

My Dad was strictly a War Time Allotmenteer. I am sure it was not that he responded to the blandishments of the Government's "Dig for Victory" campaign but he was very aware that my Mother was wasting too much of her time in the long queues outside Brown's and Turner's (local greengrocers in Capel Road) and that we were all still hungry. However the real spur came when his parents and sister were evacuated to us when the family home in Birmingham was blitzed and he felt his father needed a daytime bolt hole from an all female household. So Dad took the tenancy of a 10 pole plot (No. 158) early in 1940 where Grandpa undertook most of the planting and pottering while Dad did the heavy digging. To my six-year-old mind all the

"Allotmentees" in those days were very old men, some even older than my Dad who must have been at least 35! They certainly were all men, with the women only called in to help with the harvesting. Such was the war-time demand for allotments that the upper part of Oak Field in Attenborough's Fields, abutting the existing allotments, was converted into plots and many younger local men broke their hearts, their backs and their spades trying to cultivate parkland which had not even been ploughed within living memory - often during a precious 48 hours leave from the Forces. Plot 158 was luckier being low down the slope of the main allotment area (now a paddock for ponies) where, although the heavy London Clay was hard work to dig, it yielded well and we were able to enjoy some bumper crops. There were

strict Bye Laws governing the use of allotment plots in war time - no flowers, no livestock and no pigeons. Water was supplied into conventional, round water-butts with traditional taps-and woe betide any child caught "playing" with the water by one of the "Old Men". No laws against a speedy clout around the ears in those days!

Etiquette decreed that no allotment



work was done on Sunday mornings - most people attended morning service anyway - but in the afternoon or on summer evenings the "Old Men" and their wives, dressed in Sunday Best, would stroll down to inspect their own and their neighbours' plots and compare notes.

We were all, perforce, "organic" in those days (except for the lethal pesticides brewed up at home which would certainly be illegal today - incorporating white lead and arsenic). In addition to National Growmore, purchased from a seed merchant and corn chandler in Lower High Street, where we also bought such seeds (as we did not save it from year to year) and our seed potatoes, we purchased spent hops from Benskins Brewery and an occasional load of horse manure. Grandpa and I,

however, usually went out with a box on wheels and a coal shovel to collect our own horse manure. Most deliveries were made in a horse and cart at that time - milk, bread, coal and, of course, the brewers' drays. There was strict, (although unwritten) rules governing the collection of horse manure, at least according to Grandpa: what was dropped outside your house and was also on your side of the road was yours by right, otherwise if no one else had scooped it up during that day it could be collected up by anyone before it was trampled into the road surface by later traffic. Soot was also saved from our grates and chimneys and allowed to weather for use especially on the onion bed.

Winter storage of produce involved many different strategies in those pre-freezer days. Carrots, beetroot and other roots were stored in "clamps" for later use, parsnips following them after the first frosts which caused an increase in sugar content making them "sweeter". The clamps were usually built on the plots with sand and straw, since using our heavy damp clay it would have caused the root crops to rot. Our onions, once dried, were laid out on an old nursery fire-guard in the roof space. Mother always said that if we received a direct hit from an incendiary bomb we would all go to glory in an aroma of fried onions! Beans were sliced and salted down and soft fruit, plums and tomatoes bottled in Kilner jars. Apples that would keep were laid out on newspaper - again in the roof space - and those that were not "keepers" were sliced into "rings" and dried for the use over

Paddock Road Allotments in War Time 1940—1946 by Christine Cooling

Local History Sheet No.33 (cont'd)

the winter. Potatoes were just stored in hessian sacks in the shed. Brassicas, of course, stood through the winter and one of my least favourite tasks was to pick the frozen sprouts on frosty mornings with numbed fingers, a job which somehow my Mother and my Aunt always managed to avoid. The production of celery and the digging of deep celery trenches and binding the stems with newspaper to encourage blanching was more popular then than now. Although Dad and Grandpa's allotment was productive enough to meet our needs we never aspired to compete with the "star" allotment holders such as Mr Bennell, Mr Cooper, Mr Ridout and "Pop" Seabrook who were always among the winners at Bushey Flower Show and whose produce was the envy of lesser allotment holders.

Then the War was finally over and my Grandparents were able to return to their repaired home. The extension to the allotments into Attenborough's Fields was restored to pasture - although patches of nettles and thistles remained for several years to mark where vegetables had been grown and the land cultivated with so much effort. Gradually the need to supplement the diet with home-grown vegetables grew less and our plot became neglected.

Then Dad received the inevitable letter from the Borough Council stating that "the standard of cultivation on Plot 158 was not up to that expected of its tenants" and suggesting that he surrender it. This he was only too pleased to do and returned to his peacetime pursuit as an enthusiastic member of Oxhey Golf Club.



Oxhey in Pictures

The picture in this article (from a painting by Ian Lyons

1971) was reproduced in the book "Oxhey in Pictures" which was compiled by Christine Cooling and Ian MacKay. as an OVEG project for the Millennium.

There are still copies available at £9.50 each.

Some Oxhey Village tea towels are also still available at £2.50 each.

If you wish to purchase any of these items please contact one of the names mentioned below :

Frances Jaggard	232462
Doreen Hinds	826791
Ian Mackay	234828
Christine Cooling	231638