

Greens and the British

Sumiyuki Sakasegawa

Abstract

「一億総園芸家」と称されるイギリス人は、古代よりヤドリギ、サンザシ、ヒイラギ等に代表される緑を「命の象徴」とみなし、その後も野原や、畑地、庭の様々な草木を鑑賞し、生活のコンパニオン、心身の癒しの提供者としても愛しんできた。

筆者は既に本紀要に「庭とイギリス人」の題目でイギリス人と庭や草木との深い関わりについて考察してきたが、本稿ではエンクロージャー等を機に誕生、産業革命、二度の世界大戦を経て更に発展し、利用者に果菜等の自家栽培農産物はもとより、草花、灌木等を、又、野生生物にも快適な生息地を提供してきたアロットメント（市民農園）の歴史と現状を、関連文献、インターネット等で入手した情報をもとに「イギリス人と緑の関係」という観点から考察する。

Introduction

The British people, who prefer a home-centred life-style and have found an essential outlet for individuality and creativity in gardening, are called 'a nation of gardeners' and green, an important religious symbol of life and eternity, seems to be inseparable from their lives. Their towns and villages are rich in houses with back gardens full of plants with green leaves such as hostas, geraniums, hollyhocks, and roses, and, though much less in number, stately homes with landscape gardens, as well as parks, commons, and public foot paths, which, with a variety of wildlife, never fail to convey an air of rural tranquility, and are valued by both tourists and local users, and in which they can enjoy a relaxed life: peace, serenity and a marvellous freedom from the tumult of the hectic world (urban life). Urban cemeteries and church yards full of greens are also places rich in wildlife.

For the nature-loving, country-walk-addicted British who yearn for a refuge from the noise and bustle of city life, their love of gardening and being in the open air appears to be their way of getting back to nature blessed with peace and tranquility. Many of them, if they had a choice, would leave the

city for a smaller town or village as Shakespeare and many other men of letters and wealth have done, or go and live with nature in the Lake District like William Wordsworth. If they cannot afford it, they will have to satisfy themselves with a day out or holidays in the country which offers a quieter, more serene communion with nature. The green countryside, whose pure fresh air and idyllic atmosphere cleanse the fatigued body and spirit alike, is no other than the dialiser for the fatigued urban workers.

Gardening or strolling in the countryside, it is indeed a wholesome and satisfying activity which lifts the spirit and frees the mind. It is an escape from everyday urban environment and from reality of restrictions and monotonies of everyday life, and a welcome chance to re-charge their physical and mental batteries with the clean, fresh air of the countryside.

The greens of Britain are not, however, necessarily safe. Although there are greens-restoring 'remedies' such as European Commission grants for the maintenance of drystone walls and for seeding wild flowers in the meadows, governmental subsidies for hedging, grants from the government in compensation for not improving moorland (ex. Exmoor National Park), and various conservation-minded petitions by landscape-appreciating holidaymakers, it is also true that they are nevertheless threatened by nature-taming activities such as insensitive agricultural policy (of intensive farming by mechanisation, rural depopulation-helping grants, etc.), Forestry Commission policies (of commercial coniferous afforestation with pine needles, reclamation, etc.), road and housing construction in the green belts, dam/reservoir construction, mineral extraction, military use, and so forth.

In such a background, allotments and gardens are two of the most common conservation activities carried out by common people.

I have already shown in my previous thesis how important gardens are for the British people. In this thesis I will see how the allotment — a small piece of land rented by a person to grow vegetables, flowers, shrubs, etc. on, started and has been maintained and developed in Britain, and the allotment movements in Cambridgeshire as well.

< *History of Allotment* >

The patchwork-like allotment landscapes, which are vividly or nostalgically depicted in novels such as Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, the Field Gardens supporter Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil, Coming up for Air* by George Orwell, himself a keen gardener, in paintings by a number of painters such as Helen Copsey, and in TV serials such as *EastEnders*, are still a familiar and ubiquitous feature of the British landscape which can be enjoyed by walkers, drivers, and railway/coach travellers alike. Such scenery never fails to satisfy nostalgia for the world we think we have lost. [Gardening has occupied a central place in British folk art, literature and culture.]

The allotment or land 'allotted' to an individual labourer for him to cultivate in his spare time for the provision of food for himself and his dependents, was originally envisaged as a philanthropic gesture of compensation to the poor smallholders, cottagers and squatters alienated from any rights to the use of common land through the enclosure of the common fields, common lands, and wastes by the rich and powerful. The land was either attached to the cottage itself and rented by trustees or by the parish, or took the form of a 'cowgate', which was the right to use a common pasture.

The urban allotment, introduced from the early eighteenth century alongside 'small gardens' or 'guinea gardens' cultivated by middle-class citizens as both ornamental and productive gardens in developing industrial towns such as Coventry, Sheffield and Birmingham, was founded on the rural tradition, providing the urban poor (mostly non-agricultural labourers who had only recently moved into the town and were being exploited by the factory system) with the opportunity to grow fruit and vegetables and thus supplement their low wages. [The more ornamental cottage gardens or flower gardens were inspired by Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932), Vita Sackvill-West (1892-1962), and others at around the turn of the century.]

When the commons were virtually ended by the Enclosures which culminated in the period of Parliamentary Enclosures between 1750 and 1850, the modern allotment movement was given birth to and allotments were recommended as an alternative to the rigours and expense of the Poor Law (laws providing for support of the poor from parish funds). As early as

during the Civil War, however, hoping to re-win their rights to common, the 'diggers' unsuccessfully invaded common land at Campe Close at St George's Hill, Walton-on-Thames in Surrey, and elsewhere,¹ and in 1731 in Birmingham, a flourishing allotment system existed within the urban boundary and immediately adjacent to the urban core.²

The advocacy of allotments was pursued in the columns of the *Gentleman's Magazine* from 1765 onwards with "cow and cot" scheme, and the first Inclosure Act to stipulate that in the allocation of land, a portion should be set aside as allotments for the labouring poor, was passed in 1806 for the village of Great Somerford, Wiltshire, and the first Public Act to make specific reference to the provision of allotments for the poor came in 1819 followed by many allotment bills/acts, though it was not until 1845 that this kind of provision became mandatory with the General Inclosure Act of 1845, which ratified the association of enclosure with allotment provision.³ Even then, however, many landowners and farmers resented the idea of allotment fearing that the more the labourers worked for themselves on the allotments, the less they would work for them (landowners and farmers).

But thanks to efforts by many remarkable Victorian innovators (such as John Stevens Henslow, the rector of Hitcham who advocated and campaigned for allotments by turning part of his glebe land into allotment gardens [At a local level the clergy often persuaded landlords to provide land for allotments], Mrs Ann Gilbert of Sussex who diminished pauperism by providing the unemployed with ground on which to grow their own food, and Sir John Lawes, another pioneer of horticultural science who established allotment gardens and a licensed club at his inherited estate in Hertfordshire⁴), as well as the Allotment Extension Act (1882), the Allotments Act (1887), the consolidating Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908 which became the basis of the modern responsibility of local councils to provide allotments 'on demand' (by any six resident registered electors), and the Allotments Acts 1922-50, the allotment movement revived and gradually moved from being part of the fabric of rural life to the framework of land use and social relationships in towns and cities. In 1913 the allotments had reached 450,000-600,000 in number, and when the Defence of the Realm Act of 1916

which empowered the local authorities to take over for allotments without the owners' consent any small bit of unoccupied space including playing fields and undeveloped land to counter the Kaiser's threat to "starve the British people, until they, who have refused peace, will kneel and plead for it",⁵ there came out a dramatic increase in acreage of the allotment (See the figures in the following page) and the number rose to 1,300,000-1,500,000, or one plot for every five families by the end of 1917,⁶ and in 1918 the National Union of Allotment Holders was founded. The increase being much bigger in urban areas, the First World War gave the allotment movement an urban emphasis it has never since lost. After the war, however, the emergency land, temporarily requisitioned, was returned to its original use and the inter-war housebuilding, expanded to the formula of 'twelve to the acre', gave millions of families a domestic garden for the first time. As a result, by 1929 the number of allotments in England and Wales fell below one million, and in 1939 there were only 815,000 plots left,⁷ though there was continued demand for allotments from returning ex-servicemen and poor working men. [J.B. Priestley, noting the dire need for allotments, stressed in his BBC radio programme on Sunday, 21st July, 1940 that "that house and garden ought to be used whether the owner, who has gone to America, likes it or not" for billeting and allotments.⁸]

But again on the outbreak of the Second World War, there came out a 'Dig for Victory' campaign (organised and promoted by the Ministry of Agriculture) which closely followed a similar campaign during the First World War, and about the middle of the war over half of manual workers kept either an allotment or a garden, in which not only vegetables were grown but also hens and pigs were kept. There were probably 1,500,000 allotment gardens by the end of the war.

But an inevitable decline followed, due to the return of the wartime emergency sites to their peacetime uses, post-war reconstruction and redevelopment of city centres for housing, a huge increase in suburban houses with large gardens, intensive agriculture, advances in living standards and aspirations, the betterment of social welfare, better employment, etc. The plots on railway land provided by railway companies also decreased due to the

rationalisation of lines in the ‘Beeching’ years, and the allotment again got associated with the negative images of poverty, charity and wartime needs. [The Chairman of the British Rails Board, Richard Beeching, recommended in his *Beeching Report* of 1963 (officially *The Reshaping of British Railways*) that the surviving 29,000km route open for traffic be reduced by more than 50% and 2,300 stations closed (out of more than 6,000). British Rail had 75,000 individual plots in 1950.⁹]

But thanks to “the greening of the cities” movement in the 70’s and 80’s, new ecological awareness, the oil crisis of 1973, large-scale and longterm unemployment in the 80’s, the government-commissioned ‘Thorp Report’ in 1969 (which, submitted by Harry Thorp, professor of geography at the University of Birmingham and his committee members, advocated that allotments, which carried ‘stigma of charity’, should be improved and upgraded into ‘leisure gardens’ serving as a recreational facility for the whole family¹⁰), etc., allotment is regaining its power little by little, though, as is seen in the following diagrams the number of plots is on the gradual decrease:

<i>Year</i>	<i>number of plots</i>
1873	244,268
1890	448,586
1914	674,000
1918	1,500,000
1928	1,024,000
1930	965,000
1934	936,000
1939	814,917
1943	1,399,935
1948	1,117,308
1950	1,100,000
1955	1,000,000
1960	860,000
1965	650,000
1967	600,000

(Source: The Thorp Report quoted at <http://www.parliament.stationery-office.co.uk>)

Allotment acreage and numbers

<i>Year</i>	<i>total plots</i>	<i>acreage</i>
1935	609,352	59,403
1950	1,039,233	105,281
1960	801,061	85,169
1970	532,964	58,242
1975	439,750	47,455
1978	479,301	49,105
1996	295,630	25,393 (for England alone)

(source: *The Allotment*)

According to NSALG (the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Garden, the main body of the allotment movement in England and Wales to which most allotment societies are affiliated), England and Wales saw almost a 43% drop in allotment provision (excluding that of private sites whose figures are not available) in the last couple of decades, and their possible scenario of allotments in England and Wales for 35 years from now gives a more pessimistic figure: acreage less than 10,000 in 2030, and number of plots less than 100,000 in 2022.¹¹

The other side of the coin shows, however, that there is a keener interest in allotment as awareness of the environment and ecology has grown among men and women of all ages, and that the proportion of women ploholders has increased from only 3% 30 years ago to 15% in 1997.¹²

Allotment in present situations

Despite the continuing decrease in number and acreage as was shown in the previous pages, the allotment is now raised in status and recognition, and used by a cross-section of the whole community, forming part of life of one in 65

families in Britain.¹³ (One in 40 households in Britain has an allotment¹⁴ and offering benefits for the community at large.)

For England and Wales there are just over 305,000 council plots with an estimated 1,220,500 people involved in allotments,¹⁵ and the standard size of an allotment plot is 10 rods or 300 square yards (250 square metres).¹⁶ [A definition of allotment is, according to Section 22 of the Allotments Act of 1922, 'an allotment not exceeding forty poles in extent which is wholly or mainly cultivated by the occupier for the production of vegetables or fruit crops for consumption by himself or his family.'¹⁷ (A pole is a little over 30 square yards.)]

As far as the consideration for the disabled is concerned, 146 allotments sites have special facilities for disabled people, helped by raised beds – but that is only 2% of the total.¹⁸

As for the ownership, 25,393 acres (295,630 plots) are owned by the councils (85%) and 11% are owned by private owners as of 1996.¹⁹

Of late, holding an allotment is regarded as important in many ways: for people to make identity by having his own space to look after, to promote self-respect, to show friendship and care, to give people a means to get out of their own home, to join others and make a community, to recover people from crime, to provide first-hand lessons in sustainability and to make good our future environment. There is also the role they play in conservation: in making green lungs for people to breathe clean and fresh air in, green wedges penetrating into the urban structure, and green spaces and neighbourhoods.

In Cambridgeshire, where there is also seen a vivid allotment revival movement which includes promotion of allotments by issuing newsletters/leaflets with advisory, announcement of events, etc., there are 4,770 allotment plots on 208 sites covering an area of 950 acres and involving 20,000 people.²⁰ According to the Cambridge Allotment newsletters and books such as *Allotment* and *City Fields, Country Gardens - Allotment Essays*, plot holding represents and/or offers:

- a sought-after privacy in the green oases within densely built-up areas
- the private world concealed from the road; treasured reclusiveness

- a haven of individuality and vigour where solace can be found in the midst of a more sophisticated, but ultimately alien world
- the ideal refuge for a man to freely gratify his idiosyncracies and creativity away from the sounds and associations of home
- escape from contemporary pressures in the outside world and the romance of a return to a separate way of life
- retreat from the overcrowded family home
- a respite from overcrowded city tenements
- a relaxation without the constraints of everyday conventions
- a close relationship to the earth, something increasingly missing in our society, but essential as our surroundings become more artificial
- an individuality (expressed by the shed, etc.) otherwise absent in the lives of many working people and rebellious spirit
- self-help-oriented, getting-by-on-one's-own feeling
[The combination of self-help and mutual aid has definitely characterised the allotment world.]
- an idyllic, non-commercial way of living
- a sense of reciprocity (by exchanging the products with neighbours)
- a sense of equality, classlessness: everyone is just a gardener on the plot
- opportunities of co-operative forms of social behaviour and shared activities among the plotters

Serving as oases of green land in towns and cities with a variety of bushes, grassland, nectar producing plants, trees, etc., allotments provide a diversity of habitat and act as shelter and haven for wildlife species of birds such as blackbirds, starlings, thrushes, robins, sparrows, tits, finches, tawny owls, jays, wrens, and bullfinches, insects such as bumblebees, ladybirds and butterflies to name just a few, and mammals such as field voles, hedgehogs, badgers and foxes. Evidence from the NSALG shows that allotments have on average an up to 30% higher species diversity than urban parks²¹.

The allotmenters, however, have faced a number of problems affecting allotments. In Cambridgeshire, for example, they have faced:

- evil affect of pesticides, chemical fertilisers, etc. on wildlife
- vandalism with theft
- growing pressures on land-use for development purposes
- vacant plots caused by lack of interest due to different life styles, insufficient advertisements, etc.

[Other common reasons for vacancy seen elsewhere are: death, illness, old age, insecurity of tenure, lack of PR by the councils (for example few seem to know that all local councils have to provide plots if more than five people demand them to do so²²), poor facilities (allotments without toilets, poor quality of fencing, etc.), the distance from the water tap and home, bad appearance (squalid, disgraceful, derelict, sordid, unsightly allotment sites, espeially the sheds, caused by negligence and often too much of individualism), and so forth.]

To counter these problems, the allotment holders in Cambridgeshire are now taking such measures [taken by many other allotment societies as well] as follows:²³

- cooperation with and lobbying the council to obtain incentives like clearing plots by the councils for new gardeners, and an offer of special rates for retired or unemployed people
- PRs of allotments by publishing newsletters, brochures, etc.
- cooperation and information exchange with other allotments societies, the NSALG (National Society of Allotments and Leisure Gardeners), etc.
- holding events such as: Allotments Network stall at Farmers' Market, Cambridge [on the corner of the Market Square facing Great St Mary's Church], garden(ing) club shows elsewhere, etc.
- encouraging allotment gardeners to continue to confidently defend their land against the Cambridge United Football Club's planning application for a larger stadium that will take part of the nearby Elfleda Road allotments. [Compromises in favour of the

allotmenters (plot holders) were reached between the Whitehall Allotment Society and the CUFC, agreeing to, among others, the following points:

- 1) reduction in the original proposed take of allotments
- 2) offer of adequate replacement allotments
- 3) appropriate compensation for the allotment society
- 4) respect for habitat value of land

They also cite similar successful allotment saving cases (from developemnt) such as one in Bath.]

- promotion of allotments for biodiversity – coppice plots, wildlife/nature (conservation) areas, hedges, organic cultivation, individual wildlife schemes, creation of beetle banks (= uncultivated, permanent raised banks), buffer zones/strips, ditches, hedges, bat boxes, bird boxes, ponds, etc.
- efforts to make wildlife-friendly biodiversity-oriented allotments in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, promotion of planting of community orchards, creation of community gardens aimed at encouraging local people to take up an interest in gardening, and awareness campaign against the use of horticultural peat – since 1945, 94% of lowland peat bogs have been lost in the UK, along with wildlife that lived there.
- cooperation with RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) [e.g., in the Big Garden Birdwatch 2000 (part of UK Wild 2000) – the biggest and longest running garden bird survey – run by the YOC (Young Ornithologists' Club), the junior section of the RSPB), the Wildlife Trust, other allotment associations/societies (even one in the West African country of Mali!), etc.
- holding allotment forums to discuss strategic and development issues surrounding allotments and liaison meetings between representatives of allotment societies and City Council officers and Councillors.

Concluding remarks

In this hectic world, the health and therapeutic values of gardening, the

value of allotment gardening in leisure and exercise provision, and the growing of fresh fruit, vegetables and flowers which not only enables the plot holder to consume safe food of their own production but also contributes to the 'greening' of the city, will all become more and more important for the maintenance of the quality of people's lives and healthy and sustainable neighbourhoods rich in wildlife. One can see the evidence, for example, in the active publicity homepage newsletters by the Cambridge Allotment Network.

Food grown on allotments can contribute to a healthy diet and can lessen the impact of food production on the environment. Local food production can reduce food transportation, reduce the waste produced by food packing and reduce the use of agricultural chemicals in favour of the increased use of recycled matter.²⁴

Allotment holding will also contribute a lot in stopping or at least slowing the decline in numbers of many birds such as song thrushes, house sparrows and starlings by providing habitats and main food sources such as slugs and snails at places where arable farmlands fail to do so with widespread application of pesticides such as molluscicides. An 'allotment forestry' (coined by Geoff Sinclair of the Ipswich Wildlife Group) has been practised for the last ten years at an Ipswich allotment cite where hazel is coppiced for beanpoles and peasticks²⁵ followed by cites in Cambridge where efforts are made to make allotments better for wildlife, e.g., with gardeners encouraged to devote a small corner of their allotment or garden to plants that provide nectar throughout the season for colonies of pollinating insects such as bumble bees.²⁶

Allotments are indeed excellent places for people to combine exercise, relaxation, growing their own food and/or green foliage, and observing wildlife at close quarters, all of which help heal frustrations and worries of the modern people.

With these benefits in the background, there will be more calls for green-conscious residents to get growing on allotments – green lungs for towns and cities, havens for wildlife, and possibilities for horticultural therapy, and the classic and nostalgic image of a robin perched on the top of a garden fork may once again become a reality.

Notes

- 1 D. Crouch & C. Ward, *Allotment* (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 1997) pp.39-40.
- 2 *ibid.* p.66.
- 3 *ibid.* pp.46-48.
- 4 *ibid.* pp.51-57.
- 5 *ibid.* p.70.
- 6 *ibid.* p.71.
- 7 *ibid.* pp.73-74.
- 8 J.B. Priestley, *Postscripts* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1940) p.38.
- 9 D. Crouch & M. Stott (ed.), *City Fields, Country Gardens – Allotment Essay by Michael Hyde* (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 1998) p.49.
- 10 D. Crouch & C. Ward, p.7.
- 11 <http://www.nsalg.co.uk/2035.htm>
- 12 D. Crouch & M. Stott (ed.), p.vi.
- 13 D. Crouch & C. Ward, p.xiv.
- 14 *ibid.* p.239.
- 15 <http://www.allotments.net/habitat/habitat.htm>
- 16 D. Crouch & C. Ward, p.278.
- 17 ditto.
- 18 D. Crouch & C. Ward, p.xvii.
- 19 *ibid.* p.xv.
- 20 <http://www.nsalg.co.uk/acreages.htm>
- 21 <http://www.allotments.net/habitat/habitat.htm>
- 22 D. Crouch & C. Ward, p.xvi.
- 23 *Cambridge Allotments Newsletter* No.1-57.
- 24 <http://www.parliament.uk>
- 25 *Cambridge Allotments Newsletter* No.38., cf. <http://www.rspb.org.uk>
- 26 *ibid.* No.37.

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- <http://www.allotments.net/allotments/City/EmptyCommon/EmptyCommon.htm>
- <http://www.allotments.net/allotments/Whitehill/agreement.htm>
- <http://www.allotments.net/allotments/VineryRoad/wildlife.htm>
- <http://www.allotments.net/general/news/archives.htm> (CAN back numbers)
- <http://www.allotments.net/general/news/archives.htm> (Newsletters)
- <http://www.allotments.net/general/links.htm>
- <http://www.allotments.net/habitat/habitat.htm>
- <http://www.allotments.net/mali/ontheonline.htm> (Mali allotments)
- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radiocambridgeshire>
- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/ukwild> (Big Garden Birdwatch 2000)
- <http://www.btinternet.com/~richard.wiltshire/allot1.htm>
- <http://www.btinternet.com/~richard.wiltshire/uplands1.htm> (the largest allotment in Britain)
- <http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/services/agenda21.htm> (C. Sustainable City)
- <http://www.cambridge-news.co.uk>
- <http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk>
- <http://www.camcnty.gov.uk/sub/cntryside/biodiv/index.html>
- <http://www.camcnty.gov.uk/sub/cntryside/biodiv/plans/thrush.html>

(Thrush)

<http://www.channel4.com/nextstep>

http://www.commonground.org.uk/Community_Orchards.html

<http://edm.ais.co.uk> (Government motions)

<http://www.hdra.org.uk/gardens.htm>

<http://www.lineone.net/express/00/01/16/features/f6100gardendiggers-d.html>

<http://www.naturalhub.com>

<http://www.ncare.co.uk/nsalg/regional.htm> (Ipswich allotments)

<http://news2.thls.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/health> (Healthy Living Centre at Kings Lynn)

<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk> (People, Land, and Sustainability)

<http://www.nsalg.demon.co.uk> (The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardens)

<http://www.parliament.uk>

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/>

<http://www.saundersallotment.co.uk/>(Hampshire allotments)

<http://www.sustainablecity.net>

<http://www.sutton.gov.uk/LEISUR/Children/parks.htm>

<http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~kitchgar/> (Kitchen Garden Magazine)

<http://vegie.homepage.com/index.htm>