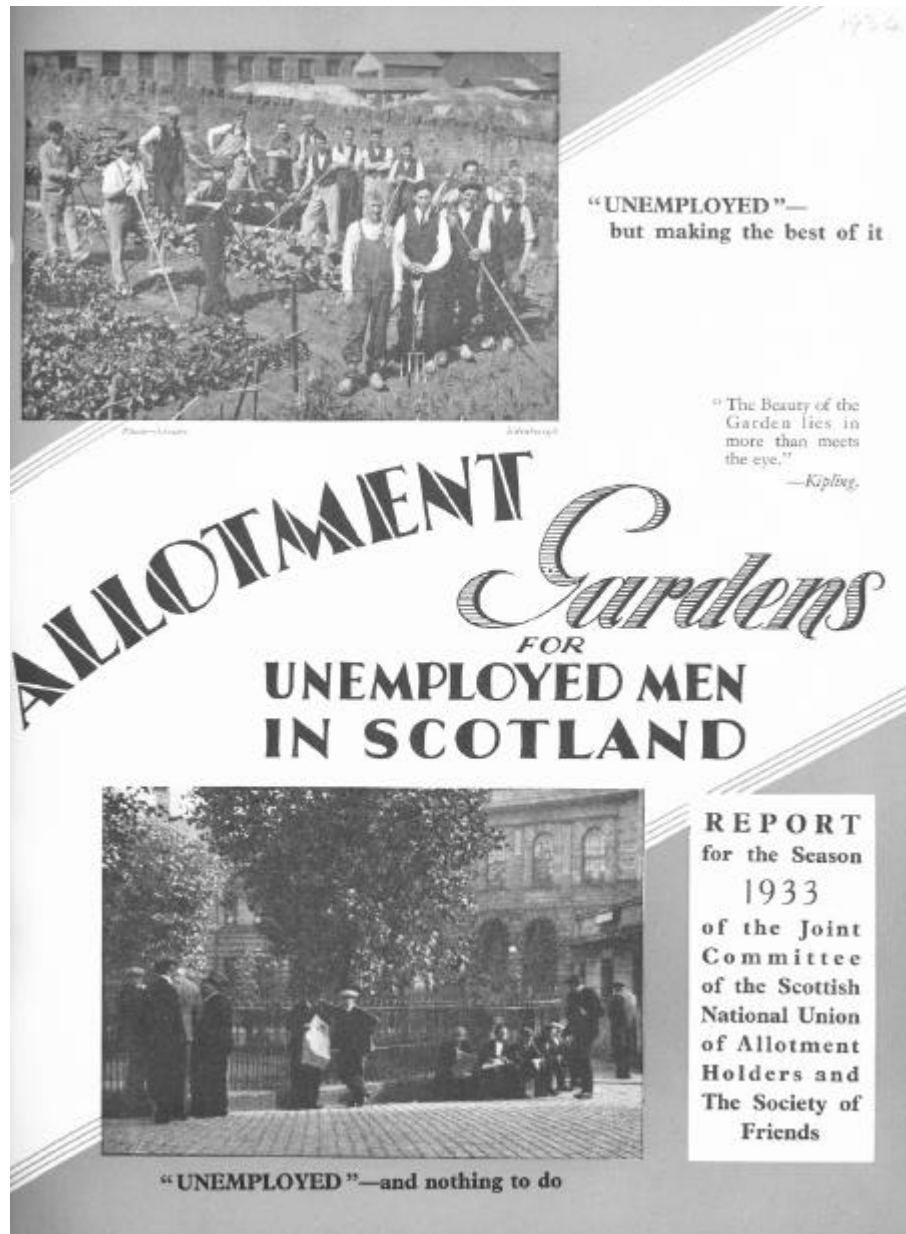


Figure 1.2 Cover image. SASU Report for Season 1933. SAGS-Victor Webb Archive, Glasgow University Archive Services.

The local press testified to the success of the Edinburgh scheme with accounts of contented men occupied in their plots:

When a representative of *The Scotsman* visited West Mains allotments on an afternoon this week he found a large number of men busy at their plots...What struck one immediately was the keenness of the men...A large number of the holders lost no time in making tool boxes for their garden tools, and the member of the Committee who acted as a guide drew attention to the tool-box whose owner was evidently prepared to flit expeditiously if the need arose. His tool-box was constructed with shafts and axle

brackets, the detachable wheels being inside the box. The generous inference to be drawn from this was that the owner of the tool-box was a man thoroughly deserving of work, not only because he had constructed a serviceable and ingenious tool-box but because he was so evidently prepared to tackle a job without a moment's lost time... In one way and another, as one went around the allotments, it was obvious that everyone was happy. If there was tragedy it was the tragedy of seeing so many of what appeared to be the *best type of worker* without employment... Something to do. Something to occupy mind and muscle. Something better—ininitely better—than walking the streets at a loose end.²⁷

Tool boxes were signifiers of latent earning potential—but one wonders what ungenerous inference could be drawn. The Rev. George F MacLeod, quoted in *The Scotsman* in November 1932, went so far as to claim that, ‘The effect on the men of holding these allotments was... far



Figure 1.3 Edinburgh family in their plot at the Warriston allotments for the unemployed, 1932. *National Archives of Scotland, File AF 66/100.*

more extraordinary than one could grasp. The life and the outlook of the men had changed. It was no less than a sacrament of earth. It was an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace which came to these men’. MacLeod went on to claim that the allotment might offer the ‘dawn of a vast solution to that awful divorce between man and nature’, much needed

²⁷ *Scotsman*, 27 April 1932, emphasis added.

because, ‘In these days of immense towns and mass production there was going to be an enormous problem of humanity being lifted up and divorced from red Mother Earth’.²⁸

In the later years of the Scheme, organisers stressed the ‘return to the sacred soil’ theme touched on by Reverend MacLeod, expanding the scope of their programs to help men raise poultry and swine on larger allotments. The cover of the 1935 report is illustrated with a “Back to the Land” progression of photos, from Granton Allotments to a small-holding in Milngavie. The text of the report explained:

The heading of this report has been selected advisedly. It is not suggested that the Schemes outlined offer a solution to the problem of Unemployment. At their best these schemes are merely ameliorative, and temporary, but these Schemes to help people to work on the land—to help themselves—are, the Committee believe, the best of all means suggested or in operation to lighten the burden and maintain the heart and fitness of those who are out of work. They are more than that, however; they are distinctly paving the way for a return to the land of a number of capable and suitable men.²⁹

From 1935, the Scottish Commission for Special Areas helped successful plottolders ‘graduate’ from standard plots to independent smallholdings.³⁰ Urban agriculture offered a route of return to a self-sufficient rural idyll.

Trouble in the fields

Although press coverage and annual reports presented a rosy picture of the SASU success stories, troubles lingered behind the scenes. The Scheme’s main difficulty was a general lack of interest, even a sense of antagonism, towards a program that presumed to provide an ‘outlet’ for the dissatisfaction of the unemployed worker. Archibald Fischer speculated that a broadcast appeal from the Prime Minister might help overcome the ‘very considerable reluctance on the part of many to take up this method of occupying themselves and creating an interest in life’.

‘[I]t is much easier to get Allotments set agoing in England than in Scotland,’ he continued, ‘we

²⁸ *Scotsman*, 7 November 1932. The reference to ‘red’ Mother Earth in the article is a curious one.

²⁹ VWA, Allotment Gardens for the Unemployed, Report for Season 1935.

³⁰ Leneman (1989). Further examination of the connection between allotment plots, small-holdings, and crofting in Scotland may shed some light on the dissimilarities between the English and the Scottish allotment movement rhetoric and development.

in Scotland need an extra push in this matter'.³¹ The Department of Agriculture for Scotland submitted this draft broadcast appeal to the Scottish Office for review:

To cultivate a garden as a way of beguiling enforced leisure seems to come more as a novel and unfamiliar suggestion to the Scotsman than to Englishmen. Perhaps this is because the direct ways of thought habitual to my countrymen can only associate the use of tools and instruments with the production of some external object of recognised utility. But I am sure that any wise physician of the mind would recommend to all the victims of this malady of our age the healing influence of productive work for its own sake—if they are to escape falling into a settled temper of dull apathy or furious exasperation. And in recommending these avenues of escape for mind and body we do not wish thereby to give any impression that such counsel exonerates the whole community from directing its thoughts and efforts to a permanent solution of our social and economic difficulties.³²

This admirable, if convoluted, attempt to depart from the 'common form' letters and speeches about allotments was eventually edited to remove any suggestion that 'all is not well with the movement in Scotland'.³³ Dull apathy and furious exasperation were probably preferable to the 'seething discontent' Fischer diagnosed among the unemployed in Scotland. In July 1932, Fischer warned the Secretary of State for Scotland that these men were 'easy prey to Red and Communistic agitators and much insidious harm is being done in this direction against which the Allotment Movement could be a strong counteracting influence if it really could be developed on the scale which it ought to be'. All the more reason, argued Fischer, for the government to support the Scottish scheme with a pound for pound match of all private funds raised.³⁴

If some men were disinclined to spend their time in 'beguiling enforced leisure', others were perhaps a bit too keen. In 1936, Margaret Thrussell wrote to the Depute Town Clerk from the hospital to complain that, although her husband could no longer manage to pay the rent on their house, 'Still he can afford to pay for two allotments and he knows nothing about agriculture anyway. Mr Thrussell is bound to keep a decent and respectable comfortable house for his own wife and daughter and keep his wife and until he has done that he has no right to spend money

³¹ NAS, AF 66/96, Letter from Archibald Fischer to James Ramsay Macdonald, Prime Minister, 21 February 1933. .

³² NAS, AF 66/96, Correspondence between Department of Agriculture for Scotland and Scottish Office.

³³ NAS, AF 66/96, Correspondence between Department of Agriculture for Scotland and Scottish Office.

³⁴ NAS, AF 66/96, Letter from Archibald Fischer to Secretary of State for Scotland, 8 July 1932.

on allotments for it takes money to stock them'.³⁵ The Committee also sent several letters evicting tenants who had taken plots for the unemployed under false pretences. One plot holder at Niddrie Mains was informed: 'it has been reported to the Garden Allotments Committee that you are not, and have not been, unemployed during the last two years'.³⁶

The Scottish Allotments Scheme for the Unemployed managed to overcome occasional hurdles to introduce hundreds of people to allotmenting, and many of these people would stay on to become the core of the Dig for Victory effort in World War II. Unfortunately, the council files contain very few letters from constituents praising the Corporation for its substantial commitment to the cause during the 1930s (Edinburgh was ahead of most other Scottish cities in its provision for the unemployed). More common are letters pointing out the shortcomings of the Council response. One plotholder, who had been turned off his plots at Hamilton Terrace in 1937, shared his annoyance at the 'pitiful short-sightedness of the Town Council in taking away allotments from the better class of working man and turning them into a "park" for the "pitchtoss" fraternity'. 'I have observed this park for a long time now,' he continued, 'and I have never yet seen a member of the public *walking* on the ground which was formerly allotments. It was in my humble view a crime to take away this form of enjoyment and usefulness from the best section of the working class—many of whom were unemployed and looked forward with pleasure to spending Saturday afternoons in a little healthy and peaceful recreation—sometimes with their families'.³⁷

'Sometimes with their families'

Propaganda surrounding the Scottish Allotments Scheme for the Unemployed left no doubt that, although women played a role, the target was the family man who needed to provide for his family and maintain his status as bread-winner and head of household. Although a few women

³⁵ ECA, File 144/4 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee), Letter to Depute Town Clerk from Margaret Thrussell, 12 March 1936.

³⁶ ECA, File J52/1, Letter 26 October 1935.

³⁷ ECA, File 226/1 (Garden Allotments, Public Parks Committee), Letter to Edinburgh Town Clerk from Fred Charter, 27 October 1939.

enrolled in the scheme—the 1939 register for Granton Mains notes Mrs Ure, Mrs Brown, and Mrs Todd sharing the site with 200 men³⁸—the allotment was primarily, if not exclusively, a male domain. Women were invited onto the plots to harvest the soft fruits and the occasional cabbage (and were encouraged to share recipes to deal with the 300 turnips produced on the average plot) but very few held plots on their own. Paired photographs in the 1938 SASU report (Figure 1.4) illustrate these gendered allotment roles—the men at ease in their space, partaking of a ‘quiet smoke’, the women in their house-dresses gathering food for the table. The material about the SASU scheme shows women exerting a ‘civilising’ influence on the plot landscape, either directly—by making the lace curtains for the shed—or from afar, as in this description of a visit to the plots: ‘In some of the plots they had a few flowers planted. When it was remarked to one of the men that he was not only considering utility, he replied, “No, the wife has to be catered for”. It was a great thing, indeed, that the women folks among the working classes exercised an influence over the men to get them to produce a little beauty for the home’.³⁹

While other popular versions of the allotment would stress opportunities for family-style leisure and recreation (as I will show in later chapters) the version embodied by the SASU scheme—the man on the plots achieving household economic independence through dependence on a charitable scheme—remained dominant well into the latter half of the century. When Iris Gunkel inquired after the tenancy of Plot No. 4 at Pilrig Park in 1960, Corporation officials would only issue a Missive of Let in her husband’s name. In 1983, she wrote to rectify the situation, commenting that at the time, ‘I objected in principle but accepted the inevitability of the situation. However, in recent years women’s rights in such matters have been statutorily recognised and I should accordingly be grateful if you would kindly arrange to correct the record by re-issuing the Missive of Let ... to me in my own name, please’.⁴⁰ The Director of Recreation responded: ‘If Mr. Gunkel intends to transfer the plot it would go to the person next on the waiting list and not be an internal family decision. I would recommend that the request

³⁸ ECA, File J52/1.

³⁹ *Scotsman*, 20 May 1932.

be refused'.⁴¹ Not until Iris Gunkel threatened to pursue the matter in court did the Council back down.⁴² This was not an isolated incident. When Eileen Holtman approached the clerk at the Parks Department in 1972 to inquire about renting a plot, the clerk first asked, 'Where is your father?' and then, 'Is your husband at work?'. When she informed him that she wanted to cultivate the plot herself, he replied: 'I can see nothing in the regulations to forbid a woman from renting a plot, but if you don't cultivate it we'll take it away from you'.⁴³



Photo—Scotsman Patriotic Press

A Quiet Smoke



Photo—Scotsman Patriotic Press

Busy Housewives

Figure 1.4 'A Quiet Smoke' and 'Busy Housewives'. SASU Report for Season, 1938. SAGS-Victor Webb Archive, Glasgow University Archive Services.

⁴⁰ ECA, File RC 26 (Recreation and Leisure Committee), Letter to Chief Executive, Edinburgh City Council, from Iris Gunkel, 7 April 1983.

⁴¹ ECA, File RC 26 (Recreation and Leisure Committee), Letter to Director of Administration from Senior Depute Director of Recreation, 4 May 1983.

⁴² ECA, File RC 26 (Recreation and Leisure Committee), Letter to Chief Executive, Edinburgh City Council, from Iris Gunkel, 17 May 1983.

⁴³ *Scotsman*, 20 July 1996.

Conclusion

The popular and municipal perception of the allotment as a productive space where disadvantaged citizens could 'grow their own' persisted long after the Depression. When the Council proposed to raise annual allotment rents from £8 to £25 in 1982, a Saughton Mains plotholder protested:

I feel that this increase is neither morally or economically justified. As many of the plot holders at Saughton Mains are elderly or in some cases unemployed a rise of this magnitude hits at the very hearth of those least able to fight back... With a growing family I garden not necessarily as a hobby but as a matter of economic necessity as do many of my fellow allotment gardeners. It is my feeling that somewhere along the lines the real truth of the matter is that some building companies are wanting this land and as the local authorities could find it difficult under the act to evict the plotholders a rise like this is really a back door eviction notice.⁴⁴

When the Council proposed a housing development for the Warriston site in 1973, a plotholder of thirty years commented: 'This ground was left to working people after the First World War and turned into allotments for the unemployed. Now the council want to take it away'.⁴⁵ A few years later, Friends of the Earth released a 'Do-it-yourself kit on land protests' offering an economic rationale for allotment promotion: 'As a nation, we spend £145 billion more on fruit and vegetables than we did seven years ago. One allotment can save £130 a year on the family bills'.⁴⁶ The Council did respond to this perceived need on occasion. When a new site at Redhall opened in 1987, Recreation Committee Chair Councillor Kinloch noted that 'working on an allotment has taken the place of a job for many unemployed people' and drew attention to the opportunity for 'the unemployed and people on low incomes ... to grow their produce at a very low cost'.⁴⁷ The Scottish Allotments Scheme for the Unemployed is still in existence, though its activities are limited to a yearly distribution of vouchers to help the unemployed and pensioners purchase garden supplies.

Although the allotment movement got off to a slow start in Edinburgh (and in Scotland generally), the Depression-era Allotments for the Unemployed Scheme gave the allotment

⁴⁴ ECA, File RC 26 (1975-1982, Recreation and Leisure Committee), Letter from R W Simpson, 13 December 1982.

⁴⁵ *Evening News*, 18 October 1973.

⁴⁶ *Evening News* 29 March 1979.

⁴⁷ *Evening News*, 21 November 1987.

movement a visibility and a coherent public identity that it had previously been lacking. The Scheme framed the allotment as a moral landscape where the ‘better sort of working man’ could experience the ‘healing influence of productive work’.⁴⁸ This projection of a productive, working-class landscape would remain potent for decades, even as simultaneous image-making projected a different identity for Edinburgh’s allotments—an identity based on leisure, not labour; recreation, not production.

⁴⁸ NAS, AF 66/96, Correspondence between Department of Agriculture for Scotland and Scottish Office.

Chapter 2

Rationalising Recreation

The members feel that the City Fathers are not in sympathy with the movement and that they being rate-payers are entitled to a share of the sympathy and consideration extended to the bowler, golfer, tennis player and others.¹

The history of the Allotments Movement in Edinburgh during the last few years has been a continuous resumption of ground for building purposes and the dispossessing of Allotment Holders who have been in possession, many of them for 15-20 years. No alternative ground has been found and the allotment movement is rapidly being crushed out of existence.²

The previous chapter explored how the Scottish Allotments Scheme for the Unemployed constructed Edinburgh's allotment landscape as productive moral space. This chapter moves forward from 1921 to tell a different story about how Edinburgh's allotments were defended and defined. The version of the allotment explored here conceives of a space where the need for recreation and relaxation edged out the need for productivity and perseverance. This is not to say that the people who championed the allotment cause saw these versions as mutually exclusive. In fact, many of the same characters appear in this chapter. Their promotion of allotment holding as a leisure activity was often articulated in the same breath as their defence of the allotment as practical space. These meanings and motivations ran parallel to each other, sometimes intertwined, sometimes not. Two dissimilar conceptions of the function of the allotment co-existed: both conceptions, however, reflected partial grounded truths and both were mobilised in efforts to stabilise the precarious position of the allotment in political and economic discourses.

Giving back the King's Park

During World War One, seventeen acres in the King's Park (east of Holyrood Palace) were among the 200 Edinburgh acres devoted to allotment cultivation. At this site, allotment holders

¹ ECA, File 144/1 DRT 14 (Public Parks Committee), Letter to Town Clerk from L Burton, Secretary Edinburgh Allotment-Holders Association, 6 May 1925.

² ECA, File 144/1 DRT 14 (Public Parks Committee), Letter to Town Clerk, Edinburgh from Archibald Fischer,

transformed what had been a ‘dumping ground for refuse’ into garden plots. During the war, this horticultural occupation carried a moral and patriotic sanction. Shortly afterward, the popular perception of allotment landscapes subtly altered. In 1919, allotment holders began to hear ‘rumours that when the cultivation of Land Order lapses they may in many cases be indiscriminately dispossessed of their plots’.³ ‘This is accentuated’ testified Mr Ridley, an allotment association representative, ‘by the notice served by the Government that the Allotment Holders in the King’s Park must terminate their holding in February next’. Already anticipating a struggle to hold on to these and other allotment sites, Mr Ridley argued:

The cultivation of Garden Allotments has become a desirable feature of City Life and being of a healthy recreative and economic nature we trust that in the near future Garden Allotments Areas on a basis of permanency may be possible as the present uncertainty of tenure operates against the Holder.⁴

Over the next few years, allotment holders and government officials negotiated the fate of the King’s Parks allotments. The official decision to terminate the allotment lease, presented in 1921, was made ‘in accordance with the general principle that Royal Parks maintained at public expense for the benefit of the people should be restored to their proper use as soon as possible’.⁵ A use that had exemplified altruism and patriotism during the war suddenly came to be associated with self-interest. The allotments were ‘surrendered’ in 1923. Reflecting on the situation a decade later, an official at HM Office of Works explained that ‘it was impossible to defend the continued alienation of portions of the ground for the benefit of a comparatively few local residents’. But the issue of access was also connected to a concern about aesthetics: ‘allotments can hardly fail to be a disfigurement of an open space such as the Kings Parks’, (explained the same official) ‘and it is practically impossible to exercise any effective control over their external appearance’.⁶ This last admission came about when Archibald Fischer enquired about re-establishing the King’s Parks allotments under the SASU scheme. He was

SNUAH, 7 July 1936.

³ ECA, File 144/1 DRT 14 (Public Parks Committee), Statement read by Mr Ridley, Federation Secretary, at interview with Parks Committee, 12 June 1919.

⁴ ECA, File 144/1 DRT 14 (Public Parks Committee), Statement read by Mr Ridley, Federation Secretary, at interview with Parks Committee, 12 June 1919.

⁵ NAS, AF 66/100, Decision of the Home Affairs Committee, 27 April 1921.

⁶ NAS, AF 66/100, Draft Official Letter from the Office of Works, Westminster to the Under-secretary for Scotland, March 1932.

informed, 'part of the park was given over to allotments during the war, but, after a good many struggles, these were got rid of, as allotments are not exactly additions to amenity'.⁷

The story of the King's Park 'resumption' illustrates several critical themes. The government made its decision based on a principle which assumed the allotment to be a constellation of private spaces, rather than a public, collective resource. It also reacted to the appearance of the allotment site, the untidy and unruly aesthetic that seemed to contrast unfavourably with the wide open green spaces in the rest of the park. In response to this, allotment associations began to assert a more compatible version that cast the allotment as a 'desirable feature of City Life' of a 'healthy recreative and economic nature'.⁸ Recreation, not production, would be the fulcrum that allowed the allotment to shift into a more secure position, politically and socially. In the years that followed, this alternative version would get worked out in recurring proposals for the creation of 'model' allotment sites that explicitly countered and revised the image of the allotments as ramshackle and resourceful blots on the landscape.

The 'model' allotment

If an association with individualism, aesthetic indifference, hard labour, and economic necessity held the allotment movement back, then it follows that an alternative image emphasised collectivism, aesthetic order, and voluntary exertion in the name of leisure and health. In the following section, I trace this dialectic through several decades before focusing in detail on proposal for green-belt 'leisure gardens' in the 1960s.

⁷ NAS, AF 66/100, Letter to Secretary for Scotland Sir Archibald Sinclair from H.M Office of Works, 17 March 1932.

⁸ ECA, File 144/1 DRT 14 (Public Parks Committee), Statement read by Mr Ridley, Federation Secretary, at interview with Parks Committee, 12 June 1919.

When the Edinburgh Allotment Holders' Association (EAHA) appealed to the Town Council for permanent allotment leases in 1919, it began by staking a claim to the title: 'Pioneers of the Allotment Movement in Edinburgh'. The Association referred to its successful 1912 campaign to establish allotments in Edinburgh's Southside: 'Our struggles to advance the movement were many but we had the satisfaction of seeing the movement spread to different parts of the City, and founded on our model'. 'Our pre-war Allotments are a model of perfection', it continued. Deputations from 'various parts of the country' had visited its sites for inspiration and guidance. These allotments, it claimed, were not just for cultivation of the 'humble tuber and cabbage', but were often dedicated 'to the cultivation of the more tender fruits, vegetables, and flowers'. 'The movement is one of the healthiest and most beneficial in the country', it concluded, 'and deserves the greatest encouragement from the Government'.⁹ The insistence on 'model' allotments in this letter anticipates a similar 1929 proposal.



Figure 2.1 The City of Edinburgh's allotment amenity scheme rewarded tidy plots with Amenity Certificates and Amenity Discs for display in worthy plots. *Edinburgh City Archives, File J41.*

⁹ ECA, File 144/1 DRT 14 (Public Parks Committee), Letter to Secretary, Board of Agriculture for Scotland from William Roy, Secretary Edinburgh Allotment-Holders Association, 28 May 1919.

The Edinburgh and Leith Federation's 1929 suggestion that the Corporation establish a 'model allotment area' coincided with the sharp decline in allotment provision described in the previous chapter.¹⁰ While some allotment agitators had begun to look to allotments for the unemployed as a possible catalyst for re-vitalising the movement, the Edinburgh Federation approached the Council's Garden Allotments Committee with a proposal to improve the public image of existing sites. 'One of the main objections to allotments and an objection which bulks largely in the minds of citizens adjacent to allotment areas' reasoned the Federation, 'is their very unsightly condition [and] until there is a great improvement in the appearance of allotments

there will still be a large body of public opinion against them'.¹¹ Corporation efforts to encourage visual uniformity on the sites through 'amenity disc' schemes and standard designs (Figures 2.1 and 2.2) had failed to bring the desired order to allotment landscapes.

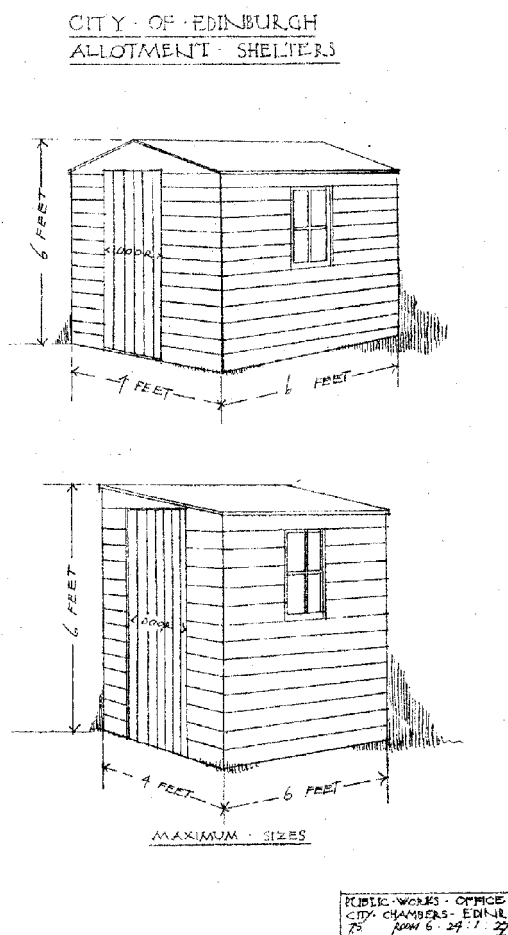


Figure 2.2 The Edinburgh City Architect drafted these plans to enforce standard shed dimensions and designs. *Edinburgh City Archives, File J52/1.*

The Federation proposed a model allotment area where allotment holders would keep their plots—edged with stone or trimly kept box-hedging—in a 'first-class condition'. A communal hut with lockers would provide storage and preclude the need for 'unsightly erections'. A border of trees and flowering shrubs would give the site a pleasing and attractive appearance.

¹⁰ Abercrombie (1949) mentions that as a result of the 1919 Housing Act, new houses were built for about one third of Edinburgh's population By 1929, Edinburgh's allotment provision was one third of its wartime peak.

¹¹ ECA, File 144/1 DRT 14 (Public Parks Committee), Letter to the Edinburgh Town Clerk from the Edinburgh and Leith Federation of Garden Allotment Associations, 12 April 1929.

The Committee realise that to provide an area of this kind would involve some little expense, but when we see the large amounts that are spent in providing Parks, Open Spaces, Bowling Greens, Golf Courses and Tennis Courts they feel that the Allotment Movement is justified in asking that a comparatively small amount necessary should be spent in order to provide a stretch of gardens which would be a credit to the City.¹²

With this proposal, the Federation tried to break out of a curious ‘Catch-22 situation’: insecurity of tenure led to plot vacancies; remaining plot holders neglected to invest in their plots and attend to external appearances. As a result, allotments presented a chaotic and unkempt face to the public. The public was unlikely to support any municipal investment that would secure the continued presence of what they perceived as an ‘eyesore’. The Garden Allotments Committee was not ready for the Federation’s proposal (which pre-dated the 1960s ‘leisure garden’ movement by forty years). At its next meeting, the Committee, after consideration, ‘resolved to recommend that no action be taken on this matter’.¹³

As development pressures on allotments intensified, allotment boosters resorted to frequent comparisons with other leisure activities. Archibald Fischer, in his eighteenth annual report as Secretary of the National Union, commented: ‘I have no knowledge of any Local Authority in Scotland setting aside an area for permanent Allotments and putting it into neat and tasteful condition in the same way as they set aside and lay out a piece of ground for any other recreation such as Football, Cricket, Bowling, or Tennis. In the meantime, they do not seem to realise that they have any duty to provide for the permanency of the Allotment Movement in their Areas’.¹⁴ Fischer stepped forward at the 1935 annual meeting to propose the creation of an independent National Trust, which would acquire and hold land for allotments.¹⁵ If the local authorities were unable, or unwilling, to provide security of tenure and place allotments on an equal footing with other leisure pursuits, then allotment holders would do it themselves.

Fischer’s proposition exposed a tension embedded in the allotment movement—many allotment

¹² ECA, File 144/1 DRT 14 (Public Parks Committee), Letter to the Edinburgh Town Clerk from the Edinburgh and Leith Federation of Garden Allotment Associations, 12 April 1929.

¹³ ECA, File 186 DRT 14 (Public Parks Committee), Minutes of the Garden Allotments Committee, 18 April 1929.

¹⁴ VWA, Scottish National Union of Allotment Holders, 1935 Annual Report.

holders felt that allotments were a right, an entitlement granted to them by local authorities as part of a moral contract rooted in nineteenth-century social welfare discourses and even older landlord-tenant relationships. To abandon this contract for an uncertain, self-determining future would have seemed foolhardy. This tension was played out in various ways between the self-managed associations and the over-seeing Council, but Fischer cast it in stark terms.

No action was taken on Fischer's proposal, and before long the Second World War again shifted the discourses of value around the allotment landscape. The Scottish National Union did not wait for a declaration of peace, however, to voice its concerns about the post-war planning of allotments. In October 1944, it sent a circular letter to Town Clerks to press for security of tenure and enlightened design—perhaps hoping to capitalise on the movement's high war-time profile. The case was made that:

It is not only in times of war that allotments are of value. They have come to be regarded as a real permanent necessity and it is desirable that they should take their place in all future planning of recreational ground and public parks. Their provision should be regarded as a public duty and a necessary social service. To business men [sic] the work of cultivation comes as a tonic, and to very many, allotments provide sole out-door recreation[sic].¹⁶

This effort to prevent a return to pre-war insecurity placed the remedy for the 'chief objection' against allotments—their unsightliness—in the hands of local authorities. 'Security of tenure would in itself provide the best incentive to improving the condition of the plots', the letter stated. The National Union also put forward recommendations for provision of standard individual huts and adequate roads, water, and paths. 'On all suitable sites', the letter continued, 'provision should be made for young people's allotments of about half the normal size of those cultivated by adults. Women should also be provided for'.¹⁷ The Union accepted that the rents of plots would need to be adjusted to meet the increased costs of these improvements.

¹⁵ VWA, Scottish National Union of Allotment Holders, 1935 Annual Report.

¹⁶ ECA, File 144/6 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee), Letter to Edinburgh Town Clerk from SNUAH, October 1944.

¹⁷ ECA, File 144/6 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee), Letter to Edinburgh Town Clerk from SNUAH, October 1944.

This 1944 appeal from the Scottish National Union of Allotment Holders attempted to make a marginal space central by insisting allotments should ‘take their place in all future planning of recreational ground and public parks’. It also attempted to establish the universal appeal of the allotment as a form of recreation. Businessmen, young people, and women were invited to join together in a sanitised, controlled landscape (Figure 2.3). The breakdown of class, gender, and age boundaries had been broached earlier, but it was not until after the war that such inclusion was seen (by some) as a prerequisite for preservation of the movement. In 1948, a representative from the English Association counselled the Scots to make an effort to bring young men into the allotment movement: ‘It would be good for the nation if more of their younger men spent less time and energy on complicated mathematical calculations for the pools and more on planning next year’s allotment’. He also suggested strategies to ‘bring the ladies into the movement’,



Photo—J. Gibson, Old Kilpatrick

School Children, Kilmarnock

Figure 2.3 School Children, Kilmarnock. SASU, Report for Season 1939. SAGS-Victor Webb Archive, Glasgow University Archive Services.

asking, ‘Why should the allotment not have a recreational ground and a communal hut where they could hold social functions like the bowling clubs?’¹⁸ The annual report for the next year

¹⁸ ECA, File 144/7 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee), Address from Mr Purves, English Association, to SAGS Annual Conference, 12 June 1948.

stated: ‘Yes, irrespective of class or creed, the allotment movement does not end in the cultivation of plants alone, it has other spheres as well’.¹⁹

By mid-century, recurring attempts to introduce ‘model allotment’ schemes and to establish allotment-holding as a legitimate recreational activity had little to show in a tangible sense, but some officials in the Edinburgh Council had begun to register the need for a different attitude towards allotment provision. In internal correspondence concerning recreation development at Niddrie Mains in 1949, the Superintendent of Parks suggested to the Town Clerk a comprehensive recreation centre, which would replace residual allotments for the unemployed with permanent allotments:

The whole area would provide for 110 allotments, 3 football pitches, 4 tennis courts, 1 bowling green, 1 putting green and 2 children’s playgrounds. Suitable pavilion accommodation, centrally situated, and boundary fencing will be the first essential to the success of the scheme. Very much stricter control of the use of allotments, now accommodating hens, dog kennels, etc. and general improvement in the standard of cultivation will also be essential to the success of the scheme’.²⁰

The allotment was at last to be located among the tennis courts and the bowling greens. The proposed Niddrie allotments did not appear in 1953 Development Plan, however, which placed the total acreage of Edinburgh allotments—municipal and private—at 170.²¹

Cinderella throws a garden fete

Some of the local authorities today looked on allotments as Cinderellas. They had got to get them to look on allotments as of quite as much importance to the community as tennis courts, bowling greens, and so on. The tending of a plot was, after all, a much healthier recreation than some of the more popular forms, and he believed that they should make the local authorities see that.²²

Mr Robson, President of the English Society, made the above comment at the 1949 annual conference of the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society (SAGS)—a reconfigured, renamed Scottish National Union. In post-war Britain, allotments struggled with an identity crisis (their

¹⁹ VWA, SAGS Annual Report 1949.

²⁰ ECA, File 144/7 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee), Memo from the Superintendent of Parks to Edinburgh Town Clerk, 29 June 1949.

²¹ City and Royal Burgh of Edinburgh, Development Plan (1953), 64-65.

²² SAGS Conference Report, 1949, Victor Webb Archive.

Cinderella-complex left them too tattered and careworn to be invited to the ball, with no handsome prince in sight). The rest of the country was turning away from vegetable plots to the cultivation of decorative flowers and ornamental borders.²³ In the early 1950s, Edinburgh's Federation decided to throw its own party.



Figure 2.4 FEDAGA Flower Show and Garden Fete Programme, 1953. *Private Collection.*

The first annual FEDAGA Flower Show and Garden Fete took place on a September Saturday in 1953 at the Walpole Hall on Chester Street (Figure 2.4). (Previously, many site associations had organised shows, and individual allotment holders were well represented in the culture of horticultural showmanship.²⁴) The Federation raised funds and awareness with a programme of events designed to appeal to a mainstream audience. The day, which began with a 'coffee morning', included a mid-afternoon set of Scottish Country Dancing and evening entertainment

²³ Bartram (1999).

²⁴ ECA indexes from 1888-1891 mention municipal support for an annual Edinburgh Working Men's Flower Show.

from the Newhaven Fisherwomen's Choir and Hamish Henderson, 'singer of bothy ballads'. President Victor Webb, LLB, presided over the festivities. Participants competed for various cups, medallions, and ribbons (a steel spade was granted to the best entry in 'Class 60'—a collection of vegetables, six kinds, no decoration allowed). Competition classes included flowers, vegetables, fruit, baked goods, jam, knitting, embroidery, needlework, and handicraft. In the flower section of the children's competition, entries included a 'plate of water cress' and a 'collection of grasses in a vase for effect'.²⁵ The event marked a shift away from wartime minimalism, an attempt to redefine allotment cultivation as an inclusive, recreational pursuit.

The leisure garden

A decade after the first garden fete, Edinburgh's allotment movement had, if anything, slipped farther into Cinderella status. Of the 170 acres listed in the 1953 Development Plan, 110 remained (offering 1988 Corporation and private plots).²⁶ The Quinquennial Review of the Development Plan anticipated 'demand should continue to fall away from its war-time peak as new leisure activities attract more people away from allotment-keeping'. Plans to include allotment areas in new housing schemes had 'not proved to be practicable'.²⁷ A few gains, however, had been made. Allotments at Saughton Mains, scheduled for termination, had been secured and purchased by the Council through the efforts in the late 1950s of Victor Webb, the President of the Edinburgh Federation. The 1958 Edinburgh Report in the SAGS annual calendar thanked the Council for its support:

In...cases...where it seemed that there might be loss of allotment ground, the Corporation have done their best to come to suitable arrangements with the owners, whereby the ground would continue to remain available to the Corporation for allotment purposes.²⁸

²⁵ Programme, FEDAGA Flower Show and Garden Fete, 5 September 1953.

²⁶ ECA, File CA/30/1 DRT 14 (Civic Amenities Committee), Review of Garden Allotments to be included in the Quinquennial Review of the Development Plan, drafted 1963. The review notes 1508 Corporation plots, 1150 in permanent and 358 in temporary areas.

²⁷ ECA, File CA/30/1 DRT 14 (Civic Amenities Committee), Review of Garden Allotments to be included in the Quinquennial Review of the Development Plan, drafted 1963.

²⁸ VWA, SAGS Annual Report, 1958.

The outlook in the early 1960s, nevertheless, remained grim. Plotholder attrition (due to old age, disillusionment, and failing interest) left many sites chequered with overgrown plots. Organisers feared the replacement generation was more interested in the Beatles than in planting Brussels sprouts. The SAGS Secretary deemed 1964 ‘one of the blackest [years] in the history of the Society in regard to the affiliated membership’.²⁹ Participants at the 1965 SAGS conference speculated about reasons for the decline in interest: an increase in homes with attached gardens; a lessening of the economic pressure to produce food; changing leisure patterns; and ‘the magnetism of television and the power of bingo’.³⁰ The crisis stimulated self-reflection within the movement, as the leaders sought to repackage the allotment image. Reformers called on associations to rid their sites of the ‘firewood merchants and dog fanciers’ who used the allotments for inappropriate purposes, and to increase the plot rentals because ‘low rates do tend to encourage riff-raff’.³¹ One speaker called on allotment holders ‘to examine the past to see the growth of the allotment movement, to examine the present to see the doldrum and trend of abandonment in allotment gardening and to look into the future with hope and with a reassessment to meet the new needs’.³²

In Edinburgh’s archival record, two personalities emerge as the catalysts for this reform effort: A V Shade, the Secretary for the Federation, and Victor Webb, the solicitor who had served as President of the Edinburgh Federation during the 1950s. Their campaigns during the 1960s proposed a radical revision of the form and the function of Edinburgh’s allotments. Webb tried to chart a path forward in this 1965 speech:

[I]f there is to be any future at all for allotment movement in Scotland we must first remove from it the stigma of charity by getting the movement placed on the same level as all the other recreational facilities provided by local authorities, for gone are the days when an allotment was made available to the agricultural labourer by his employer to enable him to eke out a rather precarious existence... Our aim must be to get the allotment movement recognised at all levels as a means of providing a healthy recreation and one that can be enjoyed by people of all ages.³³

²⁹ VWA, SAGS Conference Report, 1965.

³⁰ VWA, SAGS Conference Report, 1965.

³¹ VWA, SAGS Conference Report, 1965.

³² VWA, SAGS Conference Report, 1965.

³³ VWA, SAGS Conference Report, 1965.

Webb criticised the role developers played in the erosion of allotment resources: in Edinburgh, 'there was a demand for allotments in the city, but the allotment areas were being bulldozed out of existence by the speculative builders who, having first acquired the land, made impossible terms on the tenants regarding the terms of let, which were found to be unacceptable, and as a result the new owner sought planning permission to change the present use of the areas on the grounds that they were no longer being cultivated as allotments'.³⁴ Webb's colleague, Shade, felt that the problem was, in part, one of labelling. In a letter to the Edinburgh Town Clerk, he suggested the name "allotment" be replaced with "Leisure Garden". 'It is felt', he explained, 'that the word "allotment" conjures up a wrong impression upon people, they immediately think of some piece of ground strewn with broken down huts and uncultivated plots'.³⁵ When Shade proposed to SAGS member that they change their name to the "Scottish *Horticultural* and Gardens Society", he met with resistance. One member stated 'there was no stigma in being poor and that he did not agree to changing the title because it was looked on as a status symbol'.³⁶

In England, a similar state of confusion and decline prompted the appointment of the Department Committee of Inquiry into allotments, led by Professor Harry Thorpe. Thorpe began his exhaustive allotments study in 1965. Edinburgh had already begun to explore ideas for 'Continental-style' allotment gardens. On 29 November 1964, Shade sent a letter to the Town Clerk:

We feel that allotment gardening has a very definite place in the field of modern recreation. It is the ideal hobby for the office worker and others employed in indoor work, for the not so young who find the pace of modern life a bit trying, and of course for the retirement pensioner. There is no finer recreation or hobby than gardening, spiritually as well as physically, it is clean, healthy, relaxing, productive and creative. A man can become an artist within the boundaries of his own garden. To the flat dweller, or those destined to inhabit skyscraper flats, allotment gardening is an escape to happiness, giving them fresh air and a sense of freedom.³⁷

³⁴ SAGS Conference Report, 1965, Victor Webb Archive.

³⁵ ECA, File CA/30/1 DRT 14 (Civic Amenities Committee), Letter to Edinburgh Town Clerk from A V Shade, FEDAGA, 5 June 1965.

³⁶ VWA, SAGS Conference Report, 1965, Victor Webb Archive. On his cover of the SAGS Annual Report for 1964, Webb scratched out the words 'allotments and' in the Society's name.

³⁷ ECA, File CA/30/1 DRT 14 (Civic Amenities Committee), Letter to the Town Clerk from Federation of Edinburgh and District Allotments and Gardens Associations, 29 November 1964

‘The time has come to give consideration to modernising allotment sites’, maintained Shade. Shade linked the reform of the allotment’s appearance with a parallel reform in the allotment population. The provision of adequate facilities would ‘attract and encourage the right type of person to our allotment areas ...With the *right type of tenant* and the facilities suggested, allotment sites would be most attractive’. Higher costs would also filter out undesirable elements: ‘Increased rentals would tend to make each area self-supporting, and above all ensure a happy and contented allotment holder’.³⁸ This letter marks the beginning of a dialogue between the Federation and the Corporation. One month later, the Superintendent of Parks would propose ‘large centres situated in the Green Belt’ as ‘the answer’ to the problem of unsightly allotments and necessary closures of war-time sites in city parks. ‘Areas of at least 10 acres are envisaged laid out as permanent allotments’, wrote the Superintendent to the Town Clerk, ‘with Communal Hut and Toilets, Glasshouses, and sheds, properly maintained roads and paths, fencing, hedging, and adequate water supply’. ‘Such centres’, he concluded, ‘would be showpieces and an asset to the amenity of the district’.³⁹ The Corporation proposed three such ‘permanent allotment centres’ in Edinburgh’s green belt at Frogston Road, Niddrie Road, and Wester Hailes. The plans envisioned each plot as a ‘cultivated ready-to-go entity’, where displaced allotment holders could take advantage of the improved facilities while children played nearby on grass lawns.⁴⁰

The 1965 Development plan optimistically included a 10 acre increase in allotment ground at Frogston Road East, to be implemented in Phase One. This plan appears to have stalled, however, due to lack of resources (or opposition from allotment holders who objected to the increased rents and travelling distances that the scheme would have imposed). An Edinburgh

³⁸ ECA, File CA/30/1 DRT 14 (Civic Amenities Committee), Letter to the Town Clerk from Federation of Edinburgh and District Allotments and Gardens Associations, 29 November 1964, emphasis added.

³⁹ ECA, File CA/30/1 DRT 14 (Civic Amenities Committee), Memo from the Superintendent of Parks to the Town Clerk, 29 December 1964.

⁴⁰ ECA, File CA/30/1 DRT 14 (Civic Amenities Committee), Memo to the Edinburgh Town Clerk from the Director of Parks and Recreation, 15 December 1965.

visit from Harry Thorpe in April 1968 rekindled Shade's enthusiasm for the leisure garden revolution. In a letter to the Town Clerk he spelled out his Continental vision:

First let us consider for what purpose people today require allotment gardens and how important they are to the community? ... [Allotments] were developed very largely in periods of stress, when people were glad to have the opportunity of growing some part of their own food. However in Britain tradition dies hard and local authorities have not yet caught up with the changing needs of an affluent society, although there are indications that they are about to do so... Meanwhile a delegation has travelled abroad and studied allotments or their equivalents in various European countries. Its members bring back accounts of delightful gardens, many devoted to ornamental plants, some with pleasant chalets or week-end huts attached so that whole families can enjoy the delights of gardening. No doubt these ideas will seem strange to most allotment holders and they may well meet with some resistance at first. Yet the time is ripe for change. The rocketing price of land in towns, the consequent increasing density of planning and diminished space for gardens, all these factors lead to the conclusion that allotment gardening will meet the needs of an ever growing number of citizens. And since most of them are sufficiently well off to purchase vegetables and fruits, they may well wish to devote their allotments mainly to the cultivation of beautiful flowers and plants. We feel that a free hand should be given to all who desire to cultivate an allotment. Only in war-time need the allotment be regarded as land on which to grow food. In peace it is sufficient that it should give pleasure, foster health, and encourage the art of good husbandry, and be recognised as recreation.⁴¹

In response, the City Chamberlain expressed concern that the 'necessarily high rent' to cover the development of the improved facilities 'would dissuade all but the most enthusiastic or affluent allotment holders'.⁴² Regardless of whether or not he spoke from a genuine concern for cash-strapped allotment holders, the Chamberlain identified a definite tension between the reformers intentions' and the desires of ordinary allotment holders to get on with their hoeing and planting in peace. Within the movement itself, a gap divided allotment reformers (often trained in the legal and other professions) from the rank and file 'grubbers'. Conservatism offered little hope for the moribund movement, but the work of the reformers sometimes threatened to improve the allotment out of existence. In the resulting stalemate, Edinburgh's allotments continued to disappear: from 1965 to 1968, other land uses replaced fifteen municipal sites.⁴³

⁴¹ ECA, File CA/30/1 DRT 14 (Civic Amenities Committee), Letter to Edinburgh Town Clerk, Edinburgh from A V Shade, FEDAGA, 5 June 1968.

⁴² ECA, File CA/30/1 DRT 14 (Civic Amenities Committee), Memo from the City Chamberlain to the Town Clerk, 3 June 1968.

⁴³ Duddingston Junction, The Wisp, Meadows, Tipperlin Road, Redhall, Craiglockart Terrace, Braidburn Valley Park, Sighthill Crescent, Gorgie Station, St. Luke's Church, Bonnington Mills, Bonnington Junction, Portobello Golf Course, Hamilton Drive, Joppa Quarry.

Revivals and revisions

Thorpe's Departmental Committee of Inquiry released its recommendations in 1969, proposing Continental-style leisure gardens as their prescription for the ailing movement. The report predicted:

When the time comes, leisure gardening will take its place on equal terms among the recreations provided by the local authority. The level of provision will be maintained by pressures within the town itself. Ultimately, and as a token of the success of the new image, it should be possible to repeal mandatory legislation which has given the allotment movement protection for so long.⁴⁴

Within the next decade, 'pressures within the town itself' would come to exert a positive influence on Edinburgh's allotment provision, but the pressure came from a different direction than Thorpe envisioned. The environmental consciousness-raising of the 1970s inspired a new generation to turn to allotment gardening. Suddenly, young people committed to ecological living and green cities wanted a place to practice their organic gardening skills. By 1976, enthusiasts had rented every one of Edinburgh's 1,020 allotment plots in Edinburgh, and 300 people were on the waiting list. Friends of the Earth began a 'garden sharing scheme' to open up private gardens to wait-listed green thumbs (and to publicise what they perceived to be inadequate local authority provision).

The Corporation, startled into action, began to survey its landholdings for potential new sites. Councillors were asked to suggest potential sites in their districts and the Lothian Regional Council was approached about its willingness to open up ground. In the end, these efforts resulted in the creation of a single site at Wester Hailes. The Director of Administration wrote to COSLA in 1980 about the situation: 'Demand for allotments far exceeds supply ... and, on average, an applicant will have to wait four to five years for a plot. As a result of the high cost of land suitable for allotments and the present financial stringencies it seems unlikely that extra plots will be made available in the foreseeable future'.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Thorpe (1969), conclusion.

⁴⁵ ECA, File RC 26 (Recreation and Leisure), Letter to Michael Brown, COSLA, from Depute Director of Administration, 10 November 1980.

Lingering concerns about the ‘unsightliness’ of allotments also confounded efforts to establish new sites. The unreformed allotment was still considered to blight the ‘visual amenity’ of an area and locations that were otherwise suitable were rejected on amenity grounds. When allotments were proposed for West Pilton, the Director of Housing admitted: ‘one reservation concerns the possible appearance of unsightly ‘do-it-yourself’ type structures which, if allowed, could seriously detract from the amenity of those residents overlooking the area’.⁴⁶

In 1983, the ‘model garden’ discourse resurfaced when the Corporation relocated the World War I era Restalrig Circus allotments to the adjacent grounds of abandoned ropeworks. A ‘regular, easily managed layout’ replaced ‘sloping awkwardly shaped plots on Restalrig Circus.’⁴⁷ The Corporation spent £150,000 on the re-development, touting the scheme in to the local media as a ‘model’ garden allotments area, fully-serviced with uniform, purpose-built huts, ‘water points, handy walkways, and a car park’.⁴⁸ ‘There’s nothing like this new site in Edinburgh, and we don’t know of one like it in Scotland’, claimed the chair of the Recreation Committee. Edinburgh allotment holders had their model allotment area, sixty years after Edinburgh Federation proposals for such a site.

Conclusion

This chapter identified cyclical attempts to reform and redesign allotment landscapes. The sub-text to these attempts linked visual order with social order, asserting a ‘model’ form that would overcome associations with hardscrabble individualism and place allotments on par with other recreational uses. That these reform efforts failed to produce significant changes within the movement may have something to do with the internal contradictions they exposed. Were allotment landscapes intended for recreation or production? Leisure or labour? How could the movement square its reform instinct with its tradition of charitable provision? These unarticulated questions (or, unarticulated in the official record) haunted the politics and the

⁴⁶ ECA, File RC 26 (Recreation and Leisure), Letter to Director of Housing from Director of Planning, 17 June 1976.

⁴⁷ ECA, File RC 26, 1983-1995 (Recreation and Leisure), Planning and Development Sub-committee, 11 May 1983.

practice of Edinburgh's allotment movement. In the next chapter, I tease out other meanings that further complicated the movement's attempts at strategic self-definition. The stories I tell intertwine with the themes identified in the previous two chapters, but they also take us in some new and unexpected directions.

⁴⁸ *Evening News*, 21 December 1983.

Chapter 3

Lungs, Land, and Loyalty

Chapters One and Two traversed matching chronological territory—from 1921 to the present—while surveying two disparate (but often tangled) themes in Edinburgh’s allotment politics. This chapter introduces three new layers to my analysis of the compound allotment landscape, but treats the historical material differently. I begin in the present and work back through the layers of meaning to show how they overlap and to trace the fine ‘root hairs’ linking them to older narratives. The versions of the allotment considered here touch on discourses of urban ecology and town planning, popular land rights, and cultivated patriotism.

Green lungs

Give to barrows, trays, and pans
Grace and glimmer of romance;
Bring the moonlight into noon
Hid in the gleaming piles of stone;
On the city’s paved street
Plant gardens lined with lilacs sweet;
Let spouting fountains cool the air
Singing in the sun-baked square;
Let statue, picture, park, and hall,
Ballad, flag, and festival,
The past restore, the day adorn,
And make tomorrow a new morn.¹

Patrick Geddes closed his 1904 treatise *A Study in City Development*—a vision for the revitalisation of Dunfermline—with this unattributed postscript and paean to the glories of the Garden City dream. (He also added, as the final line in the volume, ‘Hitch your waggon to a star’.) At the close of this section, I return to Geddes and his prescriptions for town planning and urban gardens. First, I explore some of the threads that connect Geddes’s ideas to the placement of the allotment in contemporary political discourse.

¹ Geddes (1904), postscript.

In April 1999, when a reporter asked Susan Burns to explain why her Portobello allotment site should be spared from development, she replied: ‘These allotments are the lungs of the city’.² References to urban ‘lungs’ have an odd genealogy, stretching back into a strain of late nineteenth-century analogical thinking that equated the city and its ‘body politic’ with the systems and functions of the body itself. Of course, the contemporary use of the term is differently inflected. When allotment activists claim that the allotment is a ‘lung of the city’, their assertion intersects with values clustered around certain ‘buzzwords’: sustainable development, biodiversity, environment. When defended by appeal to such values, allotments become abstractions—spaces that serve a vague but necessary ecological function in the urban system. The significance of the allotment as a populated, productive space is secondary to its identity as ‘open space’. While this categorisation of the allotment does leave room for a human presence (in the sense that it provides space for expression of ecological reciprocity and ‘environmental’ values) it also is the definition that fits most readily into the abstracted, systematising rhetoric of town planning.

Despite a long tradition of classifying allotments as ‘open space’, when Edinburgh adopted a planning policy for allotments in 1997 there was still some confusion: ‘For planning purposes, an allotment use is not a specifically identifiable use in policy terms and has to be regarded as a form of open space use’. The Council did not state what constituted a ‘specifically identifiable use’, but its policy protected allotments from development within ‘the terms of open space policies in local plans’, and required developers to provide alternative allotment facilities where development of the original site ‘is deemed on balance to be beneficial’.³ The ‘Reasoned Justification’ for the policy guidance stated: ‘Allotment gardening provides a useful and healthy form of recreation as well as an economic way of producing crops using the most environmentally friendly methods, thereby contributing to sustainability, the city’s natural

² *Daily Mail*, 29 April 1999.

³ Edinburgh City Council, *City Development Control Handbook*, January 2000.

environment, and habitats for wildlife and plant species'.⁴ This justification struck an odd balance, almost as if the Council was suggesting that the demonstrated value of these spaces for wildlife and plant habitat warranted their preservation as a *human* habitat. This emphasis on the 'natural' rather than the 'social' benefits of allotments may be related to the Council's interest in meeting particular environmental 'targets' (set at a national or even an international level—in the case of Local Agenda 21) for urban green space, biodiversity, and sustainable development. Canny allotment holders, in their campaigns to preserve and protect their gardens, began in the 1990s to take advantage of these proliferating targets by placing allotment use squarely within range of bureaucrats trying to meet environmental goals.

Opportunism and open space

Echoes of this strategic positioning are apparent in the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society (SAGS) attempt to hitch their 'wagon' to the 'star' that was the Town Planning (Scotland) Act 1947:

With the continued necessity of greater food production and the coming into force of the Town Planning Act, an appeal is being made for all Councils to invite Representatives from the allotment holders to forward any suggestion to set up permanent allotment areas, where possible in towns and burghs, as such has provided a benefit to the community not only in the recreational aspect, but as a means of saving unnecessary expenditure abroad. It is also the desire of the Society to formulate and arrange cleanliness and cultivation of open space in the various housing schemes, which come under your jurisdiction.⁵

This spirit of opportunism led to a generous allocation of allotment land in the 1949 Edinburgh *Civic Survey and Plan*, conducted under the direction of the influential planner Patrick Abercrombie. The Plan included allotments within the standard open space allowance of 15 acres per 1,000 population—broken down into 4 acres for public parks, 6 for public and school recreational fields, 3 for golf courses, 1 for cemeteries and 1 for allotments.⁶ This inclusion was part of a general post-war appreciation for the value of the allotment, though there was a blurred boundary between the agricultural function of the allotment and the decorative function of the

⁴ Edinburgh City Council, *City Development Control Handbook*, January 2000.

⁵ Edinburgh City Archive (hereafter ECA), File 144/7 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee, Public Parks), SAGS to Edinburgh Town Clerk, 12 July 1948.

⁶ Abercrombie (1949), 32. For comparison, the current Edinburgh allotment provision is one acre for 7,250 citizens.

garden. The Plan noted: 'There is still a considerable amount of agricultural land within the City Boundary, whilst market gardens and allotments are to be found in practically every district. Some of these should remain to provide the essential foodstuffs for the City'.⁷ Of the garden, the plan lamented:

[I]n the past, its safety where preservation is needed has been uncertain: its provision in slum clearance schemes has been almost non-existent. The original gardens in the Old Town have long since been built upon while high density development at Craigmillar and Pilton have squeezed out all hope of garden provision. Yet there is nothing which contributes to the beauty of our environment so much as does the garden: nor anything which encourages the means for self-expression and physical exercise for which all too little room is allowed in these utilitarian days.⁸

It is not clear whether the allotment fits into the Abercrombie classification of 'garden'. Perhaps

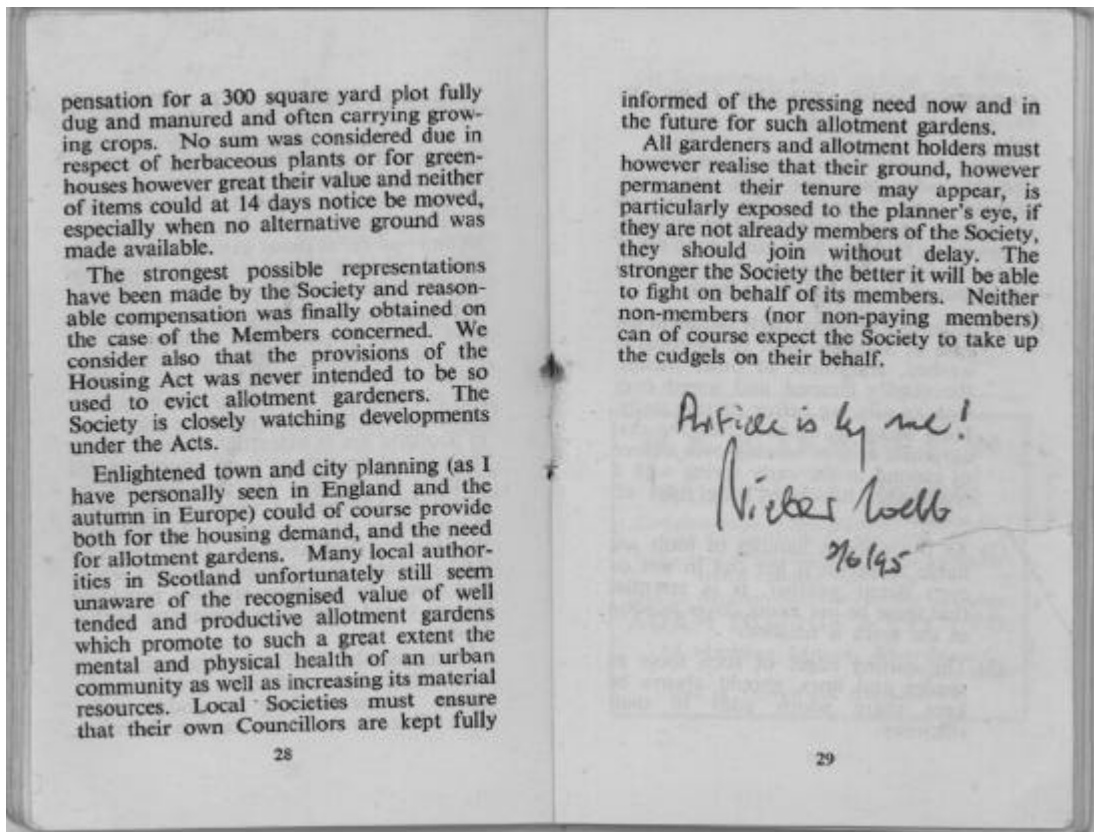


Figure 3.1 Victor Webb may have felt that the Allotments (Scotland) Act 1950 was not worth the paper it was printed on, but he was proud enough of his own commentary to write 'Article is by me! 2/6/95' in red ink on his copy of the 1952 Year Book. SAGS-Victor Webb Archive, Glasgow University Archive Services.

⁷ Abercrombie (1949), 15

⁸ Abercrombie (1949), 76

it went without saying that the landscape of untidy erections and unruly vegetables was of a different class altogether (although Thomas Sharpe's 1946 *The Anatomy of the Village* did include allotments in its vision for post-war reconstruction of the village form).⁹

One year after the release of the Abercrombie *Survey and Plan*, pressure to strengthen legislative protection for allotment sites resulted in the passage of the Allotments (Scotland) Act 1950. The Act was intended to benefit allotment holders (by extending the notification period for termination of tenancy and increasing crop compensation levels) but, according to Victor Webb, the 'working out of the provisions in practice' demonstrated that the Act was not worth the paper on which it was written. Webb went on to note:

Enlightened town and city planning... could of course provide both for housing demand, and the need for allotment gardens. Many local authorities in Scotland unfortunately still seem unaware of the recognised value of well tended and productive allotment gardens which promote to such a great extent the mental and physical health of an urban community as well as increasing its material resources. Local Societies must ensure that their own Councillors are kept fully informed of the pressing need now and in the future for such allotment gardens. All gardeners and allotment holders must however realise that their ground, however permanent their tenure may appear, is particularly exposed to the planner's eye.¹⁰

Webb's wariness appears to have been well founded. Letters in the files indicate that attention from planners was often a curse as much as a blessing. After receiving assurance that its allotment area was designated 'permanent', the West Mains association wrote to the Town Clerk in alarm because 'in the various maps indicating the future planning of the City (Civil Survey Plan) the area at present being worked by us as allotments is designated for a Primary School and/or Playing Fields'.¹¹ Oversight, rather than outright malice, was probably the reason for many lost allotments in this era. The planning officers could place open space recommendations in the plans, but this was no guarantee of their implementation. In 1952 the Town Planning Officer proposed the development of 'central, high-density housing areas with

⁹ Sharpe (1946), cited in Matless (1994).

¹⁰ SAGS *Year Book.1952* (VWA).

¹¹ ECA, File 212/2 (McClaren Allotments, Public Parks Committee), Letter to Edinburgh Town Clerk from Edinburgh Allotment Holders Association, 25 November 1950. Victor Webb was a new plot-holder at West Mains during this time. In 1951 he was involved in a second campaign to halt development at the site. In a recent interview, he recalled, 'The broad beans were about this height...it must have been April. I went to the plots and there was a two foot wide foundation for the housing scheme. I went back to my office and got out Green's Encyclopedia and looked

multi-story blocks, spaced sufficiently far apart to preserve light and air to all the housing and providing allotment garden sites on the part of the ground thus freed'. Within these areas there was a suggested provision of sixteen plots for 1,000 persons, though the recommended overall standard of provision in the city had been halved (to 0.5 acre per thousand population) from Abercrombie's 1949 standard.¹²

Competing claims

Roughly three decades before this 1952 planning projection, a similar post-war optimism sought to resolve competing claims between houses and gardens. The Secretary for Scotland sent a circular to all local authorities in April 1924.

The Secretary for Scotland is satisfied that the allotment movement is of great importance as tending to make more natural and healthy the conditions under which the inhabitants of towns live their lives, and he hopes that Local Authorities will take an interest in it, and in exercise of their statutory powers, do their best to maintain it as a contribution to the well-being of the community... The Secretary for Scotland recognises that the provision of land for houses and allotments may give rise to competing claims. At the same time he would urge that in arranging for the leasing of ground for allotments, Local Authorities should make every endeavour to secure ground as near as possible to the allotment holders' residences.¹³

One obvious solution to the houses vs. allotments problem, as Archibald Fischer pointed out, was to include allotments in the designs for new housing developments.¹⁴ In the 1930s, Fischer encouraged Town Clerks to use their open space designation powers under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1932: 'The framing of Planning Schemes provides a suitable opportunity for definite action being taken and the Union trust that your Council will keep the provision of Allotments in view if and when it comes to frame a Planning Scheme'.¹⁵ Fischer

up the Allotments (Scotland) Act of 1892...then all hell was let loose'. (Author interview with Victor Webb, 25 July 2001).

¹² ECA, File 186 DRT 14 (Garden Allotments, Grounds for Permanent Tenure, Public Parks Committee), Memo to the Town Clerk from the Town Planning Officer, 4 April 1952.

¹³ ECA, File 186 DRT 14 (Garden Allotments, Grounds for Permanent Tenure, Public Parks Committee), Circular Letter to Town Clerks from Under-Secretary for Scotland, 2 April 1924.

¹⁴ Although many of the houses constructed during Edinburgh's interwar building boom followed the low-density 'twelve to the acre' formula established by Garden City architect Raymond Unwin (Crouch and Ward 1988: 74), there is little evidence that the Corporation designated communal open spaces in housing schemes for allotment use. Three existing allotment sites which occupy communal open spaces behind 1920s local authority housing blocks—Hutchison Loan, Chesser Crescent, and Findlay Ave—also appear as emergency allotments in a 1946 listing (ECA File 144/7) which would indicate that they were uncultivated before the war.

¹⁵ ECA, File 186 DRT 14 (Garden Allotments, Grounds for Permanent Tenure, Public Parks Committee), Letter to Town Clerk from Archibald Fischer, SNUAH, 1 April 1937.

even went so far as to claim that the ‘taste for gardening manifested through thousands of persons obtaining houses with gardens instead of residing in flats, is largely due to the efforts of the National Union’ and the development of the Scottish allotment movement during the war.¹⁶ ‘In all new suburban areas’, noted Fischer, ‘there is a wealth of bloom and greenery’. What Fischer called the process of ‘regeneration’ in the cities was manifest in ‘valiant attempts to diminish the grim continuity of brick and stone by the utilisation of odd corners of ground and waste spaces for the cultivation of vegetables and flowers’.¹⁷ Fischer credited this transformation to the influence of the allotment movement, but more humility might have prompted him to look over his shoulder to the work of an Edinburgh resident from the preceding generation—Patrick Geddes.

Geddes, gardens, and the town planning movement

Towns must now cease to spread like expanding ink-stains and grease-spots; once in true development, they will repeat the star-like opening of the flower, with green leaves set in alternation with its golden rays.¹⁸

Patrick Geddes is a figure whose work in Edinburgh and elsewhere was defined by an inspired eclecticism that makes him difficult to place. His work slipped over disciplinary borders even as it created new disciplines out of disparate theories and practices. His vision for the future was recursive and rooted in history: his analysis of urban histories, especially Edinburgh’s, contained flashes of near-clairvoyant insight that seem to speak directly to contemporary concerns. In his Civic Survey for Edinburgh he wrote of the ancient cultivation terraces on the south slopes of Old Edinburgh, tracking their evolution from pre-historic subsistence plots to Renaissance pleasure gardens to derelict slum-scapes to their renewal as ‘gardens for the people’ through his work in the 1880s and ‘90s. This excavation and revitalisation of historic patterns in present practice Geddes noted as an example of how ‘one survival after another

¹⁶ VWA, 1935 Annual Report, SNUAH.

¹⁷ VWA, Allotment Gardens for the Unemployed (Joint Committee of the Scottish National Union of Allotment Holders and the Society of Friends), *Report for Season 1934*.

¹⁸ Geddes (1949), 53.

becomes in its turn similarly significant, and...the soil of the past teems with its dormant seeds, each ready to leap into life anew, be this as weed or flower'.¹⁹

Gardens and open space—the ‘unrivalled lungs of life’—were vital elements in Geddes’s prescriptions for town planning, ecological design, and personal growth.²⁰ In the 1880s his Environment Society began to cultivate waste ground in dilapidated Old Town slums, making small gardens and planting trees and creepers.²¹ He continued this work with the creation of the Open Spaces Committee, which used the Outlook Tower vantage to locate ‘no less than seventy-six open spaces, with a total of ten acres, awaiting reclamation’.²² Geddes designed and managed the ‘slum gardens’ as communally cultivated spaces, accessible to schools, street children, women—offering a solution to everything from hooliganism to ill health. In addition to cultivating the inner-city, Geddes also conducted a ‘Vacant Lands Cultivation Scheme’, which identified 450 unused acres on the outskirts of Edinburgh.²³

In the Edinburgh Civic Survey, Geddes noted of his schemes: ‘The gardens are thoroughly appreciated and their educating, civilising influence already plain, and spreading in ways too varied and complex for consideration here’.²⁴ I do wish that Geddes had elaborated on these ‘varied and complex’ influences, if only so that I could trace a link between his work in Edinburgh’s Old Town and the self-organising establishment of Edinburgh’s first municipal allotments in 1912—the year after his survey was released. In his published work, Geddes was vague about the role allotments should play. When he mentions them, it is often obliquely (as ‘open space’) rather than directly: ‘the allotments and the gardens which every city improver must increasingly provide—the whole connected up with tree-planted lanes and blossoming

¹⁹ Geddes (1911), 548. In the 1970s, a group of students at ECA continued this process by revitalising Geddes’s by-then abandoned gardens below the Castle walls.

²⁰ Geddes (1949), 14.

²¹ Meller (1990), 73.

²² Geddes (1949), 55.

²³ Geddes (1911), 566.

²⁴ Geddes (1911), 566.

hedge-rows'.²⁵ The frayed thread that connects Geddes's work to Edinburgh's allotments can be traced through texts like the following testimony from the Secretary of the Edinburgh Allotment Holders' Association in 1919, presented in a protest of the King's Park resumption:

As cultivators of the soil we have learned that all wealth arises from the soil and the forces of nature exploited, or if the simile may be used, transmitted by the alchemy of man's mind and energy. We know that just so much as we put into our plots in the way of manure, labour, etc., so much more will we receive in return.²⁶

The resonance between this testimony and Geddes's ideas is evident in the reference to natural 'wealth' and cycles of reciprocity. Geddes's philosophy held that 'real wealth' was to be found in a dynamic, sympathetic human relationship with the natural environment—the 'public conservation instead of the private dissipation of resources'.²⁷ In gardening, he believed, lay the path to 'real wealth, real economics, vital industry' as well as the 'best of medical treatment towards individual health'.²⁸ The unchecked 'progress of wealth and population', he feared, would lead to the 'swift exhaustion of the material resources of which this life depends... like that of the mould on the jam pot, which spreads marvellously for its season, until at length there is a crowded and matted crust of fungus-city, full of thirsty life and laden with innumerable spores, but no jam left'.²⁹ It is tempting to think that Mr Ridley, the allotment campaigner who gave the 1919 testimony, drew on Geddes's ideas for inspiration in his own campaign.

While it is possible that Geddes's example inspired the voluntary efforts of Edinburgh's early twentieth-century allotment holders, it is difficult to know for sure.³⁰ His legacy and influence, ironically, was probably more evident in the town planning codes that later institutionalised (and diminished) his philosophy. 'True town-planning', Geddes believed, 'begins with thus simply amending the surroundings of the people' by providing houses and gardens and, (in the words of Ruskin) 'making the field gain on the street, not merely the street on the field'.³¹ Of

²⁵ Geddes (1949), 54.

²⁶ ECA, File 144/1 DRT 14 (Public Parks Committee), Statement read by Mr Ridley, Federation Secretary, 16 June 1919.

²⁷ Geddes (1949), 26.

²⁸ Geddes (1949), 220.

²⁹ Geddes (1949), 26.

³⁰ Geddes did include a communal garden site in his design for housing at Rosecliff in Edinburgh, but this seems to be closer in spirit and intent to what would now be called a 'community garden', rather than an allotment.

³¹ Geddes (1949), 220.

course, Geddes was not alone in his crusade for alternative urban design. Geddes's work was contemporaneous with that of Garden City reformers like Ebenezer Howard, and it was also rooted in particular nineteenth-century social welfare discourses.

His 'biological' approach which sought to 'improve the material condition of the urban poor'³² through green design drew on the work of social reformer-philanthropists like Cadbury and Lever, who designed their workers' villages at Bourneville and Port Sunlight to express a 'faith that sowing and harvesting could produce not just a physical revolution but a moral one'.³³ Lever claimed allotment gardens promoted social tranquillity and were the 'very safety valve of the village',³⁴ a conviction that recalls Chapter One's exploration of the allotment as space for moral reform and social control. There is, of course, a larger web of affiliations here, but let me note a final connection between Geddes's work and Edinburgh's mid-nineteenth-century campaigners for social and sanitary reform such as James Begg (who Geddes referred to as 'a pioneer in housing'³⁵). 'I would clear out the heart of Edinburgh as you would prune an Indian jungle', wrote Begg in 1873: 'Many of the pestilential dens called houses are not fit for the habitations of cattle and pigs, and far less human beings'.³⁶ The work of Begg and others led to the 1867 Edinburgh Improvement Act, and though there is no direct reference to allotments or gardens in that legislation, Geddes's work decades later in Edinburgh's Old Town would extend and expand earlier efforts to foster public health through reform of the built environment and the creation of sanifying 'open space'.³⁷

This section has worked through a tangled tale—a dense weave that integrates the town planning movement, social engineering propaganda, urban ecological thinking, and the politics

³² Meller (1990), 24.

³³ Meacham (1999), 16.

³⁴ Meacham (1999), 37.

³⁵ Geddes (1911), 565.

³⁶ Begg (1873), 125.

³⁷ Nimmo (1996, 141) claims that Edinburgh's mid-nineteenth century reformers 'demanded that plots should be set aside for people to grow their own vegetables'. There is some evidence of organised allotment provision prior to 1911 (on old OS maps and in the reference to allotment gardens on the 1851 Johnston's Plan), but most sources indicate that pre-twentieth century provision in Scotland was scattered and informal. Further research would be needed to determine whether there existed a greater level of voluntary, philanthropic provision in Edinburgh.

of municipal bureaucracies. My concern in the previous two chapters was to show how allotment campaigners have defended and promoted the allotment cause by appealing to particular notions of value—the allotment as the workingman’s refuge and resource; the allotment as family leisure garden. In the narrative traced here, the allotment image proposed is not so clear. Allotment campaigners were willing to slot the allotment into a vague ‘open space’ category, but allotments never fit neatly into this space. They remained peripheral and ambiguous, an awkward ‘not-quite’ landscape whose position in town planning discourses was never solidified or systematised. In the next section, I consider another layer of meaning that has a similarly abstract quality, hovering above and beyond the landscape of the allotment itself.

Land for the people

In common parlance, allotment holders do not ‘rent’ allotment plots, they ‘own’ them. The first time I heard this turn of phrase (‘She’s owned that plot for sixteen years’.), I thought that the plot-holder in question was the literal owner of her tiny patch of real estate. This misunderstanding may stem from my outsider’s ignorance of certain idioms, but it also connects to a thread that binds allotments to popular Scottish notions of customary land rights and entitlements.³⁸ In this section, I identify a few isolated, discontinuous moments when allotment representations seemed to sound urban echoes of rural protest, tapping into powerful (if partly mythical) national narratives.

Irene Evans presented the results of a 1985 survey of Scottish allotment provision with a warning attached. ‘This is dangerous stuff’,³⁹ she commented of a bill that would have amended the law to grant allotment gardening status as a form of ‘recreation’. ‘The right to grow some of your own food is fundamentally different from any right you may have to score a goal or sink a putt’, Evans insisted. ‘To deprive people finally of their *right* to an allotment would be the last

³⁸ Withers (1996).

³⁹ Evans (1985),43.

step on the way to cutting people off from the land'.⁴⁰ Scottish allotments, Evans suggested, were a final outpost for resistance against the forces that placed landownership in the 'hands of the few' (she cites Winstanley here). 'A campaign for allotments,' continued Evans, 'would not only be a good end in itself, but a handy political lever to prise open the treasure chest of landholding'. She concluded with the exhortation: 'let no one believe that it is harmless to regard allotment gardening in law as "a recreation". Once that has been conceded, we have signed away our birthright to our own land'.⁴¹

The well-intentioned bill that threatened to undermine the British 'birthright' to allotment-holding was dropped in committee, and the ambiguous 1892 Allotments Act (1887 in England) continued to include allotment holding in the parcel of basic rights that accrued through citizenship. As Evans illustrated, allotments were (and are) residual symbols of pre-enclosure access to common land.⁴² In the past, this symbolic link has often cast allotment 'battles' in a righteous replay of the little commoner (or crofter) against the greedy landlord *ad infinitum*. In Scotland, because this narrative played out against the backdrop of the Highland Clearances and ongoing negotiations over land reform, the conflict was inflected slightly differently.⁴³ In 1960, George Thomson, MP for Dundee East, addressed the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society conference with this tale:

Mr Thomson went on to tell the story of a hiker who was accosted by a Laird while he was on the Laird's land. The Laird asked him what he was doing there and informed him he was trespassing. The hiker inquired why it was his land and where he had got it from. The Laird said that he had inherited it from his father, and his father had inherited it from his father before him. As the hiker questioned the Laird, he went back through centuries of fathers. Finally he reached the point where he said that his ancestors had fought for the piece of land. "Right," said the hiker. "Take off your jacket and I'll fight YOU for it".⁴⁴

Of course, this parable is as old as the hills where the hiker and the laird came to blows. But Thomson personalised his telling with some empathetic reassurance for the assembled allotment holders: 'I'm sure that you sometimes feel yourselves that you should fight these people who try

⁴⁰ Evans (1985), 43, emphasis added.

⁴¹ Evans (1985), 48.

⁴² Crouch and Ward (1988), 241.

⁴³ Robertson (1995).

to take away your land. It is, however, wise to have a good strong Society such as you have here to fight for you'.⁴⁵

1948 (1848 Redux)

When the 'good, strong' Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society met for its annual meeting on 12 June 1948, the first thing on their agenda was the 'wretched question of security of tenure'. Wartime expansion had strengthened the movement, but the threat of dispossession still loomed and many allotment holders had begun to think 'that the only permanent allotment they were likely to get was six feet long—in the kirkyard!'⁴⁶ A militant tone carried throughout the meeting, with speakers predicting 'fights all over the country in the near future'. The group passed a resolution to create a 'fighting fund' that would help with legal aid in cases like the one in Glasgow, where allotment holders were being harassed by a builder who claimed that they were squatters. Arthur Woodburn, the Secretary of State for Scotland, sent a noncommittal message, dated 9 June 1948:

I am glad to know...that the decline in the number of allotments in Scotland has been arrested, and that the Society is receiving ever more support from local associations. May it go from strength to strength.⁴⁷

The conference report notes, 'Mr Woodburn further stated that he hoped that at a very early date the vexed question of security of tenure would be put on a proper basis'. It is possible that Woodburn was unable to attend the meeting because he was preoccupied by a 'question of security of tenure' of a slightly more vexing nature.

Early in 1948, the parish priest for the Knoydart region in the west Highlands had approached Woodburn with a proposal to settle local people on familial holdings on the estate of Lord Brocket. This proposal was part of a wider post-war public resistance to landlordism, fueled by the desires of returning servicemen to claim some of the soil they had defended.⁴⁸ Woodburn

⁴⁴ VWA, SAGS Conference Report, 1960 (Dundee).

⁴⁵ VWA, SAGS Conference Report, 1960 (Dundee).

⁴⁶ ECA, File 144/7 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee) SAGS Annual Conference Report, 12 June 1948.

⁴⁷ ECA, File 144/7 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee) SAGS Annual Conference Report, 12 June 1948.

⁴⁸ Withers (1996).

refused to support the plan, and in June (when SAGS was meeting in Edinburgh), the local people decided to take direct action to stake their claims. Hamish Henderson memorialised the resulting land raids in a popular song, the 'Ballad of the Men of Knoydart'. In the third verse, Lord Brockert threatens the men:

I'll write to Arthur Woodburn, boys,
And they will let you know,
That the Sacred Rights of Property
Will never be laid low.
With stakes and tapes I'll make you traipse,
From Knoydart to the Rand;
You can dig for gold till you're stiff and cold—
But not on this 'ere land.⁴⁹

Although there is not a direct link between the two events, it may be useful to place the battle cries of the 1948 SAGS annual meeting within this context of Highland land protest and heightened public awareness of the inequities and insecurities embedded in Scottish systems of landownership. It is possible that a sense of vicarious resistance echoed in the resolve of the urban allotment holders. (We could also speculate that the 'Ballad of the Men of Knoydart' was one of the songs that Hamish Henderson performed at the FEDAGA flower show and garden fete, five years later.) These uncertain, minutely-documented connections are slim tethers to another version of the allotment, a version that would not have been presented in Parliamentary inquiries and Corporation committee meetings, but which percolated below the surface where it would not jeopardise the delicate relationships between ploholders and landowners.

There is one more clue in the 1948 conference report that hints at the submerged resistance within the movement:

When plotters meet in leafy June,
Let there be no illusions;
Whate'er they sow, they will not sow
The seeds of revolutions.

Placed as a post-script to a report of an allotment society conference that took place on 12 June 1948, this little verse seems innocent enough, if a bit inscrutable. Who are they trying to reassure with this cryptic statement about the disunion of gardening and politics? But a closer

look reveals something else entirely. Exactly a century before the SAGS gathering, on 12 June 1848, Scottish Chartist movement activists staged a demonstration in Edinburgh that began with a march up Leith Walk and ended with a meeting on Bruntsfield Links. Over 10,000 people turned out to hear speakers agitate for the Chartist platform—a working-class appeal for economic justice, voting rights and land reform.⁵⁰ Leading up to the June 1848 meeting, there had been demonstrations and ‘conspiratorial’ meetings across Scotland and the north of England, and food riots in Edinburgh and Glasgow. June brought the Edinburgh demonstrations, albeit that they were mild in comparison to the violent revolutions burning across Europe. The 1948 SAGS post-script is a coded referent to these events—a referent that creates a link, however tenuous, between the Scottish allotment movement and a history of radical protest.

Smallholdings, crofts, and peasant-proprietors

We have got somehow into a very artificial way of thinking in this country, in reference to the possession of land. Land with us is very like what language is said to be in some eastern countries. There is a kind of language that is reckoned to be so sacred, that only a limited class of persons are allowed to speak it or to read it. Well it is precisely so in this country with land.⁵¹

In the interval between the 1848 revolutions and 1948’s subtle reverberations, other developments tied allotments into discourses of property ownership and land reform. Beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, land resettlement campaigners proposed smallholding, crofting, and allotment schemes as solutions to land consolidation, rural poverty, and depopulation—a ‘return to the soil’ would engender a morally superior ‘race of peasant-proprietors’.⁵² Once again, a tension between paternalistic reform interests and radical self-helpers was evident. In the early years, categories of land-holding tended to bleed into each other. An allotment, although usually smaller than 1/4 acre, could be as large as a full acre. Highland crofts were often distinguished from Lowland smallholdings more by symbolic historic association than by size and function. In some regions, allotments were the ‘lowest rung

⁴⁹ MacDougall (1993), 38, cited in Withers (1996).

⁵⁰ Wilson (1970), 232.

⁵¹ Begg (1873), 129.

⁵² Begg (1873), 140.



Figure 3.2 The iconography of rural labour. Scythe on a shed at Warriston allotments, 2001. *Caitlin DeSilvey, photo.*

on the farming ladder'⁵³ for aspiring smallholders (a progression that would be institutionalised in 1930s Scotland when the government agreed to grant smallholdings to participants of the Allotments for the Unemployed Scheme who could prove their mettle).

In Scotland, although there was a visible Lowland/Highland distinction, agitation for access to arable land was bound up with a popular protest movement, which sought to redress the perceived wrongs inflicted by landlords during the Clearances. When the House of Commons met to consider programs to address the Scottish situation in 1889, they heard testimony claiming that: 'The agitation in the Highlands will never be satisfied until certain parts which are depopulated are again repopled'.⁵⁴ Although allotment schemes were peripheral to this dialogue initially, the language that defined the discourses around smallholdings, crofting, and 'peasant proprietors' would become particularly salient in allotment politics in the twentieth

⁵³ Crouch and Ward (1988), 211.

⁵⁴ House of Commons Select Committee on Allotments, Small Holdings, and Peasant Proprietors 1888-94, British Parliamentary Papers, Agriculture 20, 8345.

century. Scottish witnesses at the 1889 inquiry into Allotments, Smallholdings, and Peasant Proprietors consistently cited security of tenure as the most critical element in any land settlement scheme. They may have disagreed about whether the land should be held in free-hold by the cultivator or held in permanent trust by local authorities, but they felt that schemes at any scale would be worthless if people were threatened with dispossession.

John MacGilchrist Ross, a farmer from Alness, related a personal experience of being turned, without compensation, out of a house he had built on leased land. Lady Ross, he recalled ‘said she could get 16 l. a year rent for the house from other people, and that by law the house was hers, so I just turned my back and left in disgust’.⁵⁵ Ross’s experience would have been a common one.⁵⁶ When we consider twentieth-century allotment struggles within this context, we can begin to see how campaigns for security of tenure and adequate compensation may have been informed, however obliquely, by an awareness of this historical record. This indirect connection—if it did indeed exist—cannot be traced or located with any certainty. But this does not mean that it is insignificant. It is a sub-text, rooted in a collective Scottish memory that sustains a ‘customary belief in traditional rights’.⁵⁷ In the ongoing struggles to ‘save’ allotments from development, it is almost as if an act of displacement shifted the site of contestation from the rural Highlands to the urban Lowlands, where old struggles played out in miniature on vulnerable patches of cultivated real estate.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ House of Commons Select Committee on Allotments, Small Holdings, and Peasant Proprietors 1888-94, British Parliamentary Papers, Agriculture 20.

⁵⁶ Robertson (1995).

⁵⁷ Withers (1996), 329.

⁵⁸ The 1892 Act occupies an awkward space in this discourse. When it was passed, there was little demand for allotments in Scotland and certainly no popular movement to create allotments to reinstate rights of access to common lands. The fact that the Act is now interpreted as the legal safeguard of these rights says more about

Dig for victory

The third (and final) layer of meaning and memory is, in many ways, more accessible and obvious than the others I have considered in this chapter. Unlike the other discourses—which are discontinuous and often difficult to locate historically—the Dig for Victory wartime allotment boom occupies a definite space in public memory, a distinct chapter linked to other historical events in an apparently uncomplicated relationship. This enduring association between allotments and wartime privation tends, however, to obscure other origins and influences. Many allotment holders, unaware of the pre-war allotment movement, assume that World War II catalysed the formation of Edinburgh’s allotments (partly because they trace their own involvement, or that of their parents, to Dig for Victory plots).

In this section, I explore the Dig for Victory allotment image in both its historic specificity and its popular mythology. I also suggest, tentatively, that the wartime version of the allotment carries traces of other meanings associated with agricultural isolationism and ‘pure food’ asceticism. The most transparent and tangible function of an allotment plot (and one so taken for granted it often goes unarticulated) is to provide fresh food for people to eat. In previous sections I discussed how this productive function of the allotment was integral to the version that casts the allotment as an amalgam of self-help and poor relief. In this section, the vegetables and fruits of the allotment are equally important. The produce is valued for its contribution to the health of individual bodies and the body politic. This attention to the moral and nutritional qualities of the vegetables themselves resonates in a curious way with contemporary concerns about ‘safe food’, genetically-modified organisms and global (for which read, ‘American’) consolidation of the world food system.

contemporary agendas for land reform and political empowerment than it does about the context within which the Act was drafted.

Cultivation of Lands Order (1939)

The Dig for Victory effort got off to a slow start. The 1939 Cultivation of Lands (Allotments) (Scotland) Order directed local authorities to make any arable lands (including appropriate private parcels) available for allotment gardening to stave off anticipated food shortages. Edinburgh laid out 500 new plots and advertised its new scheme through local newspapers and a poster campaign. At the end of year, however, the Corporation reported to the Department of Agriculture:

The response to the Corporation's appeals to proprietors of land to make the same available for cultivation and to members of the public to become allotment holders have been disappointing... Despite [the] propaganda, the number of applicants for plots to date is only 358, and of these 45 have returned the missives of let with an intimation that they do not intend to proceed further in the matter... Most of the applicants... are not prepared to travel far from their homes to their allotments.⁵⁹

The lukewarm reception to the new scheme may be traced to causes hinted at in the Corporation records. In 1939, the public had yet to feel any household impact from wartime transport blockades and many of the prospective ploholders were in a position to be choosy about the terms of their allotment lets. Mr Huish abandoned an emergency plot on Bruntsfield Links when he found that 'the ground was laden with stones'. He and two friends tried to turn over the plot but 'Alas, we were very disappointed after digging about 100 sq. yds. to find that it was not an allotment, but a quarry we had got'.⁶⁰ Other ploholders, inured to years of allotment dispossession and neglect, found the Dig for Victory appeals unconvincing, if not disingenuous. After waiting five weeks to be assigned an emergency plot in Portobello, Mr Charter wrote:

I am wondering... whether your moribund committee has yet awakened from its state of coma to the fact that there is a "war on". I have also laughed heartily at your poster "Dig for Victory" which is apparently hung in tramcars as a blind. This I say with the knowledge of how allotment holders have been chivvied from pillar to post these last few years in Edinburgh with no security of tenure... I would suggest that when you Committee awakens to the fact that there *is actually* a war on better security of tenure should be given.⁶¹

⁵⁹ ECA, File 226/1 DRT 14 (Garden Allotments, Defense Regulations, Public Parks Committee), Letter to the Secretary, Department of Agriculture from the Town Clerk, 18 December 1939.

⁶⁰ ECA, File 226/1 DRT 14 (Garden Allotments, Defense Regulations, Public Parks Committee), Letter to the City Chamberlain from D Huish, 20 December 1939.

⁶¹ ECA, File 226/1 DRT 14 (Garden Allotments, Defense Regulations, Public Parks Committee), Letter to Edinburgh Town Clerk from Fred Charter, 30 November 1939.

Mr Gibson, of the Edinburgh Allotment Holders' Association, wrote to offer co-operation with the scheme but reminded the Town Clerk that 'for the last two years I have interviewed, consulted, pleaded, written and had a Corporation deputation to see the deplorable condition that exists at West Mains ... I have fifteen plots vacant due to this neglect'.⁶² Other citizens lobbied in vain for permission to keep poultry on plots, in light of the obvious wartime need for alternative protein sources. In January 1941 the Edinburgh Sub-committee of the Midlothian Agricultural Executive Committee (a body established to coordinate wartime cultivation



OUR GARDENS

saved 150,000 tons of shipping in 1940. That was good. But it isn't good enough for 1941. Scotland wants 70,000 Allotments and many more food gardens next year. Every square yard put into cultivation helps to defeat the submarine and save

OUR SHIPS



**PUT YOUR GARDEN ON WAR SERVICE
TO-DAY**

Figure 3.3 'Put Your Garden on War Service Today!' Scottish Gardens and Allotments Committee Newsletter, February 1941. Issued by the Department of Agriculture for Scotland. Edinburgh City Archives, File 3/11 DRT 14.

⁶² ECA, File 226/1 DRT 14 (Garden Allotments, Defense Regulations, Public Parks Committee), Letter to Edinburgh Town Clerk from RC Gibson, 6 October 1939.

schemes) reported a still ‘somewhat disappointing’ response from the public, and observed that ‘the present number of allotments in Edinburgh is 2,000 less than the number in 1918’.⁶³

Fighting fit

As Britain’s involvement in the war intensified, cultivation on the home front became a higher priority for both government and household interests. Appointed by the Department of Agriculture in 1940, the Scottish Gardens and Allotments Committee (SGAC) took on the role of cheerleader, coach, propagandist and provider (of seeds, tools, and fertilisers) for the wartime allotment movement. They also kept close watch over local authority schemes and requested regular tallies of provision, demanding explanations when numbers failed to meet projections or dropped below target levels. In its first months of operation, the Committee produced two films (‘Gardens at War’ and ‘Scotland’s Answer’) and launched a monthly newsletter. Robert Greig, Committee Chairman, posted this ‘New Year Message’ in first 1941 newsletter:

I feel under a deep sense of obligation to those who are so cordially assisting in furthering the movement for increased vegetable production...I wish to thank them for their zeal and efficiency in the discharge of a vital service. A great field of opportunity is open to us at this critical time in our history, and I earnestly appeal to my co-workers to intensify their efforts to meet the difficult days that lie ahead and to overcome the blockade which the enemy is endeavouring to force upon us. In 1941 let the phrase “Dig for Victory” be a clarion call to action throughout our land.⁶⁴

The newsletter urged associations of ‘plot-holders and plot-scholars’ to take up their spades for the cause: ‘It is a race with time. Scotland’s civilian army of small cultivators has only three months to “make it!”’⁶⁵ The vigorous tone equated civilian labour in the furrows with military operations in the trenches: One poster (Figure 3.3) boldly claimed: ‘Every square yard put into cultivation helps to defeat the submarines and save Our Ships: Put your Garden on War Service Today’.⁶⁶ In April 1942, SGAC sponsored a ‘Food Production on Tour’ exhibition to boost the Dig for Victory effort. An Edinburgh crowd of 7,000 marvelled at a fourteen by twenty foot ‘sea painting’ with the slogan: ‘Ships must bring us planes and guns: food must be grown at home’. In a roped-off imitation garden plot, ‘demonstrations of spraying, applying fertilizers,

⁶³ ECA, File 3/11 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee), Minutes from a meeting of the Edinburgh Sub-committee of the Midlothian Agricultural Executive Committee, 20 January 1941.

⁶⁴ ECA, File 3/11 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee), SGAC Newsletter, January 1941.

⁶⁵ ECA, File 3/11 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee), SGAC Newsletter, January 1941.

and earthing up [were] none the less effective for being carried out with the aid of imitation cabbages and seedlings'. The exhibition (whose colours were 'as gay and attractive as those of a village fair') also boasted educational stands on sowing, manuring, pests and blight, cooking, and food storage'. SGAC reported that the Exhibition 'did a great deal to foster enthusiasm amongst Edinburgh citizens in vegetable production'.⁶⁷

Wartime propaganda emphasised the moral and strategic value in agricultural self-sufficiency. Sometimes this was presented as a collective British goal (one correspondent for the SGAC newsletter bragged of his independence from 'foreign onions'.⁶⁸). But just as often the unit of self-sufficiency drew on a latent Scottish nationalism. When the SGAC warned the Edinburgh Town Clerk that 'further restrictions in the use of fuel may lead to imports of vegetables to Scotland from England being drastically cut down', it proposed: 'Scotland could, by properly directed effort, produce all the vegetables she requires'.⁶⁹ Allotment holders were encouraged to grow 'customary crops of leeks and Scotch Kale' capable withstanding Scottish winters, and to be aware that most seed catalogues catered to gardeners in all parts of Britain.⁷⁰

In 1941, SGAC propaganda (and the introduction of wartime rationing) succeeded in overcoming the initial inertia. The March SGAC newsletter singled out Edinburgh for its 'vital service in the national war effort', demonstrated by a 300 to 400 percent increase in allotment cultivation and an additional 200 cultivated acres in field crops.⁷¹ Over the course of the war Edinburgh created at least sixty emergency allotment areas, ranging in size from a single plot at Chesser Loan to 518 plots on the Meadows. Cultivated areas included public parks at Pilrig, Inverleith, Braidburn Valley, and Roseburn, and golf courses at Craigentiny, Portobello,

⁶⁶ ECA, File 3/11 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee), SGAC Newsletter, February 1941.

⁶⁷ ECA, File 144/6 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee).

⁶⁸ ECA, File 144/6 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee), SGAC Newsletter, June 1941.

⁶⁹ ECA, File 144/6 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee), Letter from SCAC to Edinburgh Town Clerk, 15 February 1943.

⁷⁰ ECA, File 144/6 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee), SGAC Newsletter, August 1941.

⁷¹ ECA, File 144/6 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee), Letter to Bailie Dickenson from Depute Town Clerk, 17 May 1941. File 144/6, DRT 14.

Carrick Knowe. Waverley Market flower beds and Council nurseries grew sugar beets, potatoes, swedes, and leeks. At the height of Edinburgh's wartime production, the total area in allotments approached 300 acres, with about a quarter of these under private arrangements.⁷²



Figure 3.4 'Dig On!' Flyer for Public Meeting and Film Show. *Edinburgh City Archives, File 144/6 DRT 14.*

Dig for Victory diversified the allotment movement by allowing collective patriotic duty to challenge lingering (or embedded) class, age, and gender codes around allotment holding. But this diversification was partial, and women and youth were often encouraged to participate in carefully circumscribed roles. Publication of 'An Appeal to Youth Leaders and Others to Help Young People to do Their Bit in increasing the Nation's Food Supply' spurred the SGAC to create a 'Youth Allotments' scheme. The appointment of watchful male and female officers ensured that no cross-pollination would take place between separate groups of teenage boys and girls.⁷³ The SGAC also organised 'On the Kitchen Front' with a demonstration van and a series of lectures and demonstrations. 'The SGAC has always regarded the education of the housewife

⁷² ECA, File 144/6 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee), Statement made on behalf of Edinburgh Corporation at a meeting of the Scottish Gardens and Allotments Committee in St. Andrews House, 4 June 1941.

⁷³ ECA, File 144/6 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee), SGAC Newsletter, March 1941.

as an important link in the “Grow More Food” Campaign’, commented the newsletter.⁷⁴ The education was more culinary than horticultural, an ‘appeal to the women of our nation to make the fullest use of their produce’. ‘Never before had they been called to a more noble effort, spewed the *Scotsman*, ‘for it involved lots of tiresome preparation and a great measure of persuasion to overcome age-long family prejudices against change in food’.⁷⁵

The Kitchen Front propaganda touted vegetables as ‘protection’ for the body, the physiological equivalent of the nation’s military arsenal. Physical vigour and military might were both aided by consumption of a proper diet. It was a simple formula: ‘By eating vegetables we not only help ourselves and our health but also aid our country materially. By producing more food at home, less need be imported from abroad, and thus valuable shipping space is set free for other vital war supplies’.⁷⁶ The Scientific Advisor to the Ministry of Food offered this explanation of defensive vegetable consumption:

Why are vegetables so good for our health? Because they contain important protective substances which are essential if we want to be full of energy and fighting fit...Without plenty of vegetables we get that tired feeling for which we usually blame the weather, but which, more often than not, is due to our own lack of thought in planning our meals. If children are to grow up fit and healthy, with strong bones and teeth, vegetables are an essential part of their diet from an early age.⁷⁷

The proper role of the housewife was as manager of the household stockpiles that would keep the family ‘fighting fit’. When Mary Burton, a head gardener on a Midlothian estate, won the prestigious Neill Prize from the Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society in 1943 for her expertise in the cultivation of potatoes and vegetables, the *Scotsman* mixed praise with veiled disapproval:

Her standard of digging is, of course, beyond the modest attainment of the legion of women who in these days contribute so manfully to the annual and valuable crops of allotments and kitchen gardens, but the distinction which has fallen to her should serve as an inspiration to the humblest of her sex who have come fresh to the mysteries of soil and seed, manures and marrows.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ ECA, File 144/6 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee), SGAC Newsletter, June 1941.

⁷⁵ *Scotsman*, 8 May 1940.

⁷⁶ ECA, File 144/6 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee), SGAC Newsletter, August 1941.

⁷⁷ ECA, File 144/6 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee), SGAC Newsletter, August 1941.

⁷⁸ *Scotsman*, 14 January 1943.

Post-war postures

1945 brought an end to the war, but the Home Front battle to feed the country continued for several years. Government appeals took on a note of desperation as gardeners prematurely began to abandon their wartime plots. Sir Patrick Laird, Secretary for the Department of Agriculture, attended an allotment conference in 1946 to celebrate the conclusion to the Dig for Victory campaign and propose a new slogan: 'Dig for Dear Life!'.⁷⁹ Other campaigns included the 'Battle for Bread' and 'Grow More Potatoes'. With the submarine threat lifted, the precarious national economy became the rallying point. Arthur Woodburn spelled out the situation in 1948:

About half of our food comes from abroad, and this half has to be paid for in dollars. It comes mostly from American countries. While we have increased our exports considerably beyond pre-war exports we have not been able to make these exports sufficient to pay for most of the food and raw materials we consume in this country...Every potato and turnip produced at home helps us to cut dollar purchase abroad. Every dollar we can save is a contribution to our well-being. We are fighting for our economic life and independence.⁸⁰

Boosters claimed the 'world food crisis'⁸¹ was compounded by a rapid population growth and allotments were an essential part of the nation's effort to support itself. There was, however, increasing pressure in Edinburgh to return emergency plots to their pre-war uses and develop housing on open ground. Allotment associations scrambled to consolidate their wartime gains. Although the Department of Agriculture warned the Corporation that there should be 'no immediate relaxation of effort' in the food production effort, by 1949 the allotment toehold was starting to crumble.⁸² At the SAGS annual meeting in this year Mr Wallace of Dundee asked:

Was there... any real purpose in the Allotment Movement in Scotland without security of tenure? Was it simply something that the Government called upon in an emergency and conveniently forget the rest of the time? Why should allotment holders be expected

⁷⁹ ECA, File 3/11 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee).

⁸⁰ ECA, File 144/7 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee), Address from Arthur Woodburn, Secretary of State for Scotland, 12 January 1948.

⁸¹ ECA, File 3/11 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee), SGAC Newsletter, June 1946.

⁸² ECA, File 3/11 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee), Letter from Midlothian Agricultural Executive Committee to Edinburgh Town Clerk, 24 March 1945.

to develop and labour on a plot when they knew that they might never see the fruits of their labours?⁸³

With the economic upswing in the early 1950s, appeals for thrift and home production began to lose their currency. At the SAGS 1951 conference Colonel Elliot, MP, preached to the converted allotment holders:

Many people not actively concerned did not ... realise how dependent the nation was on the soil of the country... It was not the case that the great dominions were the chief suppliers ... More food is being produced among the factory chimneys in towns than in the open spaces of Canada or South Africa. This fact has not been sufficiently stressed... People present to-day were engaged in a great industry, and this required the sympathy of both town and country... An acre of ground cultivated as allotments could produce more food than that on a farm, as concentration was the essential factor. It was necessary for this nation to provide at least fifty percent of its own food, a more vital necessity than having all the land for housing purposes.⁸⁴

Elliot's mention of 'the soil of the country' recalled 1930s organicist claims that national 'soil capital' should be carefully guarded and cultivated to provide nutritional and economic independence from foreign imports.⁸⁵ In the wake of both world wars, visions of a self-sustaining agricultural infrastructure appealed, and allotments fitted conveniently into this vision. Secretary of State William Admanson commented in 1930: 'If one could give the figure of the annual value of vegetables and fruit imported into this country, it would amount to a very substantial sum'. He supported allotments for the unemployed because they offered 'the possibility of keeping within our own country a very large sum of money that annually is finding its way into the hands of other countries and into the hands of other people'.⁸⁶ Self-sufficiency carried over into the kitchen and the classroom. 'Tinned goods have killed the use of fresh vegetables!' lamented one allotment holder: 'I think the rising generation are just as able

⁸³ VWA, SAGS Conference Report, 1949.

⁸⁴ VWA, SAGS Conference Report, 1951 (Paisley).

⁸⁵ Matless (1998), 114. Insecurity about foreign influence also affected allotments on a micro-scale with the Colorado Potato beetle scare of the 1930s. Flyers warned allotment holders of the 'dangerous foreign potato pest' which is 'notable for its powers of adapting itself to different climatic conditions and its ability to spread rapidly, both by flight and by making use of trains, boats, or other forms of transport. These two characteristics explain how it is that an insect formerly confined to a semi-desert region of the Western U.S.A. has already occupied most of the North American Continent and is now threatening to colonize Europe in a similar manner'. ECA, File 144/6 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee), Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Advisory Leaflet No. 71, March 1937.

⁸⁶ NAS, AF 43/352, Minutes of proceedings for Agricultural Land (Utilization) Bill 1930, Allotments Conference, 13 December 1930.

to make a good Scotch broth as their mothers were able to make'.⁸⁷ Organicist principles of 'wholeness' and 'freshness' would build a Scotland where every child knew how to cook the symbolic national staple—Scotch broth—just as in England they would knead and bake wholesome English bread.⁸⁸

Concluding and circling back

This chapter has moved over some rather rough terrain in trying to clear away the weeds to make visible a few narrative paths. Three versions of the allotment—knotted and often indistinct—emerged from this effort. The first, which cast the allotment within town planning discourses, traced connections from Patrick Geddes to contemporary urban ecologists. The second version linked the allotment movement to agitation for customary land rights—exposing an obscured correlation that rarely appears in rhetorical representations, but is potent nonetheless. Finally, I detailed the symbolic significance of the Dig for Victory wartime allotment movement. As a conclusion and a departure, I return to the point where this convoluted journey began.

Before the First World War, there were very few organised allotment sites in Edinburgh. When Grange residents formed the Edinburgh Allotment Holders' Association in 1912, the Corporation drafted a set of regulations and helped the Association establish a few sites in South Edinburgh. By 1916 there were eleven and a half acres under joint Corporation-Association management. The war changed the situation considerably. As one interested observer described it, when the Cultivation of Land Order (1917) took effect:

The Town Council of Edinburgh took vigorous action to procure and provide land for Garden Allotments and these efforts met with a loyal response from the citizens. Garden Allotments in Edinburgh alone must have produced about 3,000 tons of Foodstuffs in 1918... Allotment holders...quickly acquired sufficient knowledge to enable them to produce good crops from what had in many cases been waste and unproductive spaces.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ NAS, AF 43/352 (Agricultural Land (Utilization) Bill 1930) Allotments Conference, 13 December 1930.

⁸⁸ Matless (1998), 157.

⁸⁹ ECA, File 144/1 DRT 14 (Public Parks Committee), Statement read by Mr Ridley at interview with Parks Committee, 12 June 1919.

By the war's end, 3,400 allotment holders cultivated over two hundred acres of former wasteland and parkland. But the national emergency had passed, and much of the land was needed for house-building and other uses. Allotment holders felt the sting of dispossession and appealed to their elected officials for measures that would secure the future of the new movement. The government responded with an inquiry in June 1921, where Archibald Fischer testified:

We do not need to urge at this time of day the immense value of the allotment movement as a national asset—its economic, educative, hygienic, recreative, and we would even go the length of saying, moral and spiritual value is undoubted and admitted.⁹⁰

Undoubted and admitted it may have been, but, as we will see in the next chapter, this was no guarantee of security. Eighty seasons after Fischer's testimony allotment holders presenting evidence at a Parliamentary Inquiry would bear out Patrick Geddes's aphorism that 'history both ever and never repeats itself'.⁹¹

⁹⁰ NAS, AF 43/154, Deputation from the Scottish National Union of Allotment Holders, 17 June 1921.

⁹¹ Geddes (1992), 43.

Chapter 4

February 2001

In the wet, wet, wet
There's nothing like a mug of tea:
Forget
The world, feel free:
There's all the time yet
For doing, time to be.¹

In this thesis I have tried to excavate the historical motives and meanings embedded in a taken-for-granted landscape. If it is useful to imagine history as soil (following in Foucault's footsteps), then I have been 'restoring to our silent and apparently immobile soil its rifts, its instability, its flaws'. In this chapter, I show how the rough historical ground traversed in previous chapters is 'is once more stirring under our feet',² and how the tensions and cross-pollinations of the past carry forward into the politics of the present. An 'Allotments Inquiry' held by the Scottish Parliament in February 2001 brings to light contemporary reinscriptions, bound to the past by frayed and knotted threads.

For the most part, my presence in the preceding chapters has been slight. Footnotes signal my work in the archives, and the narrative structure reveals my efforts to give a meaningful shape to the information found there. I remain outside the frame. Allotment history cannot admit me except as observer and interpreter. In this chapter, I record my slip over an invisible border to participate in the events examined. A through-the-looking-glass inversion turns my analytic gaze on myself, and on a group of people I know as 'subjects' and as friends, colleagues, and collaborators. As I sit to write this chapter, I slip back and forth over the border, disoriented by the simultaneity of my roles: observer, advocate, researcher, plotter. I wonder where to locate myself for the telling, how to guide my reflection through shifting registers. I begin in a stone bothy at Edinburgh's Warriston allotments on a wet February afternoon.

¹ Lister (1985).

² Foucault (1970), xxiv.

Interlude: in the bothy

When George lights the Tilley lamp its glow picks out the room's details: stone walls hung with tools and antlers, table and mismatched chairs, campstove and sooty tea kettles in a low alcove. Tony kneels to light a fire in the grate, some warmth against the February rain. Outside the smudged windows sodden gardeners potter in their plots, or shelter in their sheds. We sit around the table and shuffle our notes while George sets up the microphone. Six of us gather in the Warriston communal hut (once a keeper's cottage for the estate) to rehearse the presentation we will give to the Scottish Parliament this week. The Local Government Committee wants to hear from allotment holders about their issues, wishes, needs, and complaints. FEDAGA committee members invited me to join their deputation as an 'expert witness' (all irony intended), to bolster their evidence with statistics and historical comparisons. This is our third strategy meeting. From hours of brainstorming and blether over tea and scones we have emerged with a script.

We stand in turn to deliver our parts. Afterwards, we listen to the tape (our voices over drumming rain and spitting fire) and edit, working to achieve the balance of information and entreaty that will persuade the MSPs to favour our cause. Words which we hope will grant us legibility and legitimacy (sustainable, organic, development, inclusion, wildlife) pepper the script. These are not necessarily the words we use when we talk to each other. They are an imprecise translation: from the grounded, intimate language of the garden; through the blunt, irreverent language of the internal committee meeting; and, finally, to an abstract political appeal.

At some point in our rehearsal, I recognise a parallel between our practised Parliamentary presentation and the material I have unearthed in the archive. Each letter, testimony, appeal, and deputation in the files reflects a similar process of translation and strategic selection. The faded old scripts in the archive were once as fluid and tentative as ours. The archive fixes the scripts,

but it does not contain them entirely. Fragments of those scripts have slipped into this one.

During a break, our conversation turns back to the familiar: tales of winter floods, unanswered letters to Council officials, ordered spuds. The next day when I sit to write the scent of woodsmoke rises from my folder.

The context

An attempt is being made by the Edinburgh Federation, to get an upgrading of the management of these sites and to make them a more valid (and secure) part of the Council's leisure provision. This is being done to ensure that they are considered alongside other leisure activities controlled by the Council such as golf-courses, leisure centres, bowls, tennis, etc. and not left as the remainders of a war-time food production campaign to be given the minimum of attention and finance, and to be disposed of at the first opportunity.³

In December 1992, when the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society (SAGS) newsletter printed this assessment, the Edinburgh Federation (FEDAGA) had just conceded the loss of a Dig for Victory era allotment site at Liberton Brae. During the struggle to save the site, ploholders lodged objections to eight planning applications and appealed to the Secretary of State four times. Liberton Brae's loss triggered a renewed sense of purpose for Edinburgh's allotment movement. In the 1990s, negotiations with the Council led to capital improvements on many sites and the adoption of the 1997 planning presumption against allotment development. Compared to most Scottish cities, Edinburgh appeared to be taking its allotment responsibilities seriously. But in 2000, when FEDAGA accepted the invitation to present evidence to Parliament, ploholders and associations were far from satisfied with the Council's allotment policy and practice.

The SAGS petition for Parliamentary action (which led to the Local Government Committee inquiry) appealed for the 'provision, protection, and promotion' of allotments. This triad accurately summarises concerns over allotments in Edinburgh leading up to the February 2001 Allotments Inquiry. First, provision was not keeping up with rising demand. The waiting list for aspiring Edinburgh ploholders climbed steadily in the 1990s to reach 1,200 in 2001. Although

the Council created a new site at Stenhouse in 1998 to accommodate ploholders displaced by a rapid transit scheme, it had no plans to increase overall provision or establish new sites.⁴

Second, lack of adequate protection threatened several city sites, including privately-owned parcels at Craigentenny-Telferton and Spring Gardens. Climbing property values and ambiguous zoning compounded allotments' vulnerability: Edinburgh local plans classified allotment land under twelve different land use designations. Council sites, though more secure than private ones, were also vulnerable. At the Hawkhill site (zoned for 'industry/business' uses), the Council in 2001 turned allotment land over to an adjacent warehousing operation (under the agreement that the company would pay for the ploholders to be moved to new plots).

The final leg of the SAGS platform—promotion—threatened to fall off altogether in Edinburgh. One Council employee (assigned to a part-time allotments officer post) managed and administered the entire allotment system with an annual revenue budget of £4,000. Promotion was not high on his list of priority tasks.⁵ Allotments appeared only fleetingly (and cryptically) in Council strategy documents on biodiversity, sustainable development, and social inclusion. The Lord Provost's Commission on Sustainable Development included a single item: a regulatory change, it suggested, 'could engage a small army of ploholders to sell fresh produce locally and ... supply food from allotments to peripheral estates'.⁶ The Dig for Victory shadow was too long to allow allotment holders to escape from the horticultural infantry. One ploholder commented of the Council attitude toward allotments:

It just seems as though the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing. On one hand they've got policies on preserving allotments and you've got things like initiatives to improve diet, and to provide exercise for people and facilities for that. And on the other hand you've got offices prepared to sell off ground...it's like there's no cohesion to the policy.⁷

³ SAGS Newsletter Volume 2, Number 4, December 1992.

⁴ Edinburgh's allotment provision has declined only slightly since the late 1960s. In 1968, the Council managed 25 allotment sites on 71.5 acres (1,217 plots). In spring 2001 Council sites numbered 22 and covered about 60 acres (1,050 'full' plots, with half-plot rental bringing the total number of allotment holders on Council plots close to 1,200). Nine privately-managed sites provided approximately 180 additional plots.

⁵ In 1999 the Council shifted responsibility for promotion and management of its other recreational activities to a private company—Edinburgh Leisure. Allotments were left on their own in the Recreation Department.

⁶ The Lord Provost's Commission on Sustainable Development for the City of Edinburgh (2000), 77.

⁷ Interview with LB, 6 April 2001.

As Edinburgh's municipal allotments edged toward their ninetieth birthday, they endured at the margins of political agendas and urban land uses, their awkward bureaucratic location between leisure and social welfare categories mirrored by their geographic location in residual open space—wedged among prisons and crematoriums, railways and canals. When SAGS approached the Local Government Committee with the petition, Donald Gorrie, MSP, recommended further inquiry because, 'Allotments play an important role in the community, although they are low on most councils' list of priorities and fall between several Parliamentary stools'.⁸

The strategy

Before the bothy rehearsal, the FEDAGA delegation met several times to shape its message for the Parliamentary presentation. This was not a simple task. The group approached its work through a circular process of self-definition. We translated expressions of value rooted in experience into legible and saleable universals. The process involved equal parts playfulness ('allotment holders are skip emptiers' became a recognition of 'composting and recycling of organic waste and its consequential saving in landfill') and reflection ('I garden to get away from the stresses of modern life').

Revealing tensions surfaced. One person remarked on the 'need to distance ourselves from the Dig for Victory image' and 'dispel the vision of allotments as shantytowns'. We need a 'a modern vision' agreed another, to 'stress the modernity of allotment gardening'. This ambivalence about the history of allotments echoed older narratives and negotiations. 'We shouldn't be looking to make allotment sites pretty gardens' commented one person, in defence of the traditional image: 'We are not a leisure activity, we are a food-producing activity'. The urge to transcend the past felt, to some, like a betrayal of a core value. Someone else defended the ramshackle image on the grounds of diversity and freedom of expression: 'Allotments are different things to different people, we don't want to regiment their use'. In these scraps of

⁸ Donald Gorrie, MSP, 28 November 2000, Local Government Committee Official Record.

discussion the ghosts of allotments past hovered in the room with us. What is an allotment? A place where people grow food because they need it? A place where families recreate in the open air? A landscape artefact of wartime deprivation? All of these? ‘Should we say “an allotment for everyone who *needs* an allotment”’ asked George, ‘or “an allotment for everyone who *wishes* for one”?’ ‘Wishes’, agreed the group, but only after we established that need *did* still motivate some allotment holders. An excerpt from the final deputation script reveals a definite orientation to contemporary environmental and social agendas:

One hundred years ago, the provision of allotments was seen as a means of allowing low-wage earners to grow their own food cheaply. The benefits of today’s allotments have changed and are generally accepted as being the following: provision of a resource that provides a healthy and sustainable food supply, often in an organic environment; composting and recycling of organic waste and its consequential saving in landfill; local provision of healthy outdoor activity and exercise for all ages and social and ethnic groups; provision of a resource for education in the most basic activity of food production; fostering of community development and cohesiveness; provision of access to nature and wildlife as a means of stress relief for residents in densely populated urban areas; and provision of open spaces for local communities.⁹

The FEDAGA script demonstrates a fluency in particular discourses and a willingness to mould representations so they will register with people in positions of power. The process of packaging our appeal was not unproblematic. In strategy meetings, the group expressed a wariness and mistrust of the trendy (and possibly transitory) appeal of the popular jargon.¹⁰ The politics of translation compelled us to deploy the language of the powerful in order to win resources, but we reserved a ‘definitional uncertainty’ which allowed for unspoken resistance to the accepted lexicon.¹¹ Although we edited certain values and benefits out of the final script—foregrounding only the ones with recognisable political currency—the process did not dilute or erase our commitment to the unarticulated and the impolitic. Scholars have shown how ‘engagement with the narrative of local sustainable development can be seen as an attractive option’ for allotment campaigners, because it combines ‘a natural and genuine belief in the inherent social and

⁹ Scottish Parliament Local Government Committee (hereafter SPLGC), Official Report, Allotments Inquiry, witness George Sutherland, 13 February 2001.

¹⁰ One participant reflected in a later interview on ‘flavour of the month’ government policies. ‘Because allotments are so kind of all embracing they tend to fit into any of these jargon words, whether it’s sustainable development or Local Agenda 21 or whatever. But that’s just the word of the moment and there’ll be new words in ten years time, and allotments will still fit with the new words. I don’t think allotments per se are about sustainable development but I think sustainable development is about allotments’. Interview with AB, 22 July 2001.

¹¹ Rose (1997), 194.

economic value of allotment gardening with the prospect of a new, coherent and powerful line of defence'.¹²

Contained within this strategic positioning is an implicit (and, at times, explicit) critique of the 'traditional' allotment image—hardscrabble, functional, individualistic. Recently, both academics and advocates have sustained this effort to 're-write the plot'. David Crouch comments:

As we enter the new century, allotments emerge as strong examples of community development, social leisure, good environments and sustainability, and source of exercise and therapy. Planning can respond. Allotments can be reinvented for the 21st century.¹³

This 'reinvention' does reflect real changes in allotment culture. Over the past few decades, there has been a significant increase in the number of women, younger people, and ethnic minorities using allotments for a variety of idiosyncratic and individual purposes. The rhetoric of reinvention, however, tends to overstate the 'then and now' shift, to paint the past in starkly functional colours that never really existed. What is missing, perhaps, is a recognition that the allotment has always been different things to different people, that the effort to define these spaces has been ongoing. There may not be a clean reinscription for allotments, precisely because they are always going to be formed out of plural and contradictory processes. Allotments represent an archetypal 'polysemic landscape' which is always undergoing construction and reconstruction. 'The landscape is never inert', observes Barbara Bender, 'people engage with it, rework it, appropriate and contest it'.¹⁴ There will always be a disconnect between representations for political ends and the multiple grounded meanings experienced by the people who use these spaces.

¹² Wiltshire et. al. (2000), 204.

¹³ Crouch (1998), 11. 'The humble allotment, it turns out, does indeed lead the alphabet of sustainability, to the point where if it did not already exist, you might chose to invent it', write Wiltshire and Azuma (2000),142. See also, Crouch (2000); Garnett (1996); Irvine et. al. (1999); Stocker and Barnett (1998).

¹⁴ Bender (1993), 3.

In the next section, I turn to the inquiry to pull out the echoes between the evidence and the archive, to tug on those narrative threads of a persistent politics. I also weave in voices of allotment holders to show how their experiences show a fertile friction—an alignment with and opposition to the represented script.

Content: the inquiry and the interviews

If Archibald Fisher and Victor Webb had been sitting in the gallery of the Scottish Parliamentary Chambers on 13 February 2001, they might have wondered why so much of the evidence sounded eerily familiar. The cast of characters—SAGS, FEDAGA, the Food Trust of Scotland, and one site association—presented a slate of needs and desires that fell into well-worn grooves. Security of tenure emerged at the top of the wish list, closely followed by increased investment; recognition and promotion; consideration in town-planning policies; and local authority commitment. Proposals for innovative schemes included large allotment sites in the urban green belt and collaborations with schools. Delegates asked the Local Government Committee to consider consolidating and updating allotment legislation. They requested the formation of a working party to inquire further into the situation. Rewind to 1921, or 1961... the testimony reworked perennial attempts to shift the allotment from periphery to centre, from obscurity to stability. On the surface, what had changed about the evidence presented was how people supported their requests. Sustainability, biodiversity, and social inclusion were the words of the day; witnesses appealed for ‘joined-up’ policies that would integrate allotment provision with other social and environmental objectives.

During the inquiry, as I watched the other witnesses from the glassed-in observation room, I felt pulled in two directions. The part of me present as a delegate—my overhead charts documenting Edinburgh Council’s tradition of indifference—felt a bit dismayed by the unfocused impression we seemed to be making on the committee. Each of the four delegations touched on a few common themes, but the overall representation included so many different claims, appeals, and statements of value it was easy to get disoriented. The literal-minded

committee members probed each delegation for a set of clear recommendations, a unified statement of intent that could guide their work. Did the delegates want a requirement for a certain acreage of allotments per capita in Scotland's cities? What about a best practice guide produced by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities? Delegates replied with qualified support for these ideas, but they were quick to point out that the variation between cities, neighbourhoods, and even allotment sites would make it very difficult to apply standard guidelines or policies. At the end of the three-hour inquiry, it was difficult to summarise what we actually did want from the committee, other than a general expression of support and interest.

The muddle of our presentation fascinated another part of me—the researcher who had spent months reading through archival material with an uncanny resemblance to the scripts we were acting out. I also started to wonder if it was possible for us to present a unified message, or if, despite our best efforts to condense and clarify, allotments were just too complex to explain, to summarise, in unambiguous terms. Even the buzzwords we adopted seemed to complicate the situation: they were so amorphous and all-inclusive that they could mean everything and nothing. Beneath their gloss the older values and meanings still shifted, poking through and exposing persistent contradictions and tensions.

In the following section, I work through the Parliamentary evidence using the five contiguous plots—or versions—of the first three chapters as framing devices. For each version, I first present my analysis of the relevant inquiry evidence. I then contrast the evidence with narrative and reflection from contemporary allotment holders. This task forces me to sort the material into categories, to isolate themes that are intertwined, to assert an organising logic where often there was none. Each interview excerpt speaks to the section where I have placed it, but it also speaks to other tangled meanings—including personal, private ones rarely captured in political discourse. The short excerpts are brief, but complex, statements of value and experience. Because I respect the contingency of these statements, I present them without framing text.

They appear as voices running parallel to the official narrative, subversive and affirmative in turns, which must be listened to against the background of all that has come before.¹⁵

Something to do

Of all of the phrases buzzing around in government policy-making of late, *social inclusion* is one of the most slippery. During the inquiry, delegates used the term in several different ways. The primary use tapped into one of the most resilient allotment versions—the allotment as a space of reform, where people marginalised by society are offered meaningful and productive occupation. In this conception, allotments provide a tangible benefit—food—but they also exert a subtle influence on the character of the participant, moulding social outcasts into model citizens. Delegates cited successful initiatives to involve ‘socially excluded elements of society’ (be they homeless, disabled, unemployed, or teenagers) in allotment cultivation. At one Glasgow site, an ‘amazing decrease in the amount of vandalism’ followed the creation of a youth program (echoing Patrick Geddes’s claim that urban gardens could combat ‘hooliganism’). Another delegate proposed a program to sentence minor offenders to allotment labour. Moral reform and dietary reform were linked under the social inclusion umbrella.

Social inclusion is of considerable importance. Allotments tended originally to be places where people who had limited incomes were able to grow food for their own families. That still applies. There are areas in Scotland where there is considerable food poverty... It is absolutely nuts that a housewife who does not have a lot of money should be buying pre-washed and pre-peeled carrots in a little cellophane bag, which have been flown in from Zimbabwe.¹⁶

The allotment is invoked as a landscape that produces both food and people. ‘We must remember that, with a bit of help, a 30ft by 60ft plot can provide a family of four with the vegetables and soft fruit that they need pretty much all year round’, commented another delegate.¹⁷ The new language recast, but retained, links with the Scottish Allotments Scheme for the Unemployed and conventional allotment values.

¹⁵ In spring 2001, I conducted semi-structured interviews with fifteen Edinburgh allotment holders. I asked people to reflect on their personal histories, their motives for allotment-holding, and their perceptions of the contemporary political situation (all names have been changed). I also spent three days in the company of Gilbert Clark and Ali Black, touring each of Edinburgh’s thirty-one allotment sites and chatting with willing ploholders along the way.

¹⁶ SPLGC, Official Report, Allotments Inquiry, witness Arthur Bell, 13 February 2001.

¹⁷ SPLGC, Official Report, Allotments Inquiry, witness Judy Wilkinson, 13 February 2001.

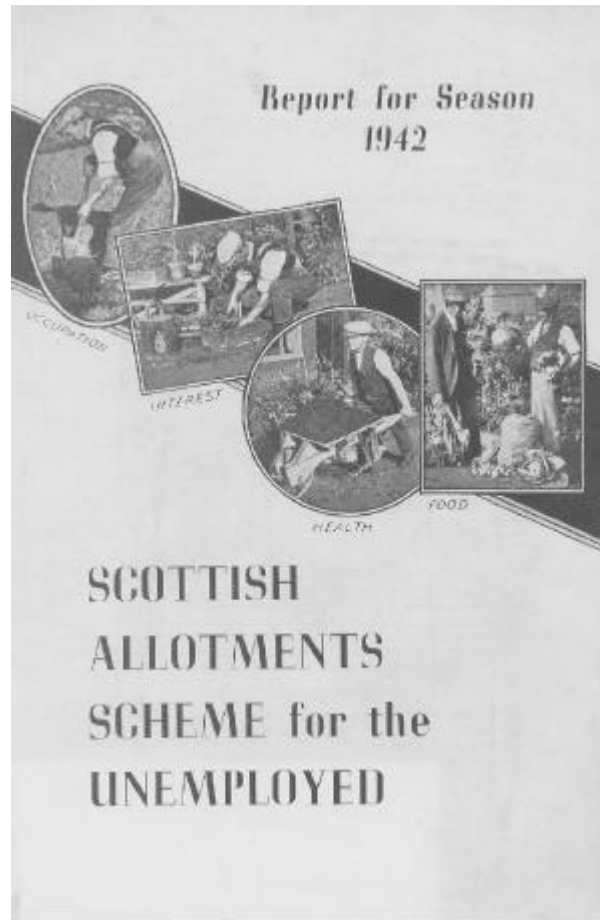


Figure 4.1 'Occupation, interest, health, food'. SASU Report for the Season 1942'. SAGS-Victor Webb Archive, Glasgow University Archive Services.

Other evidence placed social inclusion within a broader community agenda. 'As a kind of community centre in the open air, allotments have a role to play in social inclusion strategies', commented one delegate.¹⁸ Social inclusion, in this instance, referred to a generalised desire for spaces where social diversity flourished, where differences were accommodated and celebrated.

The distinction between ethnic diversity and biodiversity blurs in the allotment:

Most plots have flowers and flower borders, with native and exotic species... We grow a rich variety of plants... Of plot holders, 49 per cent are women... Of our plots, 15 per cent are worked by gardeners of ethnic origin. About 20 per cent of plots at both sites are visited regularly by people's children and grandchildren.¹⁹

Native and exotic people, as well as species, thrive in close proximity. Each allotment sustains an informal, fluid community which allows for varying levels of commitment and engagement.

¹⁸ SPLGC, Official Report, Allotments Inquiry, witness Martin Moonie, 13 February 2001.

¹⁹ SPLGC, Official Report, Allotments Inquiry, witness Judy Wilkinson, 13 February 2001.

In the inquiry evidence, community empowerment also emerged as a key part of the social inclusion agenda. Delegates pressed the need for ‘devolved management’ and community-based initiatives guided by a ‘sense of individual responsibility’. Most delegates supported spatial integration of allotment resources, not isolated green belt locations.

People who suffer as a result of poor diet do not, generally, have cars or the inclination to travel out of town to set up an allotment or to work in an allotment for a day. They need somewhere they can walk to and where they can take the kids. School kids should be able to see the allotments and work in them so that the allotment becomes *socially inclusive* in the area in which those people live.²⁰

As in the past, the ‘something to do’ discourse stressed the social and the practical—not necessarily the recreational—aspect of allotment gardening. But on a personal level, it is much more difficult to isolate these motives.

Voices: a sense of horti-cultural community

My father was a motor mechanic, he worked in a garage at McClaren road that had a grass bit of ground out the back and during the war we was encouraged to plant and grow stuff. Dig for Victory. So he had ground there and we grew stuff. And of course I got it in my head, ‘Oh, you can do that, and get stuff out of the ground’. I thought this was fabulous. Pulling turnips out of the ground just for a seed and a wee bit of attention. And so I decided at some point in my life I would have a plot... My generation and above, we did it for the food. And having a hobby, something to do.²¹

I think [allotments are] an asset and they bring all sorts of people together from all walks of life...a good number of foreigners. We’ve got a black African and...we have several Polish people...they are very keen. I think some of these people from Europe who came over, perhaps before the war, maybe refugees, I don’t know. But they are very keen. I think they like to have their own plot. They’ve been there a long time. I like the feeling of meeting all these different people, all different ages.²²

There was always a mix. There were always the people who worshipped their creator through their cabbages; there were always the people who wanted to get away from the house and sat and read the paper in their cottage; there were always the people who wanted or needed the produce because they didn’t have an opportunity to grow anything at home or it was too expensive to buy. There were one or two people who were exotics, inevitably. The hippies, the organic people who really are so focused that anything in a bag is just anathema. We had one chap who we called the gentleman gardener because he always seemed to have somebody else to do the work and he took all the credit for it. There was another man who was an officer in the army and he had

²⁰ SPLGC, Official Report, Allotments Inquiry, witness Tony Stanton, 13 February 2001.

²¹ Interview with GN, 22 April 2001.

²² Interview with MT, 5 April 2001.

his [men] do all the work. He carried the produce away... There were professors of mathematics... all sorts of people who just loved the soil.²³

For my wife's sake, because she loved gardening... we got this plot down here. She really loved it. She still loves it, but she's troubled with her back... she can't get on with things like she used to... I'm getting on a bit now and we're thinking about giving the plot up next year... It's just a way of life, I suppose. We've been doing that for so many years, y'know. I just like doing it. If we do give it up we'll miss it... The friendship you have amongst different ploholders. These two up there are fairly friendly. Especially my wife, she'll miss that. Because if you live in a flat you're a bit more isolated somehow. People are inclined to keep to themselves nowadays.²⁴

I'd rather have an allotment than a [private] garden. Maybe I just want to belong.²⁵

Rationalising recreation

When inquiry delegates mentioned the recreational value of allotments, their statements tended to focus on outcomes: stress relief, physical health, education. One delegate asked:

Why are we interested in gardens? People like to garden and to grow plants. Most people with allotments grow food and eat it. Allotments provide release from stress and opportunities for exercise... People can pass on knowledge and skills to children and encourage their children's interest in nature.²⁶

Recreational benefits were intertwined with other values, other conditions. 'Local provision of healthy outdoor activity and exercise for all ages and social and ethnic groups', emphasised both recreation and social inclusion. 'Provision of access to nature and wildlife as a means of stress relief for residents in densely populated urban areas', conflated town-planning, biodiversity, and leisure discourses. My own evidence included the condemnation of comparative under-investment:

Vulnerability to development pressure is compounded by a disparity in investment between allotments and other recreational activities... In Edinburgh, the recreation department budgeted £4,000 for the year 2000 for the entire allotment system. We estimate that that equals one seventh of the amount... allocated to other activities per hour of use.²⁷

²³ Interview with GD, 2 April 2001.

²⁴ Interview with WE, 3 April 2001.

²⁵ Interview with AB, 22 July 2001.

²⁶ SPLGC, Official Report, Allotments Inquiry, witness Judy Wilkinson, 13 February 2001.

²⁷ SPLGC, Official Report, Allotments Inquiry, witness Caitlin DeSilvey, 13 February 2001.

Positive claims, however, overshadowed negative statistical comparisons. Opportunities for youth recreational and educational activities appeared high on the agenda for both delegates and committee members. One MSP commented:

About a year ago I heard a child say that they thought that apples were produced by Cadbury's. I take it that you are looking to explain to children that apples grow on trees and are not manufactured.²⁸

Another delegate emphasised cultural, as well as the recreational, values.

Allotments can provide natural heritage resources and historical interest to urban development projects... Allotments in Nottingham have recently been awarded the same world heritage status accorded to Blenheim Palace and the Taj Mahal...the folded A4 leaflet that one receives when one applies to be put on the waiting list for [Edinburgh] allotments... presents allotments largely as map locations. The document does not accentuate their role as *working museums or nature reserves*. No criticism of the City of Edinburgh Council is intended—I am using the example of the leaflets because they are symptomatic of the way in which allotments are *viewed*.²⁹

Although evidence presented situated allotments within recreation discourses, it did not make an overt claim for the allotment as primarily a leisure resource. Social inclusion and biodiversity rhetoric overshadowed the recreational emphasis. Most local authorities already classify allotments within categories of recreation and leisure, and there were greater perceived gains to be made by appealing to other agendas.³⁰ But if 'recreation' encompasses the simple joy people feel out in the open air in a productive and pleasurable occupation, then it qualifies as one of the most valued aspects of allotment-holding for the people who shared their experiences with me.

Voices: multi-generational recreational landscapes

I just like being out in the open air. It's nice... [Allotment gardening] keeps the old people off the streets and happy, doesn't it? It keeps a lot of families provided with food and it gives them something to do at the weekend. And it's better than putting old people in the geriatric hospitals. Anyway, I li—we like it. Let's be selfish.³¹

The allocation of cash per head, per capita, compared to the cost of football pitch and usage. It's nonsense. So, no. I don't think [the Council is supportive]. And they should

²⁸ SPLGC, Official Report, Allotments Inquiry, MSP Gil Paterson, 13 February 2001.

²⁹ SPLGC, Official Report, Allotments Inquiry, witness Martin Moonie, 13 February 2001.

³⁰ Recognition of recreational value does not guarantee protection. In 1997 the City Development Director wrote, 'It is reasonable to seek to apply the Council's open space policies to allotments, in view of their recreational value, in particular. In practice, however, allotments tend to occupy backlands sites and to have less general amenity value in visual terms than other forms of open space. It has not, therefore, appeared reasonable to make a case against development of privately owned allotment sites in the past when planning applications have been made'. City of Edinburgh Council, Report by the Director of City Development, Application of Planning Policies to Allotments, 6 November 1997.

³¹ Interview with JF, 4 April 2001.

be. It would look good on their green papers. It would look very green. It's an opportunity they are completely missing. And the number of hours and people involved in the recreation on allotments, compared to the statistics on the football pitch, what it costs per head...if you work out the per capita costs for a football pitch compared to allotments, we don't get anything like the money that should be spent.³²

I don't know how many young people actually do think about growing their own food... I don't think they realise that potatoes grow underground and you have to dig them up. I don't know if they know that apples grow on trees. You know, it's scary. They must know some but, I think there's that huge gap between consuming the food and knowing what it is. Because it all come so perfectly packaged from the supermarket. And that's where you get you food, from the shop.³³

Well, when I was a child during the war my father had an allotment at Liberton. And I remember enjoying helping him out. I particularly loved digging up potatoes. I thought it was fun to see them coming out of the earth, all these lovely round potatoes....The grandchildren love it too and I think each generation seems to enjoy what you enjoyed. If you're happy doing it they like doing it too. And there's lots of things that even quite small children can do. Planting, making little holes for leeks and pouring the water in, and of course digging the potatoes.³⁴

Green lungs

In the 1970s, a fringe movement struggled to place environmental issues on the political agenda; activist groups pressured local authorities to recognise the ecological and economic value of allotments and urban open space. In the 1990s, initiatives like Local Agenda 21 appropriated these discourses to reapply them to urban areas. The City of Edinburgh now has strategies for promoting biodiversity and sustainable development, but, as delegates pointed out, councils do not always take advantage of the opportunity for self-promotion and proactive planning:

In Edinburgh, allotments have a low profile in other council strategies such as sustainable development and social inclusion strategies. The provision of properly funded and serviced allotments, rather than open grassland, should form part of every major residential development.³⁵

During the inquiry, MSPs prompted witnesses to expand on the value of allotments as habitat for urban wildlife populations. One delegate responded:

A major function of allotments is to provide sites for biodiversity in the city... Allotments provide a *green artery*—a chain of green sites—through cities, which supports an incredible community of animals. Pollinating insects are a good example: they are essential to the work of allotments and to growing food. There is an incredible diversity of species in the allotments in Kelvininside, given that it is a relatively isolated

³² Interview with LB, 6 April 2001.

³³ Interview with AA, 4 April 2001.

³⁴ Interview with MT, 5 April 2001.

³⁵ SPLGC, Official Report, Allotments Inquiry, witness Jack Sutherland, 13 February 2001.

site in the west end of Glasgow. The sites form refuges for birds. In the west end, there has been an enormous decline in the sparrow population. I am proud to say that in Julian Avenue we have a thriving relict sparrow population. Allotments provide seed for seed-eating birds—someone is doing a good job even if they keep a weedy plot, because that provides seed for birds.³⁶

This testimony shifts the system value around the allotment, marginalising traditional allotment functions (such as food production, which is not necessarily compatible with flourishing wildlife populations) to emphasise a previously unacknowledged benefit. There are strains, too, of older discourses, the abstract value of urban ‘open space’ explored in Chapter 3. ‘Developing allotments can encourage a greening of the community’,³⁷ commented one witness. In some cases, delegates indicated, a site’s value to local authorities as wildlife habitat may equal (or outweigh) its value as human habitat:

The council is not actively pursuing acquisition of any sites for the provision of further allotments. In fact, as the result of a planning decision, it is about to close a site at Hawkhill, which is a small island of green and a haven for wildlife in a poorly provided-for area near the middle of the city, very near to Easter Road. It is not the best of spots, but the site is being developed for industrial purposes.³⁸

Another relatively abstract environmental benefit that emerged during the inquiry concerned what the inquiry convenor (an allotment holder herself) called ‘the *recycling* role of allotments’.

I do not throw anything out—I keep everything because I think that I will be able to use it on my allotment. We should push that aspect. Allotment holders were the original recyclers because they threw nothing out. We will be able to pursue that angle.³⁹

The convenor identified a politically opportune ‘angle’ in an aspect of allotment culture born of necessity, frugality, and site insecurity. In the inquiry, ‘composting and recycling of organic waste and its consequential saving in landfill’, became a saleable asset, rather than a routine task.

Voices: gap habitats for human and wild life

There are three things in our favor here, actually. That prison deters any housing development. Cause nobody wants to live [near it]—apart from the pylons, which is, another added extra... And right next to a cemetery, which is on that boundary. So we’ve got good neighbours, from the point of view of development. But we’re concerned about industrial development, or commercial development. ‘Cause they’re not quite so picky. And the only thing that’s probably saving us on that basis is the price

³⁶ SPLGC, Official Report, Allotments Inquiry, witness Keith Vickerman, 13 February 2001.

³⁷ SPLGC, Official Report, Allotments Inquiry, witness Arthur Bell, 13 February 2001.

³⁸ SPLGC, Official Report, Allotments Inquiry, witness Tony Stanton, 13 February 2001.

³⁹ SPLGC, Official Report, Allotments Inquiry, MSP Trish Godman, 13 February 2001.

of actually stabilising the soil would be so high that, it makes it not worth their while. But, our frogpond's down here. We did that about seven or eight years ago. There's a lot people in here garden organically, so in order to keep frogs in the place we excavated that pond...When they come down to do the [Water of Leith] walkway...they'll have to devise a method of allowing the frogs to progress from there to in here, but it'll have to be meshed at each end to prevent rabbits from coming in and out...We're really concerned with, the wildlife in that area up there, that particular corner, is so diverse, it's absolutely unreal. There's otters in there, there's kingfishers. There's a wee microcosm, a wee minor ecology in there. It's never been disturbed there along that bank for about eighty odd years. It's more or less self-sustaining, but it'll be wiped out when they build the path. And it won't come back, because most of the birds that are in there have no where to go.⁴⁰

It's the wildlife as well. It's fascinating just watching it and you don't get any opportunity to watch little kind of strange beetles that you don't even know what they are and five different varieties of bees. You don't get that anywhere else in the city. You have to go out of the town to do that, and to go out of the town you have to have a car.⁴¹

It's not an integrated policy. That's the problem. It's leisure but it's also parks, which are two sort of separate things really, in some ways, although they are probably under one huge department. Planning comes into it. It's all the different departments are not really working together. And then somebody else has got green issues and environmental issues. So they all seem to be pulling against each other rather than working together. It's fairly obvious, the mess. It seems to me silly that they haven't grasped—this is the time, if they are ever going to do anything—this is the time and they've almost missed it. There's now a huge environmental movement and the...Council are supposed to meet all sorts of targets, and be seen to be green. And the allotments are an obvious way of doing that with something that they've already got in place, but instead of preserving them and extending them to meet the waiting lists they're cutting them back, and they're not maintaining them properly. So it seems an awful missed out opportunity.⁴²

Land for the people

During the inquiry, allotment holders did not raise claims for traditional rights of access and ownership. They may have felt this line of reasoning was more likely to concern than convince the MSPs. In a pre-inquiry meeting of the Public Petitions Committee, however, allotments and land rights arose in two different contexts: security of tenure and responsible access. The Rural Affairs Committee should review the allotments petition, commented one MSP, 'to address allotments within the reform of land ownership and the use of land'. Another noted:

Under the Agricultural Holdings (Scotland) Act 1991, people would have secure tenancy to land over which they have held a tenancy for forty years. It seems odd that people can be put off that land at will. If there were the political will to preserve

⁴⁰ Interview with TS, 10 March 2001.

⁴¹ Interview with AB, 22 July 2001.

⁴² Interview with LB, 6 April 2001.

allotments, the time to make such a provision would be under the new land reform legislation.⁴³

At a later meeting, the same member pressed the connection with land reform further, but on the flip side of his previous argument:

If crofters, farmers, and other stewards of the land have to accept responsible access, why should not owners of allotments? Unless [the Executive] includes allotments [in the land reform legislation] it will further reinforce the belief that is held in rural areas that the proposed access laws are to benefit only urban dwellers, at the expense of people in the countryside. After all, many rural dwellers may be interested in how the allotment system works.⁴⁴

Rural residents insisting on rights of access to urban allotments? Bureaucratic politics adopts and inverts rhetoric crafted in previous contexts—but among some allotments holders (especially young ones), old fires still burn. Others recall a traditional conduit channelling rural skills to urban soil, a broken link with the countryside that can not be healed with legislation.

Voices: rural and radical roots

I think allotments are wrapped up with the whole landownership argument as well. People who own land have power over people who don't own land. And in a city very few people actually own land, and having an allotment is a way of protecting the land not just for yourself but for future generations as well... These aren't monuments. These are living, breathing, part of day to day city life and they should be preserved as such.⁴⁵

I got involved through the organic gardening group which started off as something completely different... It began as a land group, and they were talking about issues surrounding land in Scotland, access and the politics, you know, that a lot of it is owned by English people... That was before I joined it, there was a feeling that people wanted to do something, and it was very concerned with environmental issues, and so it became the Sustainable Lifestyles Action Project. ... At the beginning we sat around and talked a lot about what we actually wanted to do rather than what we wanted to talk about. And one thing that we could quite easily do was to start gardening and start growing our own food and that, most of us at that time were on low income, so it would help us get fresh organic produce that wouldn't maybe necessarily otherwise be able to afford. And we thought it was a healthy thing to do, it's enjoyable.⁴⁶

Up to the war, and then beyond the war up to probably about 1960 there were people who were growing food and really, that was their main objective was to grow food for their family. And they did a good job. Then, there was quite a slump. In the 1960s there wasn't demand for allotments. And I suppose the pre-war people and the people who not more than one generation away were country people, I suppose they died off. And then from about 1970 there was a pick-up by people who that got hadn't got this tradition, at least one generation back, of knowing, coming from the country—the

⁴³ Scottish Parliament, Public Petitions Committee, 24 October 2000.

⁴⁴ Scottish Parliament, Public Petitions Committee, 19 December 2000.

⁴⁵ Interview with AB, 22 July 2001.

⁴⁶ Interview with AA, 4 April 2001.

family having done farming or some such. And there wasn't the pressure. It was a pleasure. They were doing it for leisure as much as for food. I suppose there's not the pressure on. If you're starving you learn how to grow whereas if it's only just your leisure you can neglect your plot and it isn't fatal. I think this is probably what's happened. This trend had increased, I think, but it's being ameliorated to some extent by idealists coming in and wanting organic food and the like. And some try to imitate them and haven't really got the skill nor the time or sometimes the strength to do it.⁴⁷

I think there are elements, there are people down at the allotments who would be willing to get together and sit down and approach the Council or other funding bodies or the community as a whole and say OK let's buy this piece of land ourselves, as a community based thing. Let's make our own decisions about it. And it doesn't have to be in conflict with the Council. It can be in partnership with the Council, I think they'd be quite up for that kind of thing...But it needs to be encouraged and at the moment I don't feel that that's what's happening. I don't feel that it's being allowed to happen.⁴⁸

Dig for victory

One of the inquiry witnesses, asked whether lack of local authority will or lack of resources was responsible for allotment decline, replied: 'I think that allotments are just not a sexy subject. No one has thought them important. They have slipped away since the end of World War Two'.

The querying MSP responded: 'Dig for victory and all that'. This exchange illustrates a curious liability associated with the Dig for Victory image. Since World War II marks the apex of the allotment movement's vitality in the public imagination, the association with wartime imperatives tends to block other perceptions of allotment history and value. In the inquiry, however, a new national imperative emerged to claim the allotment as ally.

Delegates cited recent government initiatives to improve public health—spelled out in the Scottish 'diet action plan' and the national health plan. Allotments, they suggested, could play a key role in the implementation of these plans:

Scotland's diet action plan identified a need to double per capita fruit and vegetable consumption within 10 years.... Given the Executive's interest in joined-up policy making and the disastrous condition of health—much of which is related to nutrition and diet—the obvious benefits of people growing their own fruit and vegetables are there to be grasped.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Interview with GC, 10 March 2001.

⁴⁸ Interview with AA, 4 April 2001.

⁴⁹ SPLGC, Official Report, Allotments Inquiry, witness Michael Cuthbert, 13 February 2001.

The [national health] plan is emphatic in making its case for health promotion and disease prevention being every bit as important as cures. It offers a vision of a proactive health service that enables health through partnership, instead of one that simply treats illnesses once things have gone wrong. SAGS sees allotments as having the potential to be central to any such programme of local authority and NHS fusion.⁵⁰

Although the context is different, the tone and the intention of these proposals is not far from the ‘fighting fit’ rhetoric of Dig for Victory, in which personal health becomes a national goal, individual consumption a collective project. In more private testimony, the patriotic inflection of the Dig for Victory years contrasts with a contemporary radical micro-politics that reserves its loyalty for a different cause, though the practice looks much the same.



Figure 4.2 World War II Anderson shelter with lace curtain, Craiginny Golf Course Allotments. *Caitlin DeSilvey, photo.*

Voices: cultivated politics of patriotism and protest

If you go far enough back, they grew allotments to supplement the dinner table, quite surely. When the war came, all the ground was utilised to food production—even the golf courses... Everything, everywhere, everything was turned over to food production. Because it was a beleaguered country. Aye. Dig for Victory.⁵¹

I was a schoolgirl, but my father had allotments up where there’s now houses in Portobello, at Hamilton Terrace... everybody gardened then because there was no vegetables coming in from abroad. You either grew it or you did without... Immediately after the war allotments took a dive, didn’t they? Nobody wanted to know

⁵⁰ SPLGC, Official Report, Allotments Inquiry, witness Martin Moonie, 13 February 2001.

⁵¹ Interview with HM, 14 April 2001.

anything about it. Food became very easy to get... and nobody wanted to be bothered about it. They were building houses where the gardens, the allotments were... but now it's all organic and a different atmosphere about now.⁵²

It's about anarchy. It's a silent protest against globalisation, and that's really what allotments are about. We don't want mass-produced vegetables, we don't want apples covered in chemicals... We want to make our own decisions and have control over our own food, and that's really the crux of allotments. And that's why the politicians don't like it. Because it goes against their arguments for global trade and everything else... It's a positive protest'.⁵³

Local food, local produce, local economy... Bringing the power to the lowest local level, and allowing decisions to be made at a level that's appropriate... I think having access to land to grow your own food is very much about those kinds of issues. That's me deciding what I want to eat and how it's grown. And if I want to make the decision to do that then I should have the space to do it in, thank you very much... For me gardening is a political issue because it's about my right to eat the food that I want to eat. That's been produced in a way that I would like to see it produced. A lot of issues like that there is no way of taking direct control and gardening is such an easy way to do that. I can grow tomatoes on my windowsill. I can grow my own food and it's a political statement, in a very lovely way.⁵⁴

The standard government guidance in this country now is if you don't buy an organic carrot, then peel it because of the pesticide residue in the skins is high... I would much rather be able to have a carrot right out of the ground. It's the taste and the flavour, and it's a difference in quality. I've got about the only four year old in the universe who love cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts. If it's green he adores it.⁵⁵

Measuring

These fragments of inquiry evidence and interviews illustrate both alignments with and departures from the rhetorical tactics I explored in previous chapters. What is striking is the dedication not to one line of reasoning, but to several. As in the past, advocates supported their demands with an array of representations and appeals. Although their transitional discourses reflected and advertised changes in allotment culture, witnesses also drew on previous patterns and inscriptions. I do not want to overstate the polysemic character of the 2001 evidence, but in this section I explore some of its implications. At the close of the inquiry, one MSP queried the SAGS delegation about an allotment cost-benefit analysis. Gilbert Clark—former Liberton Brae plotholder and active Scottish allotment campaigners for over a decade—fielded the question:

⁵² Interview with Helen M, 14 April 2001.

⁵³ Interview with AB, 22 July 2001.

⁵⁴ Interview with AA, 4 April 2001.

⁵⁵ Interview with LS, 14 April 2001.

Mr Gibson: Would you like the Scottish Executive to carry out a cost-benefit analysis of how allotments benefit society, not just in terms of health but through work along the lines of the work at Hamiltonhill allotment—for recidivists or other people who have been in prison or young offenders institutions and so on?

Ali Black: That would be a very worthwhile exercise, although it would be difficult to do.

Gilbert Clark: I will add a general qualification to that point. Most things that are really worthwhile are not measurable. That applies to allotment sites.

Mr Gibson: Yes—I appreciate that it is about quality of life. Unfortunately, many things in politics have pounds, shillings and pence attached to them. It would be useful to show the health benefits in that way. It is hard to measure happiness on an index, but if it were possible to demonstrate that allotments benefit society more than they cost it—in terms of loss of land for housing or industrial development—that would help your case.

Gilbert Clark: I answer that by asking you to measure me: I have been happy for 60 years.

Everyone in the room chuckled (including the questioner). Clark had turned the interrogation around to expose the absurdity (and perhaps the futility) of the proposed ‘cost-benefit analysis’. While Archibald Fischer might have approached this situation with opportunistic tact, Clark’s answer cut through the haze of policy-speak to make a simple and profound point: in order to take the measure of an allotment you must take the measure of the people who work and play there. And because each of those people will give you different answers, contradicting themselves as often as they contradict each other, the measure will always evade you—pounds and pence are irrelevant in allotment accounting.

Ten years earlier, Clark had touched on this state of affairs in a SAGS newsletter. He mused about why housing invariably took priority over established allotment gardens, and speculated that the cycle of dispossession would continue unless ‘our interests more nearly match those of our neighbours and also are more clearly heard above the competing clamour of other political and economic powers’. Self-selecting allotment holders, Clark wrote, have a ‘more than average wish to “get-away-from-it-all” and a desire “to-do-our-own-thing”’.

If this is so then it may be that we are more vulnerable when competing interests vie for our place and that it is necessary for us to make an exceptional effort to seek out the common good beyond the confines of our individual plot.⁵⁶

This thesis has explored the genealogy of these historical ‘efforts to seek out the common good’, while recognising their uneasy fit with grounded, individual experiences. Edinburgh allotment activist Ali Black explains the situation in another way:

The whole thing about allotments is that people don’t want to be organised. They want to do their own thing. And that’s the kind of green space that we’re losing in the city...because its not profitable, there’s no recorded participation, it’s not part of anybody’s performance management indicators...and that’s where allotments kind of slip between the gap.⁵⁷

Black and Clark both suggest that the cost of individuality is obscurity; ambiguity leads to invisibility; an interstitial existence can be a precarious one. Allotment advocates have tried to translate their values into a language more nearly matching those of their neighbours, and the people in positions of power, but this translation has not significantly altered the balance.

Another plotholder reflects:

It’s... right that there is a great benefit from the pleasure and the fresh air and the creativity and all of these things... The reasons people have allotments are all very real to those people, but for the people who don’t have them, or who want a house, or need or want money, the arguments don’t carry a lot of weight, I’m afraid... If you go back to the beginning of the allotment movement...there was a logic and a kind of economic imperative to it which doesn’t now exist. And we’re struggling to find... the arguments to keep this thing which was so accepted and so acknowledged as being worthwhile.⁵⁸

It is true that there have been moments when a ‘logic and a kind of economic imperative’ underpinned the allotment movement. I hope I have also shown, however, that this imperative often slipped away as crisis and need subsided. In the wake of war and economic depression, allotments remained jumbled, humble, chaotic and fiercely private, yet ostensibly public, places. The political and bureaucratic ‘illegitimacy’ of allotments was, and is, a function of their embedded individuality and plurality. The tangled threads cannot be pulled apart without threatening to unravel the whole cloth. Gillian Rose writes:

[P]erhaps it is not the case that to become visible and nameable, to express an identity, is a necessarily radical strategy. To be named, to be discursively recognisable, may itself be a tactic which already concedes too much. To be named is to make sense, to be

⁵⁶ SAGS Newsletter, Volume 1, June 1990.

⁵⁷ Interview with AB, 22 July 2001.

⁵⁸ Interview with GD, 2 April 2001.

made sense of; it is to be positioned in the realm of the legible, the knowable, the translatable. It is to be made vulnerable to knowledge; to be produced through discourse, to be produced.⁵⁹

On the allotment, diverse motives and meanings may coexist with minimal conflict; in presentation, the diversity appears as incompatibility and inconsistency—tension arises in representation that does not exist in practice. Allotments are peculiar kinds of compound cultural landscapes.⁶⁰ They are both cohesive and disparate, private and public, plural and unified. Individual plotheolders inscribe their values on distinct territories within the collective whole. Rose's comments suggest a politics of illegibility (and a realm of untranslatable practice) particularly resonant for the allotment history woven here.

In this chapter, I have been shifting between three registers of experience and rhetoric—the tactical, public forum, where strategic values are articulated; the mediated middle-ground of the strategy meeting, where meanings are sorted and prioritised; and the awkward, intimate space of the interview, where people struggle to align personal perceptions with general observations. In conclusion, I move deeper into the third register—poking about below the fabric of overt politics in a fertile and fractured uncertainty.

⁵⁹ Rose (1997), 186-187.

⁶⁰ Crouch and Ward (1988); Crouch 1989 a and 1989b. As far as I can gather, 'the allotment' usually refers to a singular object (the private plot) and 'the allotments' is used to refer to the collective site. This convention is not rigid, though, and in some instances 'allotment' can refer to both singular and plural objects.

Conclusion

In the Furrows

Fergus Harris, he was a sawmiller in Leith... And he owned this bit of land and he did nothing but grow rhubarb in it. And he sold the rhubarb to the local greengrocers. And when he died he willed it over to the people. I rather suspect that he wouldn't have willed it over to the people, but the houses that he built were so expensive. You see...being beach, it's almost impossible to build here. So he stopped his buildings there, and the Corporation stopped their buildings there... There've been four generations of my family here. My great grandfather, my grandfather, my father and now me. At that plot and then this plot. And that goes back to pre-Edinburgh Corporation rental. The stories that I could tell you about this plot are phenomenal. There was one along there, Number 23. Tom McDonald. Now he used to live in the plots. He had an address for his mail to go to his sister's, but he used to live all summer and most of the winter along in Number 23. There being no sewage down here, his effluence was somehow or other found its way onto the compost heap. Which was a perfectly good place to put it. He was a devout Roman Catholic, and there used to be a convent, up there in Pirniefield. And the nuns used to come here and scrounge. And he had the greatest delight in giving them leeks which were fed from the compost heap...My father, he thought this was hysterical... and the nuns were quite pleased with the huge leeks, without knowing what they were fed!¹

The man who told this story keeps an allotment at Claremont Gardens, in Leith. I met him with Gilbert Clark and Ali Black last spring while we were touring the site. He showed us his early lettuces, his glass-house grape vine, and his precocious peas, and then he offered us this narrative—mixing origin tale, family lineage, and irreverent anecdote. I begin my final chapter with this story because its specificity opens up a realm that has been largely unexplored in the rest of this thesis. The story contains traces of the more public stories I have been excavating but it also charts an alternative micro-history: one of informal markets, scatological humour, residential sheds, gap site economic geographies, and plot level loyalties. One man's story, layered with politics and practice, compost and Catholicism. Each of Edinburgh's thirty allotment sites (and roughly 1,400 plots) may be presumed to be layered with such detail.

In this conclusion, I use plot-level histories to reflect on some of the methodological issues and historical themes that have emerged in the course of this thesis. At the beginning, I explained

¹ Claremont Gardens, 31 March 2001.

my decision to include both archival and oral/ethnographic material in my research. I also commented on my own agency in the research process as a conduit for information and a participant in advocacy efforts. This methodological fusion produced disparate kinds of information, which, in turn, influenced the nature of the conclusions I feel able to draw. Examination of the official record—the archived depositions, letters, testimonies, and appeals—provided insight into how allotment advocates articulated the value of allotment-holding historically. A series of linked chapters detailed several strategic versions of the allotment and their mobilisation in recursive appeals for security and legitimacy. Had I limited my inquiry to this archival material, I could have written a thesis that documented these tangled discourses and then concluded with a brief acknowledgement of contemporary resonance. My decision to gather additional material through ethnography, interviews, and political participation, however, allowed other insights to intrude. A crude reduction might describe the relationship between method and material as follows: archival research revealed official versions and abstracted translations; participant observation and interviews exposed grounded meanings and personal motives (not always consistent with official versions); involvement in the political process illuminated the mediation and negotiation that transforms personal, particular experiences into public representations.

This conclusion, then, reflects upon my methods and outcomes to propose a provisional understanding. In the previous chapter, I suggested plurality may become a political liability when people attempt to translate multiple motives into persuasive arguments. Despite cyclical attempts to redefine allotments, to inscribe them with legible meanings, allotments may remain invalid or illegitimate in relation to dominant discourses of value. They exist in gap sites and in interstitial space. I also noted that, while certain motives appear to be inconsistent with each other at the level of presentation, they exist in messy proximity at the level of practice. Because most of this thesis focused on a municipal, managerial scale, the proliferation of motives and meanings emerged as a weakness, a sign of disorder. But at the scale of the plot, this proliferation of motives may, paradoxically, be one of the greatest strengths of the allotment. If

ambiguity leads to vulnerability in the political sphere—making it difficult for allotments to ‘fit’ into standardised categories of leisure provision—it also may build resilience and resistance within the movement, explaining the persistence of plotting into the twenty-first century. The muddle of reasons and rationales that cluster around the allotment movement may help explain not only why these places are marginal, but also why they are durable as cultural forms. Allotments are flexible, multi-functional spaces, open to simultaneous, potentially inconsistent, inscriptions of value.

In the following section, I move down to ground level to examine how the flexible, plural character of the allotment landscape engenders both vulnerability and durability. Borrowing from Geertz, I look at two sets of practices that are essentially similar—both involve the cultivation of an allotment plot, both fuse political and personal goals. But, I propose, although the practices are externally alike, they send unlike messages, and tap into different contexts to frame their meaning. A wink is more than a wink, a spade is not only a spade—it is also a tool that may be used to serve different cultural purposes and to dig dissimilar plots.

Victor’s plot

On 25 July 2001, Martin Moonie and I drove out to Dalkeith to meet with Victor Webb—former President of the Edinburgh Federation, 1950s allotment agitator, movement archivist. Our task was to pick up the last instalment of the archive materials Victor had donated to the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society, but our interest was more complicated. Martin, a member of the SAGS committee, also shares my plot in Portobello and my interest in Scottish allotment history. We had been warned about Victor’s encroaching senility, but we hoped for a few stories, pieces of lost plots. Victor answered the door—tall and rumped, sharp blue eyes in a thin grey-stubbed face: ‘I’ve been going through the papers, so many papers’, he said. ‘I’ve had the most interesting life...’ He led us through the kitchen into the musty back parlour, where a bay window looked out on the ‘tallest pear tree in Scotland’. Victor arranged the chairs so that we both faced his one almost-good ear. For almost two hours, Victor talked in elaborate

circumlocutions about his life: sex and tractors, coastal command and Quakers, meteorology and, occasionally, garden politics. Every once in a while we leaned forward to ask a question, or suggest a name that might trigger a memory, but these efforts barely altered the flow of his loose musing. A small heap of papers lay on the side table between us. During his monologue he shifted it to the floor or our laps, trying to find documents that might help keep 'straight and logical'. Once he stopped to pray for clarity, hands cradling his temples. Through the words, I sensed shadowy outlines of the narratives I had unearthed in the archives.

Victor became an allotment holder at West Mains in the 1940s. Brought up on a farm, he had been gardening since the age of four. A law degree and involvement in WWII (as a Quaker) kept him occupied in his youth, but he began cultivating an Edinburgh allotment as soon as he could. In 1951, he entered the world of allotment politics, spurred by the intrusion of a housing foundation at the edge of his plot. 'They chose the wrong allotment', he says. He quickly educated himself in allotment law (with the help of Archibald Fischer's self-published text on Scottish allotment legislation) and became a force in the Edinburgh and Scottish movements. He describes himself as an 'untroublemaker', able to mend the rifts between the warring factions at West Mains and to successfully agitate for security of tenure on Edinburgh plots. 'I have the ability to bring peaceful solutions', he says. 'Where there's injustice I'll put it right'. In the early 1950s Victor became the president of the FEDAGA, which he claims he started. It is more likely that he revitalised an existing organisation, building up 'pressure groups in every ward of the city'. All of this information came out in fragments, interspersed with unrelated reminiscences.

At one point, I noticed a square of white cardboard on the carpet. A name badge: President, Victor Webb. Red and white ribbon attached. I held it out to him, my mind already visualising his name on the 1953 FEDAGA flower show program. It was a wordless prompt: 'Oh, this, We used to have flower shows. I was the President. I think I won 8/10 of the prizes, so I had to stop entering'. His narrative aligned with my own uncertain narrations, like tracing paper maps

loosely stacked one on top of another: layers of archive, memory, practice, interpretation. The encounter offered affirmation and authentication for my interpretations and opened up others.

Out of the stack of papers, Victor pulled a small brown notebook, stained with age and soil. 'This was my book, where I wrote it down, the garden. It's all in there'. The book was full of diagrams, lists of varieties, tasks to be done. Coded notes referred to crop rotations, weather patterns, plans. The pages fell open to a strata of 1948 allotment crops: rasps, celery, rhubarb, long carrot, spinach beet, polyanthus, leeks, peas, Onward potatoes, shallots.

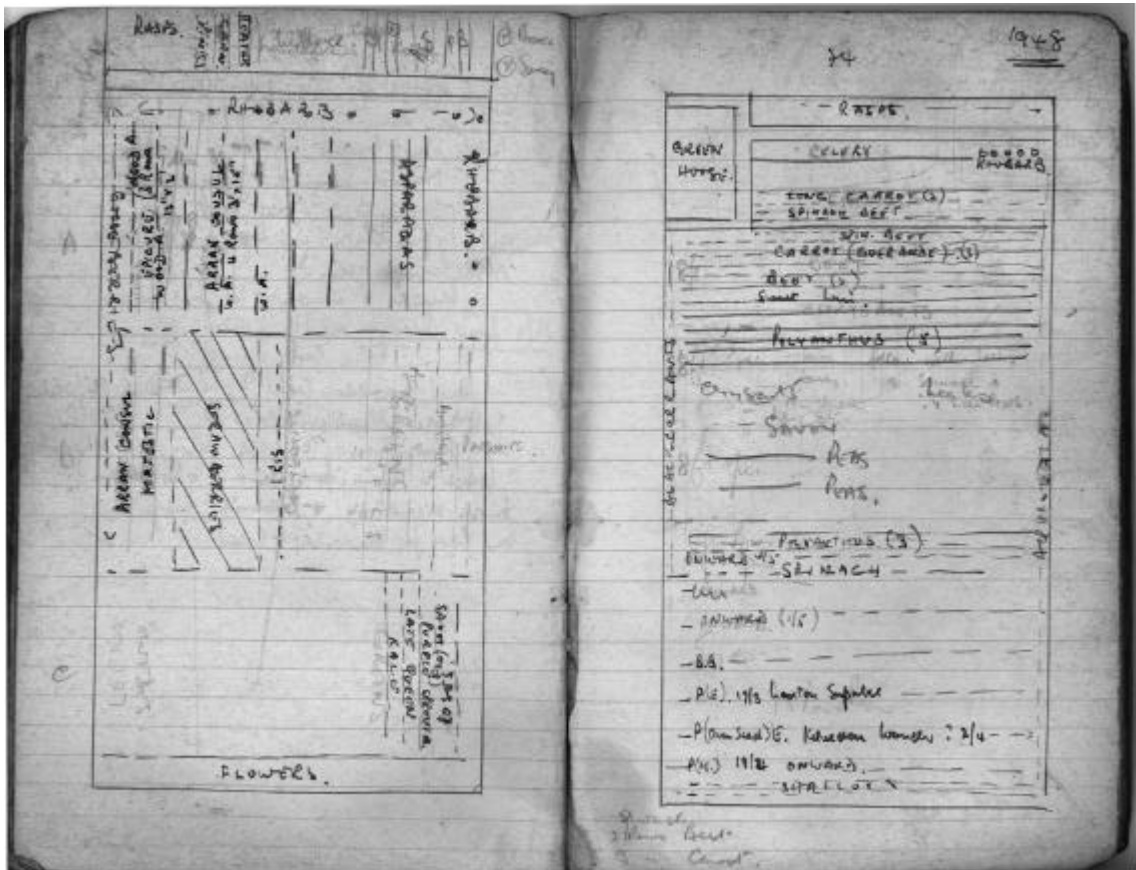


Figure 5.1 Victor Webb's garden notebook, 1941-1954. SAGS-Victor Webb Archive, Glasgow University Archive Services.

Victor's garden book opened a window into the 'grounded truth' I have been speaking of, the place where the hands connect with the soil, where people act in their living, leafy, private theatres, their actions unscripted and unrecorded except in their own hand on a smudged page and in the organic geometry of their plots. In this space, people cultivate private reasons for

keeping an allotment. These reasons are not often accessible to us, but in Victor's case we know of his rural childhood, his joy in working the soil, his commitment to social justice, his sense of pride in his skills as a peacemaker and a negotiator. He believes allotments are important because they meet a 'social need, for mental and physical health for people in tenement buildings', and in his own life they provided an outlet for his energy and intelligence.

The meeting with Victor marked, for me, a moment of convergence, as materials and methods that had been separate came together: the archive fused with oral testimony; abstracted political representation merged with individual experience. At the point of convergence, I also gained an appreciation for Victor's lifetime effort to place the allotment movement on equal footing with other recreational pursuits. Although the ground under the movement was still shifting in 2001, I could probably thank Victor, in part, for having the opportunity to cultivate an allotment of my own—even if some of my reasons for doing so were just as illegible to him as his were to me.

My plot

In 1923, residents of Moira Terrace, Portobello, approached the Electricity Board about using the overgrown patch of land behind their homes for allotments. The Board agreed, the Council accepted management responsibilities, the City Architect set a grid on the weedy waste. Early correspondence documents minute negotiations: a request to place a 'little wooden door' in the wall between the houses and the gardens; complaints about the 'depredation of rabbits'; concerns about the fumes emitted by the power station. One tenant asked for an exemption from payment of rent in the first year because the ground was 'chokeful of wrack'.² Until 1950, the issues were of this scale. But in that year, the Electricity Board terminated the Council lease. The ground was 'required for the purposes of their electricity undertaking'. The plots disappeared from the record, but not from the ground. For forty-five years the plot-holders carried on.

In 1995, the land changed hands in a distant board room, part of a massive sell-off of public sector properties. The threat of development woke allotment holders from their seasons of slumber. They appealed to the Council for help. The Recreation Director supported the cause on paper: ‘The allotment site is used by all sections of the community for recreation as well as an economic way of growing fresh produce for families. Because of the sheltered nature of the site it is ideally suited to leisure gardening in its truest sense’.³ But a Council bid to buy the property from the new owners (a quasi-governmental body) fell through. Speculative builders took over. For two years the company schemed to evict the allotment holders. Allotment holders fought back with a sophisticated media campaign and the cultivation of Council allies. A security guard set up camp in a trailer on the plots, harassed the gardeners, called the police to arrest the ‘trespassers’ in their potato patches. Eviction efforts foundered, failed. The plot holders became ‘squatters’. The builders sold to a second outfit, Bett Homes. Bett Homes applied for planning permission with a design that would replace each of the 57 plots with a private dwelling. The Council rejected the plan, the Scottish Executive rejected the appeal. A state of limbo descended on the plots—half-abandoned, but resilient and resistant.

In September, I stepped into this landscape of decay and muted defiance—my ‘chokeful of wrack’ plot was an artefact of the site’s ongoing insecurity. I would have waited years for a Council plot. At Craigentenny the space existed because others were unwilling to invest time in something so uncertain. The tenuous security worked in my favour, opening a gap for me to step into. The plot developed erratically under my care. I spent hours at the plot in lackadaisical labour, enjoying the feel of the soil as much as any sense of progress or production. In April, I invited Martin to share the plot. By mid-summer we were harvesting respectable crops of potatoes and greens, although I still spent more time weeding the herb garden and decorating the shed with found objects (or preparing material for strategy meetings) than I did collecting sea-weed or digging over turfy patches. Our irregular bit of grass—anathema on a ‘real’

² ECA, File 186 (Public Parks Committee, Allotments, Portobello).

³ ECA, File RC 26 (Recreation Committee), Report by the Executive Director of Recreation, 6 November 1995.

allotment—made a good space for sitting and socialising, so we left it. Martin and I act on another layer of allotment culture, knitting our own associations between history and practice. Our performance at the plot fuses unlike elements: garden party posh meets Dig for Victory dinginess; the tattie patch meets the rocket row. Critical nostalgia parodies the ‘traditional’ cultural symbolism associated with allotments, while inventing other versions, other traditions.

My role as a researcher during this project has shared certain characteristics with my role as a plotter. In both instances, I stepped into a gap created by uncertainty and ambiguity and began to work with the materials at hand to unearth meaning, to cultivate and produce (crops and historical interpretations). I juxtapose my own experience with Victor’s here to draw out two observations. First, both of our experiences have been intertwined with the precarious politics of allotment-holding. Insecurity of tenure has been, and remains, the thorn in the side of the allotment movement. I hope this thesis contributes to an understanding of why this has been, and why it continues to be. Secondly, our plotted histories reveal two different ways of making individual meaning in the allotment. Victor and I may share certain motives—a desire for fresh vegetables, appreciation for soil and sun—but in other ways we operate in radically different ‘imaginative universes’.⁴ Although the allotment tradition may struggle with political instability, it possesses a cultural flexibility that allows it to accommodate diverse and disparate uses and values. This quality of accommodation and adaptation has allowed it to resist complete marginalisation in the political sphere.

A placed kind of difference

In the concluding chapter to their book, *The Allotment*, David Crouch and Colin Ward reflect on the ambivalence that surrounds allotments:

The problem for local authorities is that allotments contradict their ideas of urban and rural, being a mixture of the two. In their administrative conception of the landscape, councils find it hard to categorise unofficial horticulture. The dilemma today remains whether allotments are really a means of enabling poor people to grow their own food or whether they are a location for family leisure... The allotment fails to conform to the

⁴ Geertz (1973), 13.

leisure industry's conception of passive leisure and, in the wider landscape, to the ideal of private, individualised space...The allotment is a different kind of place in which different values prevail.⁵

In this thesis, I have traced these contradictions, awkward categorisations, and non-conforming uses through to their historical roots in Edinburgh's allotment record. At different moments, and in different plots, allotment-holding in Edinburgh has encompassed—to present an incomplete catalogue—recreation, production, patriotism, community, health, protest, ecology and escape. Present-day representations (like those at the Allotment Inquiry) reveal survivals of traditional meanings, as well as revivals and reinscriptions.⁶ Allotment holders—operating from a curious stance of deference and defiance—have been pressing for recognition and validation for at least eight decades. Contemporary appeals may be inflected differently, but allotment holders still draw on a textured and tangled weave of meaning to support their assertions. In doing so, they express a cultural durability that may, paradoxically, be linked to allotments' perennial vulnerability.

⁵ Crouch and Ward (1988), 271-272.

⁶ Crouch and Ward (1988), 268.

Appendix I

Allotment Chronology

1851	Patriotic Society manages allotment gardens at Queensferry
1892	Allotments (Scotland) Act obliges local authorities to provide allotments on request
1912	Edinburgh Allotment Holders' Association and Edinburgh Corporation establish first municipal plots
1913	Scottish Office gives approval for Edinburgh allotment regulations—the first in Scotland
1914-1917	WW I food production
1918	Scottish National Union of Allotment Holders established (later Scottish Allotment Gardens Society)
1919	Land Settlement Act removes 'labouring population' reference in legislation
1921	Parliamentary inquiry into allotments
1922	Allotments (Scotland) Act 1922 establishes provisions for termination of tenancies, compensation, compulsory acquisition
1926	Allotments (Scotland) Act 1926 gives local authorities rating powers
1932	Society of Friends and SNUAH form the Scottish Allotments Scheme for the Unemployed
1939-1947	Intensive 'Dig for Victory' allotment cultivation
1947	Town and Country Planning Act (Scotland)
1950	Allotments (Scotland) Act 1950 improves compensation and termination notice for allotment holders
1953	First annual FEDAGA flower show
1968	Harry Thorpe visits Edinburgh
1976	300 names on the Edinburgh allotment waiting list
1983	Allotment provision levels at 22 municipal sites, 1055 plots, on 65 acres
1995	Publicity draws attention to threatened plots
1997	Council adopts planning guidelines to protect allotments and ensure replacement of developed sites
1998	'Future of Allotments' committee report published by House of Commons
1999	Food Trust of Scotland publishes 'A Survey of Scotland's Allotments and an Agenda for Future Action'
2000	SAGS submits petition to Scottish Parliament
2001	Local Government Committee Allotment Inquiry; Edinburgh begins to draft 'Allotments Strategy'

Appendix II

Edinburgh Allotment Alphabet, from Abercorn Road to Wester Hailes

My initial search for allotment material in the Edinburgh City Archive (ECA) unearthed over sixty files and a handful of miscellaneous documents, spanning the period from 1913—when Edinburgh drafted the first set of Scottish local authority regulations for allotments—to 1995. These files trace the twentieth-century history of municipal allotment management across five different committee jurisdictions and through several government re-structurings. While I was trawling through these files, I began to keep a list of allotment sites mentioned in the files. My impulse for this task was partly personal (I learned Edinburgh’s geography through triangulation between allotment site names, my *A-Z*, and the urban environment) and partly academic (my research gained from a knowledge of how many sites there used to be, where they were, and why they disappeared). Over time, this list grew into a spreadsheet of allotment sites (extinct and extant, municipal and private).

ECA included three primary sources for this project: periodic detailed registers of municipal allotment sites; allotments listings in the Edinburgh city surveys and development plans; and day-to-day business documented in the committee files.¹ These sources provided slightly different kinds of information. For example, private allotment sites are not recorded on the municipal registers, but they are included in the open space inventory for the 1953 and 1965 development plans. The 1969 Departmental Committee encountered comparable omissions of private sites in municipal records: ‘It seems to us incredible that a great many authorities are unaware not only of the numbers of private allotments which are provided within their administrative areas but also, in some cases, of their very existence’.² Some private sites in Edinburgh have never been recorded in any local authority documentation. Sites listed with one

¹ Registers of allotments, including details of acreage and/or plot numbers, exist for 1933/34 (ECA J 52/1); 1948 (ECA 144/7, DRT 14); 1953 (Development Plan 1953); 1965 (Development Plan 1965); 1968 (ECA CA/30/1, DRT 14); and 1987 (City of Edinburgh Recreation Department).

² Thorpe (1969), 37.

name in the municipal registers are often listed under entirely different names in the planning documents. Sites also fade in and out of the record, disappearing for thirty years and then appearing on the list again when a particularly intrepid city surveyor maps and lists them back into existence. Some of this confusion may indicate poor communication between planning authorities and allotments officials. It also, however, attests to the complexity of the allotment network. The fact that sites were scattered throughout the city on obscure, irregular plots of ground (often under independent association management) is a plausible, if partial, explanation for the local authority's erratic record-keeping.

The following spreadsheet is a work in progress. The list culls and sorts information from the files, but it is not a comprehensive precis of what exists in there. Many files went untouched. Nor does it claim to be an exhaustive representation of Edinburgh's allotment history. Although I register over 150 sites, some allotments escaped the archive's net (and my eye). Others probably appear twice under different names, despite my best efforts to avoid repetition. Where possible, I have supplemented the archival material with information from my conversations with allotment holders and my explorations of the city's allotment traces. I imagine this list—the Allotment Alphabet—as a tool for further research and public history projects.

Schoolchildren can cross-reference this list with Ordnance Survey maps of their neighbourhoods; site associations can refer to the specific site files I have listed here to write their own plot histories; and FEDAGA can use the list to document the historic provision of allotments in their ongoing work with the Council. I have lodged a working copy of this list with FEDAGA.

Edinburgh Allotment Alphabet

Working Register of Edinburgh Allotment Sites: 1851-2001

Note: Sites in use as of August 2001 are listed in italics.

Site	Details
Abercorn Road	Probable WW I site. 1923 city register.
Alfred Place	1913 Corporation site.
Alston Road	Probable WW I site. 1923 city register. May also appear as Hammer Road. Use terminated 1924.
Annandale Street (W)	May correspond with site on 1896 OS map. 1923 and 1933 city register. 43 plots 1933. Use terminated end of season 1933.
Balcarres Street	1923 and 1933/4 city register. 37 plots 1934. Remnant plots 2001. ECA file 1960-75 (Craighouse Park).
Bailie Terrace	WW II site. 24 plots in 1948 and 1948 emergency allotments registers.
Balgreen Park/Nursery	WWII site. 6 plots in 1946 and 1948 emergency allotments register. 1.9 acres (36 plots) in 1965. Use terminated 1998 for CERT scheme.
Bangholm	1923 city register. Used terminated 1923.
Bangholm, Leith	1923 city register.
Blackford Avenue	WW I site. Initiated by Edinburgh Allotment Holders' Association 1914. Turned into market garden 1925.
Blackie Road	May also appear as Trinity Hospital site. Two sites on 1946 OS map. 1953 plan notes .7 acres for termination. ECA file 1918-1954.
Blinkbonny	WW II site. 64 plots in emergency allotments register, 1946; 48 in 1948.
Bellvue Street	Probable WW I site. 19 plots. Use terminated 1933.
Blackhall	Probable WW I site. 1923 register.
Bonnington Mills	Probable British Rail site. 1953 and 1965 plans note 4.8 acres in three areas.
Bonnington Junction	Probable British Rail site. 1953 and 1965 plans note 2.1 acres.
Boswall Parkway	24 plots in 1948 emergency allotments listing. ECA file 1973-75.
Braidburn Valley Park	WW II emergency plots. 176 plots in 1946 register. 1953 plan (6.5 acres). 1965 plan (2.3 acres). Use terminated 1968.
Bruntsfield House	WW II emergency (8 plots).
Bruntsfield Links	WW I plots resumed 1923. WW II emergency (21 plots). May also appear as Warrender Park Terrace.
<i>Cambridge Ave</i>	Probably date from construction of Pilrig Cottages. 1933 register (12 plots). 2001: 6 Council-owned and administered plots.
Canaan Lane	1939 listing. May be associated with Falcon Avenue site.
<i>Carrick Knowe</i>	Probable WW I site. 1933 register notes 58 plots. Acreage reduced in 1998. 2001: 35 plots, Council-owned and administered. ECA file 1928-52; 59-70; 71-75.
Charterhall Road	Probable WW I site. 1923 register. 1953 plan notes 2 acres with .5 acres proposed for termination. Private.

Chesser Avenue	Probable WW I site. 1923 register (only 3 plots). 1953 plan proposed 2 acres for proposed termination.
<i>Chesser Crescent</i>	WW II emergency plots (8) on .5 acres. Also appears as Chesser Gardens. 2001:12 Council-owned and administered. ECA file 1963-75.
Chesser Loan	WW II emergency plot.
<i>Claremont Park</i>	May pre-date WW I as private plots. Also appears as Pirniefield Terrace. 1953 plan notes 3.5 acres with proposed 1 acre decrease. 1965, 2.3 acres. 2001 Council-owned and administered (40 plots). ECA file 1962-75 (Claremont Gardens).
Clark Road, Leith	Probable WW I site. 1923 city register. See also Bangholm.
Cochrane Terrace	Probable WW I site. 1923 city register.
Colinton Mains Loan	WW II emergency plots (6).
Comely Bank	In 1923 Council register. May be associated with Learmonth Grove (1929). 112 plots in 1933 register, 78 in 1934. Terminated 1936. ECA file 1931-49.
Craigcrook Road	Appears in 1953 plan as 3 acres proposed for termination.
Craighall Crescent	Appears in 1953 plan as .8 acres.
Craighouse Park	WW II emergency plots (9). ECA file (Craighouse Park) 1960-1975.
<i>Craigentinny Golf Course</i>	WW II emergency plots (110). 2001: 47 plots Council-owned and administered.
<i>Craigentinny-Telferton</i>	Established in 1923 on Electricity Board land (appears as Moira Terrace). Corporation-administered until 1950. 2001: 57 plots owned by developer. One planning application rejected. ECA file (Portobello) 1923-59.
Craigentinny House	WW II emergency plots (40).
Craiglockart Gardens	1953 plan noted 1.5 acres, private site.
Craiglockart Terrace	WW II emergency plots (22). 1953 plan 1.5 acres; 1965 1.2 acres proposed for termination.
Craigmillar (Castle Dr)	WW II emergency plots (66) on 1.6 acres. 1965 plan proposed 1.2 acre increase. Use terminated between 1968 and 1985.
Cramond	Probable WW I site. 1923 register.
Dalgety Road	1914 and 1946 OS maps. Cross-reference with other Marionville/Lochend listings.
Dalkeith Road	Noted in 1920s corporation minutes. May also appear as Prestonfield.
Davidson's Mains	Probable WW I site. 1923 register.
Dean Path	Probable WW I site. 1923 register.
<i>Dean Gallery</i>	Established 1984 on old orphanage garden site. 2001: 22 plots, privately-administered.
Derby Street, Leith	Probable WW I site. 1923 register.
Dickson Street	May appear under other name. Associated with Trinity Hospital. ECA file 1939-57; 1925-1939.
Dryden Street	Probable British Rail site. 1935 termination notice in ECA files.
Duddingston	Probable WW I site; 1923 register. May appear as Crescent or Junction. 1 acre proposed for termination 1953 plan; 3.7 acres proposed 1965.
<i>Ferry Road</i>	WW II emergency plots (48). On location of former park for the blind. Grant of land may stipulate recreational use. 2001: 54 plots Council owned and administered.
Findhorn Place	May be pre-WW I plots, established by Edinburgh Allotment Holders' Association (EAHA). 1923 register. 1934 register (7 plots).
<i>Findlay Avenue/Sleigh Dr.</i>	WW II emergency plots (8). Listed as Restalrig Square 1953 (.7 acres). 2001: 7 plots Council-owned and administered.

George Street, Leith	Probable WW I site. 1923 register. 1934 register (10 plots).
Glendevon Park	WW II emergency plots (13).
Gorgie Road/Market Sidings	Established pre-WW I as Corporation site. 11 plots 1934, 1948. 1965 plan .5 acres. Use terminated late 1980s. ECA file 1962-75.
Gorgie Station	Appears as separate .5 acre site in 1965 plan.
Grange Loan	One of several pre-WW I sites established by EAHA on the Grange Estate. Use terminated 1931. ECA file 1931-1954 (Grange District).
Grange Terrace	WW I site. Established 1914 by EAHA. Use terminated 1932.
Granton Branch Railway	British Rail. 4.3 acres in 1953 plan. May appear as Boswall Parkway (1948).
Granton Mains	Depression-era allotments for the unemployed. 720 plots.
Greenbank Crescent	Probable WW I site. 1923 register.
Hamilton Terrace/Drive	1923 register. See also Portobello East. 1934 register (80 plots). 1953 2.5 acres. 1965 2.1 acres proposed for termination. ECA file 1959-75.
Harrison Park/Tyncastle	Possible WW I site re-opened in WW II. 1968 register .15 acres.
<i>Hawkhill</i>	Also appears as St. Clair Street. Possible British Rail WW I site. 1923 register. Use scheduled to terminate 2002 due to Council land sale.
Hillhouse Road	WW II emergency plots (15). May be associated with Craigcrook Road site. ECA file 1962-75.
Hutchison Crossway	WW II emergency plots (38). 1953 plan proposed 2.2 acres for termination.
<i>Hutchison Loan</i>	WW II emergency plots (5). 2001: 5 plots Council-owned and administered.
Hutchinson Medway	WW II emergency plots (1).
Hutchison Road	WW II emergency plots (64).
Hope Crescent	Private site. Appears on 1896 OS map. 1953 plan proposed .8 acres for termination.
<i>Hopetoun Street</i>	Site privately administered, from WW II or earlier. 1953 plan proposed .8 acres for termination. Owned in public sector. Uncultivated and undeveloped since early 1990s.
Holyrood Park	WW I emergency plots (17 acres) in King's Park resumed 1922. WW II emergency plots (52). 1953 plan notes 13.5 acres.
Inchview Terrace	WW II emergency plots (11).
<i>Inverleith Park</i>	Probable WW I emergency plots. WW II emergency plots (113). 2001:126 plots on approximately 7 acres, Council-owned and administered.
Inverleith Park WW II	WW II emergency plots (145) on putting green.
Janefield	WW II emergency plots (9). May also appear as Corstophine.
Joppa Quarry	WW II emergency plots (10). 1953 and 1965 plans, 1.5 acres. May also appear as Joppa Terrace, British Rail site, use terminated in 1989.
Kinnear Road	Probable WW I plots. 1923 register. WW II emergency plots (26). 1953 plan proposed .7 acres for termination.
<i>Lady Road/Newington Cem</i>	Established 1914 by EAHA. Formerly owned by railway. 2001: 26 plots on 1.8 acres. Council-owned and administered. ECA files 1962-75;1923.
Lanark Road	WW II emergency allotments (8).
Lauder Road	Probable WW I plots. 1923 register. Use terminated 1926.
Lauderdale Street	WW II emergency plots (14). ECA file 1962-75.
Learmonth Grove	1929 corporation minutes. Possible link with Comely Bank site (and St. Bernard's). On location of 1851 Patriotic Society Allotment Gardens.
<i>Leith Links</i>	WW II emergency allotments (17). 2001: 28 plots Council-owned and administered.

Liberton Brae	WW II emergency allotments (28). Local history sources locate origins in WW I use. May be associated with Tower Mains site. 1965 plan proposed 2 acres for termination. Use terminated late 1980s. ECA file 1959.
Loaning Road	1953 plan noted 2.1 acres. Possible association with Lochend sites.
Lochend Farm, North	Probable WW I site. 1923 register.
Lochend Farm, Marionville	Probable WW I site. 1923 register. 1934 register (119 plots).
Lochend Meadows	Probable WW I site. 1923 register. 1934 register (144 plots).
Lochend Road, Leith	Probable WW I site. 1923 register. 1953 plan noted 3 acres.
Maidencraig Crescent	WW II emergency plots (15). 1953 plan proposed 2.1 acres for termination.
Marionville Drive, Restalrig	WW II emergency plots (34). May be remnant of Lochend, Marionville. ECA file 1959-75.
Meadowbank	WW II emergency plots (232).
Meadows	WW II emergency plots (520) in five locations. 1965 plan proposed 7.3 acres for termination.
<i>Midmar Drive</i>	Established 1917. Small section developed in late 1980s. 2001: 110 plots on 7 acres, privately-owned, Council-administered. ECA files 1919-30; 31-58; 60-75.
Millbank	Established 1915 by EAHA. Also appears as Oswald Road. 1923 register.
Milton Road	WW II emergency plots (10).
Moredun Crescent	WW II emergency plots (65).
Morningside Grove	1939 listing.
Mortonhall Road	WW II emergency allotments (38) on land held by adjacent homeowners. Use terminated 1990s for residential development.
Murrayfield Road	1953 plan proposed .7 acres for termination.
Newbattle Terrace	1953 plan proposed .6 acres for termination.
Niddrie Mains	Depression-era allotments for the unemployed (110 plots). Use terminated 1950s. ECA file 1949.
Niddrie Mains/Jewel Cottages	Depression-era allotments for the unemployed (113 plots).
Orchard Road (North)	WW II emergency plots (11). May also refer to Orchard Brae Park site.
Park Road	WW II emergency plots (52).
Pilrig, Leith	1923 and 34 registers lists Pilrig, Edinburgh and Pilrig, Leith sites. See ECA file (Pilrig) 1931.
Pilrig, Balfour Place	1923 city register. 10 plots listed 1933, 1934, 1948, 1968 (.5 acres). ECA file 1972-1975 may discuss termination.
Pilrig Park, Stanwell Street	WW II emergency plots (23).
<i>Pilrig Park</i>	Probably established WW II. 2001: 24 plots on approximately 2 acres, Council-owned and administered.
Pilrig House	WW II emergency (1 plot).
<i>Portobello East</i>	Established 1912 by British Rail. May appear in city records as Hamilton Terrace or Hamilton Dr. 2001: 24 plots, railway-owned, association-administered.
Portobello Park	WW II emergency plots (42). 1965 plan notes .8 acres at Portobello Golf Course.
Portobello Road	1953 and 1965 plans noted 3 acres. May refer to Craigentenny/Telferton/Moira Terrace site.
Powderhall	1953 plan listed 1.9 acres in Broughton district.

Priestfield Road	Probable WW I site. 1923 register.
Primrose Bank Road	Probable WW I site. 1923 register.
Redhall	May appear as Kingsknowe on 1947 OS map, between canal and railway. 1.8 acres in 1965 city plan.
<i>Redhall (The Dell)</i>	Established 1987 on former Council nursery site. 2001: 42 plots Council-owned and administered.
Relugas Road	Established 1915 by EAHA. 1923 register.
<i>Restalrig (Circus)</i>	Probable WW I site. 1923 and 1934 register. 32 plots on 1.8 acres until site relocation, 1984. 2001: 30 plots, Council-owned and administered.
Restalrig Avenue	WW II emergency plots (22). 1953 plan noted .7 acres.
Restalrig Church	1953 plan noted 1.9 acres.
Restalrig Terrace East	1953 plan noted .9 acres.
<i>Restalrig/Prospect Bank</i>	Appears on 1946 OS map. 2001: 9 plots, Council-owned and administered.
Robb's Loan	WW II emergency plots (31).
Rosebank	No documentation. Terminated 1934.
<i>Roseburn Cliff</i>	Private site in development designed by Patrick Geddes. Also referred to as Wester Coates. Informal. Pre WW I.
Roseburn Public Park	WW II emergency plots (80).
St Alban's Road	Probable WW I site. 1923 register. 1953 proposed 1 acre for termination.
St Luke's Church	1953 and 1965 plan noted 2.3 acres.
St Mark's	Probable WW I site. 1923 register. 1934 register 63 plots.
St Thomas Road	Probable WW I site. 1923 register. 1934 register.
Salisbury Green	Possible pre-WW I site. 1923 register. Managed by St. Leonard's Association, 88 plots on 5.5 acres, until termination in 1950s for University residences.
Salisbury Green, WW II	WW II, 39 additional plots.
<i>Saughton Mains</i>	Depression-era plots for the unemployed. 184 plots on 9.25 acres in 1934. 2001: 190 plots Council-owned and administered. ECA files 1933-51; 51-62; 59-75.
Old Saughton	WW II emergency plots (51). Earlier use probable.
Saughton Crescent	WW II emergency plots (8). ECA file 1961-75.
Saughtonhall Drive	Probable WW I site. 1923 register. Use terminated 1924.
Savile Terrace, West	Probable WW I site. 1923 register. 1934 register 18 plots. May be associated with West Mains/Blackford Road plots.
<i>Scotland St Lane (E)</i>	Undocumented private site on remnant parcel of the Broughton Estates. Current allotment holders claim site deed stipulates allotment use. Unknown number of plots, privately-owned.
Sighthill Cres./View	WW II emergency plots (9). 1965 plan noted .9 acres. ECA file 1959-75.
Slateford Road	Pre-WW I Council site. 1953 plan proposed 1.6 acres for termination. May appear under other name.
<i>Spring Gardens</i>	Undocumented private site adjacent to Holyrood Park. 2001: semi-cultivated, privately-owned and administered.
Stenhouse	WW II emergency plots (40).
<i>Stenhouse Drive</i>	Established 1998 to replace sites lost at Balgreen and Carrick Knowe. 2001: 35 plots Council owned and administered.

Stevenson Road	1953 plan proposed 1.5 acres for termination at tram depot.
<i>Succoth Gardens</i>	Probable WW II site listed as Garscube Terrace. 1953 plan notes 1.5 acres. 1965 plan notes .6 acres. 2001: held by adjacent homeowners in trust.
Tipperlin Road	1953 plan noted 1.4 acres. 1965 plan noted .8 acres.
Usher Institute	1923 register. May appear under other name.
Victoria Park	WW II emergency plots (64).
Wakefield Avenue	WW II emergency plots (16).
Wardieburn Drive/Street	1939 listing. May be associated with Boswall Parkway/Granton Branch Railway.
Warrender Park Road	1953 plan proposed .6 acres for termination.
Warrender Park Terrace	WWI and WWII plots. Also listed with Bruntsfield Links.
<i>Warriston Road</i>	Depression-era plots for the unemployed (173 plots on 8.7 acres). 2.8 acres developed for residential use 1976. 2001: 112 plots, Council-owned and administered. ECA file 1941; 60-75.
West Mains/McLaren	Depression-era plots for the unemployed (177 plots on 10.6 acres). 1948 (160 plots). Eventually incorporated into West Mains, or developed for residential use. ECA file 1939.
<i>West Mains</i>	1923 register. 1934 register (119 plots on 6.5 acres). 1948 (76 plots). 1951 (?) struggle to save plots documented in <i>Scotsman</i> . 1953 plan proposed 8.5 acres for termination. 2001: 86 plots Council-owned and administered. ECA files 1938; 59-75.
West Pilton	WW II emergency plots (67). Use continued until 1970s. ECA file 1937; 60-75.
<i>Wester Hailes</i>	Established 1978. 2001: 80 plots, Council-owned, association-administered.
Western General Hospital	1953 plan proposed 4.7 acres for termination.

Bibliography

Primary unpublished sources

Edinburgh City Archives

144/1 DRT 14 (Public Parks Committee, Garden Allotments), May 1919-October 1925

3/5 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee, Allotments, Midmar Drive), March 1919-December 1930.

122/1 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee, Allotments, Lady Road), January 1923

186 DRT 14 (Public Parks Committee, Garden Allotments Grounds for Permanent Tenure), 1923-1954

32 DRT 14 (Public Parks Committee, Allotments, Portobello), January 1923-August 1959

32/5 DRT 14 (Public Parks Committee, Allotments, Midmar Drive), January 1931-February 1958

144/4 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee, Garden Allotments) August 1932-December 1934

103/4 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee, Allotments, West Mains Road), May 1938

226/1 DRT 14 (Public Parks Committee, Garden Allotments, Defence Regulations) September 1939-December 1939

212/2 DRT 14 (Public Parks Committee, Allotments for the Unemployed, West Mains Road), January 1939

144/6 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee, Garden Allotments), January 1941-December 1946

3/11 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee, Miscellaneous Garden Allotments) January 1942-March 1945

144/7 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee, Allotments, General), January 1946-April 1959

3/8 DRT 14 (General Purposes Committee, Allotments, Salisbury Green), January 1949-November 1956

CA/30/1 DRT 14 (Civic Amenities Committee, Garden Allotments), February 1960-May 1975

CA/G215/1 DRT 14 (Civic Amenities Committee, Allotments, Midmar Gardens), March 1960-May 1975

CA/G211/1 DRT 14 (Civic Amenities Committee, Allotments, Lady Road), April 1962-May 1975

RC 26 (Recreation and Leisure, Allotments General), August 1975-December 1982

RC 26 (Recreation and Leisure, Allotments General), January 1983-November 1995

J20/8 (Report by the Town Clerk in regard to Statutory Provisions Relating to Garden Allotments), 1920

J20/9 (Report by the Town Clerk in regard to Allotments (Scotland) Act 1892), 1922

J 41 (Certificates and Diplomas)

J 52/1 (Garden Allotments: Miscellaneous Forms and Plans), 1924-1937

J 52/2-7 (Papers, Garden Allotments Committee) 1936-1933

I6 (Regulations Confirmed by Secretary for Scotland, 23 May 1933); Amendment to Regulation
11, Confirmed by Secretary for Scotland, 24 April 1924)

National Archives of Scotland

AF 43/98 (Defence of the Realm Regulations 1914-1918)

AF 43/154 (Allotments Special Fund under Section 18(3) of the Land Settlement Act 1919,
1920-1925)

AF 43/352 (Agricultural Land (Utilization) Bill 1930, Allotments Conference)

AF 43/353 (Agricultural Land (Utilization) Bill 1930, Allotments Conference)

AF 66/5 (Small Agricultural Holdings Act 1892 and Allotments (Scotland) Act 1892, 1889-94)

AF 66/18 (Edinburgh Regulations for Allotments Under Section 6 of Allotments Act 1892,
1913-1924)

AF 66/67 (Allotments (Scotland) Act 1925, 1925)

AF 66/68 (Allotments Grants, Loans, and Statistics, 1914-1929)

AF 66/96 (Allotment Gardens for the Unemployed-Formulation of Scheme)

AF 66/100 (Allotments for the Unemployed in Edinburgh, Use of Royal Parks, 1932-33)

SAGS-Victor Webb Archive, Glasgow University Archive Services

Acts of Parliament Relating to Allotment Gardens (Scotland), compiled by Archibald Fischer

Scottish Allotments Scheme for the Unemployed, Reports and Appeals, 1932-1939

Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society, Conference Reports and Annual General Meeting
Records, 1935-1965

Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society, Year Book, 1952

Miscellaneous

Craigentinny Garden Allotments, Organisational Files and Correspondence

City of Edinburgh Council, Report by the Director of City Development, Application of
Planning Policies to Allotments, 6 November 1997

City of Edinburgh Council, Report by the Director of Recreation, City of Edinburgh's
Allotments, 10 March 1997

City of Edinburgh Council, Report by the Acting Director of Recreation, City of Edinburgh's
Allotments, 11 January 1999

Primary published sources

- Allotments (Scotland) Acts (1892; 1922; 1926; 1950)
- City and Royal Burgh of Edinburgh (1953) Town and Country Planning Act (1947),
Development Plan 1953
- City and Royal Burgh of Edinburgh (1953) Development Plan 1965 Review, Written Statement
- City of Edinburgh (2000) City Development, Development Control Handbook
- Craigentinny Garden Allotments Newsletter, 1995-2001
- Cuthbert M and P McGhee (1999) *A Survey of Scotland's Allotments and an Agenda for Future Action* Food Trust of Scotland, Edinburgh
- Garnett T (1998) *Growing food in cities: a report to highlight and promote the benefits of urban agriculture in the UK* National Food Alliance, London
- Edinburgh City Library, Edinburgh Room, News Clippings, Allotments
- Thorpe H (1969) Departmental Committee of Inquiry into Allotments Report, cmd 4166, Vol. 10, 1968-1969
- House of Commons (1889) Report from the Select Committee on Allotments, Small Holdings, and Peasant Proprietors, British Parliamentary Papers, Agriculture, 20
- House of Commons (1843) Report from the Select Committee on Labouring Poor (Allotments of Land)
- House of Commons (1998) Environment, Transport, and Regional Affairs Committee, The Future for Allotments, HC 560-I and Minutes of Evidence, Volume 560 i-iii, and Volume 560 II
- McDaid H and L Reid (2000) *Portobello East Junction Allotments*
- Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society Newsletter, 1990-2001
- Scottish Parliament, Official Report, Local Government Committee, 28 November 200; 13 February 2001
- Scottish Parliament, Official Report, Public Petitions Committee, 24 October 2000; 19 December 2000

Secondary sources

- Abercrombie P (1949) *A civic survey and plan for the city and royal burgh of Edinburgh* Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh
- Agee J (1939) *Let us now praise famous men* Ballantine, New York (1966 edition)
- Archer J (1997) The nineteenth-century allotment: half an acre and a row *Economic History Review* L, 1, 21-36
- Barnes T and J Duncan (1992) *Writing worlds: discourse, text, and metaphor in the representation of landscape* Routledge, London

- Barnett D C (1967) Allotments and the problem of rural poverty, 1780-1840, in E L Jones and G E Mingay (eds.) *Land, labour and population in the industrial revolution* Edward Arnold, London, 162-183
- Bartram R (1999) The enclosure of nature in Stanley Spencer's Hoe Garden Nursery *Ecumene* 6, 341-359
- Begg J (1873) *Happy homes for working men and how to get them* Charles F. Lyon, Edinburgh
- Clarke J and C Crichton (1985) *The devil makes work: leisure in capitalist Britain* Macmillan, London
- Clifford J (1997) *Routes: travel and translation in the twentieth century* Harvard University Press, Cambridge
- Cosgrove D (1984) *Social formation and symbolic landscape* Croom Helm, London
- Cosgrove D and S Daniels (eds.) (1988) *The iconography of landscape: essays on the symbolic representation, design, and use of past environments* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- Couch G (2000) *Emplotting the good life: the life geographies of the Hungerhill Allotment Gardens, Nottingham* Unpublished dissertation presented for the Master of Arts in Landscape and Culture, School of Geography, University of Nottingham
- Crouch D and C Ward (1988) *The allotment: its landscape and culture* Faber and Faber, London
- Crouch D (1989a) Patterns of co-operation in the cultures of outdoor leisure – the case of the allotment *Leisure Studies* 8, 189-199
- Crouch D (1989b) The allotment, landscape, and locality: ways of seeing landscape and culture *Area* 21.3, 261-267
- Crouch D (1990) Culture in the experience of landscape *Landscape Research* 15, 11-19
- Crouch D (1992) British allotments: landscapes of ordinary people *Landscape* 31(3), 1-7
- Crouch D (1998) Rewriting the plot on city allotments *Planning* 1275, 11
- Crouch D (2000) Places around us: embodied lay geographies in leisure and tourism *Leisure Studies* 19, 63-76
- Crouch D and D Matless (1996) Refiguring geography: parish maps of Common Ground *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 21, 236-255
- Daniels S (1989) Marxism, culture, and the duplicity of landscape, in Peet and Thrift (eds.) *New models in geography* Unwin Hyman, London, 196-220
- Duncan J and N Duncan (1988) (Re) reading the landscape *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 6, 117-126
- Duncan J and D Ley (1993) Introduction: representing the place of culture, in J Duncan and D Ley (eds.) *place/culture/representation* Routledge, London, 1-21

- Egoz S (2000) 'Clean and green but messy: the contested landscape of New Zealand's organic farms' *Oral History* 28, 63-74
- Evans I (1985) Allotment provision in Scotland, in I Evans and J Hendry (eds.) *The land for the people* Scottish Socialist Society, Blackford, Scotland
- Francis M (1987) Some different meanings attached to a city park and community gardens *Landscape Journal* 6, 101-112
- Francis M and R Hester (eds.) (1990) *The meaning of gardens* MIT Press, Cambridge and London
- Fraser W H and R Morris (eds.) (1990) *People and society in Scotland, Volume II, 1830-1914* Economic and Social History Society of Scotland, Edinburgh
- Geddes P (1992) The notation of life *Edinburgh Review*, Summer 1992, 88, 42-47
- Geddes P (1904) *City development: a study of parks, gardens, and culture institutes. A report to the Carnegie Dunfermline Trust* The Saint George Press, Bourneville
- Geddes P (1911) The Civic Survey of Edinburgh reprinted from *The Transactions of the Town Planning Conference* for the Civics Department, Outlook Tower, Edinburgh and Crosby Hall, Chelsea
- Geddes P (1949) *Cities in evolution: an introduction to the town planning movement and to the study of civics* Williams and Norgate, London (first edition 1915)
- Geertz C (1973) *The interpretation of cultures* Fontana, London
- Hardy D and C Ward (1984) *Arcadia for all: the legacy of a makeshift landscape* Mansell, London
- Harvey D (1993) From space to place and back again: reflections on the condition of postmodernity, in Bird et. al. (eds.) *Mapping the futures* Routledge, London, 3-29
- Henderson G (1998) 'Landscape is dead, long live landscape': a handbook for skeptics *Journal of Historical Geography* 24, 94-100
- Holloway L (2000) 'Hell on earth and paradise all at the same time': the production of smallholding space in the British countryside *Area*, 32.3, 307-315
- Hunt J D (1991) The garden as cultural object, in S Wrede and W H Adams (eds.) *Denatured Visions: Landscape and Culture in the Twentieth Century* The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 19-32
- Irvine S and L Johnson and K Peters (1999) Community gardens and sustainable land use planning: a case study of the Alex Wilson Community Garden *Local Environment* 4, 33-46
- Jackson J B (1986) The vernacular landscape, in E Penning-Rosewell and D Lowenthal (eds.) *Landscape meanings and values* Unwin Hyman, London, 65-77
- Leneman L (1989) *Fit for heroes? Land settlement in Scotland after World War I* Aberdeen University Press, Aberdeen

- Leathlean H (1997) Louden's Gardener's Magazine and the morality of landscape *Ecumene* 4(1), 86-107
- Lefebvre H (1996) *Writings on cities* (selected, translated and introduced by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas) Blackwell, Oxford
- Lister R P (1985) *Allotments* Whittington Press, Gloucestershire
- MacDougall I (1990) *Voices from the hunger marches: personal recollections by Scottish hunger marchers of the 1920s and 1930s* Polygon, Edinburgh
- MacDougall A (1993) *Knoydart: the last Scottish Land Raid* Middlesbrough, Cleveland, Lyndhurst
- McLeod E V (1998) *A war of ideas: British attitudes to the wars against revolutionary France, 1792-1802* Ashgate, Hampshire
- Martin R and T Marsden (1999) Food for urban spaces: the development of urban food production in England and Wales *International Planning Studies* 4, 390-412
- Matless D (1992a) Regional surveys and local knowledges: the geographical imagination in Britain, 1918-39 *Trans. Inst. Br. Geographers* 17, 464-480
- Matless D (1992b) An occasion for geography: landscape, representation, and Foucault's corpus *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 10, 41-56
- Matless D (1994) Doing the English village, 1945-1990: an essay in imaginative geography in Cloke et al, eds *Writing the rural: five cultural geographies* Chapman, London, 7-88
- Matless D (1996) The geographical self, the nature of the social and geoaesthetics *Progress in Human Geography* 21, 393-405
- Matless D (1998) *Landscape and Englishness* Reaktion, London
- May J (1996) Globalization and the politics of place: place and identity in an inner London neighbourhood *Trans. Inst. Br. Geographers* 21, 194-215
- Meacham S (1999) *Regaining paradise: Englishness and the early Garden City movement* Yale University Press, New Haven
- Meller H (1990) *Patrick Geddes: social evolutionist and city planner* Routledge, London
- Mitchell D (1996) *The lie of the land* University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis
- Mittler D (1999) Environmental space and barriers to local sustainability: evidence from Edinburgh, Scotland *Local Environment* 4, 353-365
- Moran D (1991) *The allotment movement in Britain* Peter Land Publishing, New York
- Morris M (1996) 'Tha't be like a blush-rose when tha' grows up, my little lass'; English cultural and gendered identity in *The Secret Garden Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 14, 59-78
- Moselle B (1995) Allotments, enclosure, and proletarianization in early nineteenth-century southern England *Economic History Review* 48(3), 482-500
- Muir E (1999) *Scottish journey* Mainstream Publishing, Edinburgh [first published 1935]

- Nash C (1996) Reclaiming vision: looking at landscape and the body *Gender, Place and Culture* 3, 149-169
- Nimmo I. (1996) Brigade of greenfingers, in *Edinburgh's green heritage*, City of Edinburgh Council, Edinburgh
- Olwig K R (1996) Recovering the substantive nature of landscape *Annals - Association of American Geographers* 86, 630-653
- Onslow W (1886) *Landlords and allotments: the history and the present condition of the allotment system* Longmans, Green, and Co., London
- Pile S (1997) Opposition, political identities, and spaces of resistance in S Pile and M Keith (eds.) *Geographies of resistance* Routledge, London and New York, 1-32
- Pile S and N Thrift (eds.) (1995) *Mapping the subject: geographies of cultural transformation* Routledge, London
- Pugh S (ed.) (1990) *Reading landscape: country-city-capital* Manchester University Press, Manchester
- Rich, A (1995) *Dark fields of the republic* WW Norton, New York
- Robertson I (1995) *The historical geography of social protest in Highland Scotland, 1914-c1939* Unpublished thesis for Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education and University of Bristol
- Rose G (1994) The cultural politics of place: local representation and oppositional discourse in two films *Trans. Inst. Br. Geographers* 19, 46-60
- Rose G (1997) Performing inoperative community: the space and the resistance of some community arts projects, in S Pile and M Keith (eds.) *Geographies of resistance* Routledge, London and New York, 184-202
- Rose G (1993) *Feminism and geography* Polity, Cambridge
- Sharpe T (1946) *The anatomy of the village* Harmondsworth
- Sheilds R (1991) *Places on the margin. Alternative geographies of modernity* Routledge, London
- Smith N (1993) Homeless/global: scaling places, in Bird et. al. (eds.) *Mapping the Futures* Routledge, London, 87-119
- Smith S (1999) The *cultural politics of difference*, in D Massey, J Allen, P Sarre (eds.) *Human geography today* Polity Press, Cambridge, 129-150
- Smout T C (1987) *A century of the Scottish people, 1830-1950* Fontana Press, London
- Spirn A W (1988) The poetics of city and nature: towards a new aesthetic for urban design *Landscape Journal* 7, 108-126
- Stocker L and K Barnett (1998) The significance and praxis of community-based sustainability projects: community gardens in Western Australia *Local Environment* 3, 180-189

- Thorpe H (1975) The homely allotment: from rural dole to urban amenity: a neglected aspect of urban land use *Geography* 268, 169-83
- Warner S B (1987) *To dwell is to garden: a history of Boston's community gardens* Northeastern University Press, Boston
- Westwood, S and J Williams (1997) *Imagining cities: scripts, signs, and memory* Routledge, London and New York
- Whatmore S (1999) Hybrid geographies: rethinking the 'human' in human geography, in D Massey, J Allen, P Sarre (eds.) *Human geography today* Polity Press, Cambridge, 22-39
- Whatmore S and L Thorne (1997) Nourishing networks: alternative geographies of food, in D Goodman and M Watts (eds.) *Globalising food: agrarian questions and global restructuring* Routledge, London, 287-304
- Wilson (1970) *The Chartist movement in Scotland* Augustus M. Kelley, New York
- Wiltshire R and R Azuma (2000) Rewriting the plot: sustaining allotments in the UK and Japan *Local Environment* 5, 139-151
- Wiltshire R, D Crouch and R Azuma (2000) Contesting the plot: environmental politics and the allotment garden in Britain and Japan, in P Stott and S Sullivan (eds.) *Political ecology: power, myth, and science* Edward Arnold, London, 203-217
- Williams R (1973) *The country and the city* Chatto and Windus, London
- Williams R (1990) Between country and city in S Pugh (ed.) *Reading landscape: country-city-capital* Manchester University Press, Manchester, 7-18
- Withers C (1996) Place, memory, monument: memorializing the past in contemporary Highland Scotland *Ecumene* 3, 325-344