



THE FEDERATION OF
EDINBURGH AND DISTRICT
ALLOTMENTS AND
GARDENS ASSOCIATIONS

FEDAGA – where we came from and what we do

Stuart McKenzie

FEDAGA stands for *The Federation of Edinburgh and District Allotments and Gardens Associations* and is the representative body for affiliated Allotment Garden Associations in and around Edinburgh. We currently represent all Edinburgh Council sites as well as many independently run sites.

To tell the story of our foundation we have to look back to the establishment of allotments after WW1. Allotment holders in Scotland were represented by the *Scottish National Union of Allotment Holders*, formed in 1917. The union represented ploholders on hurriedly created allotments around the country. Back then, Britain was facing a severe food shortage during the First World War. A great deal of our food was imported and the U Boats and naval blockades meant Britain was starving.

Depression

A new crisis unfolded during the great depression in 1932 that prompted the creation of the *Scottish Allotments Scheme for the Unemployed*. The Union was concerned that unemployed people were giving up their plots as they could not afford to keep them. At the time the Union's total funds amounted to £18 but they still wanted to do what they could to help. The Scheme found plots and also provided seeds, seed potatoes, manure and tools. It was funded through donations, including those from Kings George V and VI.

To give an idea of the scale of the operation, in 1932:

- Over 2,000 people were helped by the scheme.
- Three quarters of them had plots for the first time.
- The scheme distributed almost 3,000 tools, 18,000 packets of seeds, 30 tons of seed potatoes and 16 tons of manure.

This is also the justification for the formation of FEDAGA.

What we do

FEDAGA was established around the same time. We promote the interests of our members, negotiating with the Council, trying to improve conditions, lobbying on allotment matters and providing discounted trading of



Illustration © Jenny Cook



Photos from the joint show in September. All photos © FEDAGA or RCHS

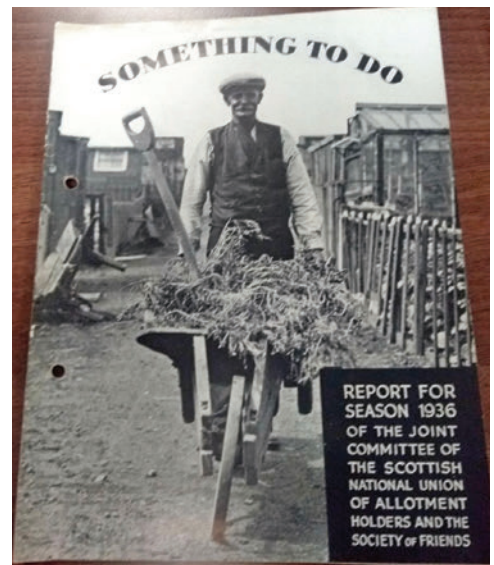
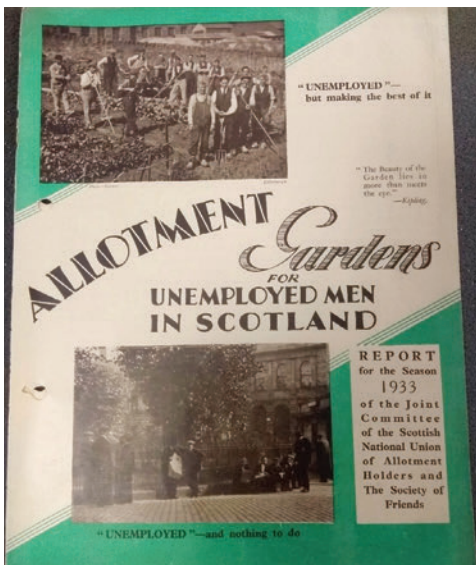
seeds, seed potatoes and onion sets. We've recently added leek plants to our annual order form and expect to supply around 20,000 leek plants next June. A monthly email newsletter is sent out to members. This replaced a paper version that we produced every six months and was both labour intensive and expensive. It has become an essential part of bringing members together, informing them of events but also providing useful advice. How did we ever manage before the Internet?

All Edinburgh Council allotment holders are given the opportunity to join FEDAGA with their annual rental invoice. The annual subscription is £3.50 which includes £2 that is returned to the member's own site to support initiatives there. The remaining £1.50

helps with administration costs, an annual show, visits, trading and a small grants scheme open to member sites. Non-Edinburgh Council sites are also welcome to join at £1.50 per plot. FEDAGA negotiated a flagship allotment policy document "Cultivating Communities" to which Edinburgh Council is committed. This has been taken forward in a series of Allotment Strategy policy documents. We also meet with Council representatives to discuss how to improve, extend and develop the allotment service.

Show

We still hold an Allotment Show each year. This started in 1953 when it was attended by the great and good of Edinburgh. It was held in the Walpole Hall beside St Mary's





Cathedral on Palmerston Place. Entertainment was provided by the Musselburgh Fishwives Choir and the day ended with a ceilidh. For the past four years, we have joined up with The Caley and held the Show in Saughton Gardens, Edinburgh. The exhibition area now extends into the courtyard which is covered by a large marquee. This has proved to be a great success, and includes tables of vegetables, flowers, cakes, and jams from members of both organisations. In 2025 there were 85 exhibitors, the most we've had in recent years.

The law

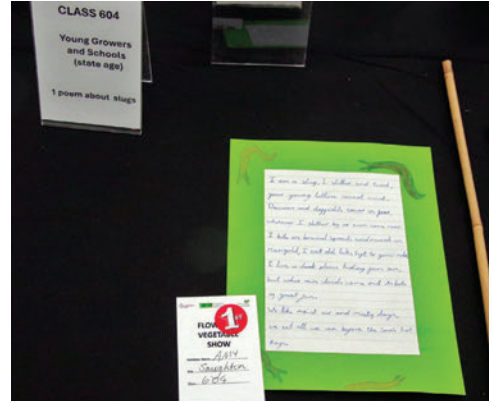
FEDAGA also campaign to prevent any further loss of allotments and have already met with a measure of success. The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 (Part 9) strengthens councils' responsibility to ensure adequate provision of allotments to the public and was established to encourage the development of new sites.

So, what is the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act? The Act puts the onus on local councils to maintain an allotment waiting list. The list should not be longer than half of the allotment plots in that council area. This means no one should wait longer than five years. The Act also sets out a process whereby communities may identify suitable unused land owned by the council, arrange to sublet it and create an allotment

site there. This would involve planning, financing, designing, building and then running the site including enforcing rules, running a waiting list and collecting rents. Quite a task. Killandean Allotments in Livingston are a good example of doing just that – they built their own very successful site, funded by The Lottery and other green initiatives. All plots are a good size, with a shed and water harvesting. A composting toilet is also installed. The Scottish Government recently reviewed how successful the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act has been. Their question was: has it resulted in more allotments and shorter times on the waiting list? Sadly not.

Lists

I was called to the inquiry to give evidence and explained that in Edinburgh we have about 5,500 people on the waiting list. We have a stock of 1,700 plots. To satisfy the current demand with a half-plot for everybody on the waiting list, we would need 77 acres of land. To give you an idea of what that means, the whole of Inverleith Park is 54 acres. The waiting times in Edinburgh are at the 10 to 14-year mark at the moment; that is, people arriving on allotment sites have waited 14 years. I recently met someone who arrived on my site and I said, "You do not look old enough. You don't have grey hair like the rest of us." He replied, "I put my name down when I was 12". That is what you need



to do these days. Since then, the list has grown. There are now between 9 and 10 thousand people waiting for allotments in Edinburgh. That's equivalent to three Inverleith Parks, which is frankly unachievable. Talking of Inverleith Park, the allotments there were created following food shortages after World War One, as Edinburgh Council's response to the state of national emergency regarding food shortages. In February 1918 the Council considered a motion regarding the giving up of five acres of ground for allotments in Inverleith Park. A fence would be moved from around the entire park to protect the new allotments from sheep. It was agreed that rent of the allotments should be 10 shillings each – quite a contrast to the current annual rent for a Council plot of £169.05. Incidentally, 10 shillings in 1918 is worth about £25 these days.

I was lucky and only had to wait two months for my plot back in 1986. Then, they even asked if you'd like more than one. I hope that soon the waiting time can be reduced by some investment by Scottish Government to help the creation of new sites which will allow more people to take part in this wonderful pastime. Until then, put your children's names down, just in case they want one.

Stuart McKenzie
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Stuart rented his first allotment in 1986 having spent two months on the waiting list. He was also offered a second one should he want another. Times have certainly changed. Current President of Edinburgh's Allotment Federation supporting plot holders throughout the city. Look out for the annual show in early September partnered with The Caley.

