

# 100 years and still growing

– a celebration of  
Horfield and District Allotments  
Association

2017 marked our 100th anniversary –  
read on for a snapshot of our fascinating history

During World War 1, food supplies were hit by blockades and people were urged to start allotments: HDAA's first meeting was in December 1916 and in 1917 & 1918 we gained access to land at Golden Hill and in other parts of Horfield.

In the early years, nearly all plot holders were men – things are very different in 2018.

## Did you know our local history?



The name Horfield is Anglo-Saxon, and means 'filthy open land'. Bishopston owes its name to James Monk, Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol 1836–1856.

The prison (right-foreground in this photo) was opened in 1883 – built on the site of a 'privately owned pleasure garden'.

Until the 1920s much of the land to the west of the Gloucester Road was open fields with farms, and most of the houses were not built until the 1930s.

## Did you know?

- Quabb Farm, from which HDAA rented land, was located on part of Horfield Common until the 1930s. The word quabb could be a type of fish, or refer to boggy ground.
- The name Golden Hill suggests a beacon-hill.
- Golden Hill Farm was located near Birchall Road, and was only built on in the 1930s.



## Did you know?

- Buffalo Bill's Field was once part of our allotments, and was where the Memorial Ground now stands. It was named after Colonel William Cody who staged his Wild West Show there in 1891. A wooden stadium was built, and 100,000 people saw the show in one week.

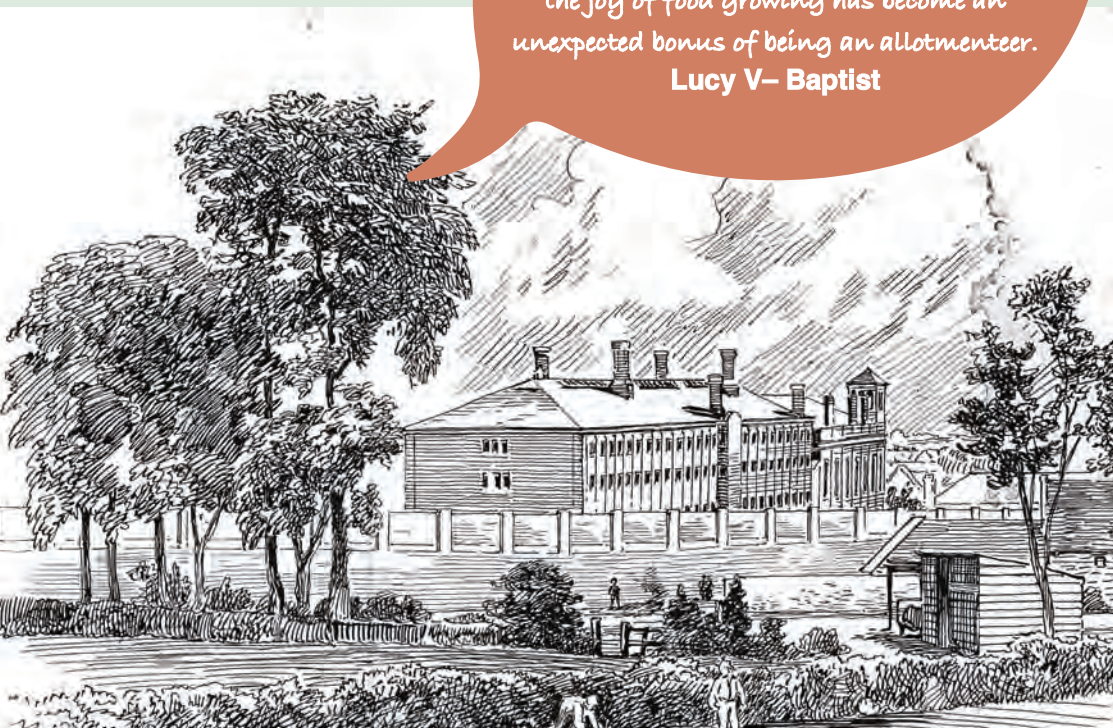
## Did you know?

- An allotment plot is 10 perches in size. A perch (also called a rod, or a pole) is 30 square yards or 25 square metres. Today most people rent half a plot for about £25 a year.
- In 2018 HDAA manages 19 acres across sites at Birchall Road, Wessex Avenue and Golden Hill. Back in the 1920s HDAA managed around 90 acres.

*Food-growing and cooking  
have become two of the enduring loves  
of my life.*

*Helping younger generations discover  
the joy of food growing has become an  
unexpected bonus of being an allotmenteer.*

**Lucy V– Baptist**



*An early illustration showing the prison from the allotments*

## HDAA allotment sites – their names and derivation

- St Agnes Field – used by St Agnes Cricket Club.
- Long's Field – used by Mr Long, a greengrocer.
- Davies (aka Davis) Field – reputedly used by Mr Richard Davies, the undertaker, wheelwright and cattle dealer for grazing animals.
- Baptist Field – used by Horfield Baptist Cricket Club.
- Graham's Field (aka Wessex Avenue) – managed by a farmer, Mr Graham.
- Birchall Road – converted from a rubbish dump in 1931.

Early maps label the Golden Hill fields as 'Gastons', meaning 'rough grassy places'. The Golden Hill site is on high, exposed ground which slopes to the east. The bedrock is just a metre below the surface. So, Golden Hill was a 'filthy open place', of 'rough fields', and not initially suited to food growing. The efforts of 100 years of plot holders have certainly improved the soil and fertility!

The un-made Gaston's Lane (or Donkey Lane) from Bishop Road to Longmead Avenue is an ancient route connecting Bristol with Horfield Church. Our current sites are divided into 'fields' by ancient hedges (shown on an 1840s map), the names of which relate to previous uses.

*It's a community of plot holders – exchanging a few words, or swapping produce, sometimes a social event or party, BBQ, sing-song.*  
**Jeremy – Davies Field**

*As the Summer went on we knew we had made the right decision to get the allotment ....We take real pride in being part of the Allotment.*

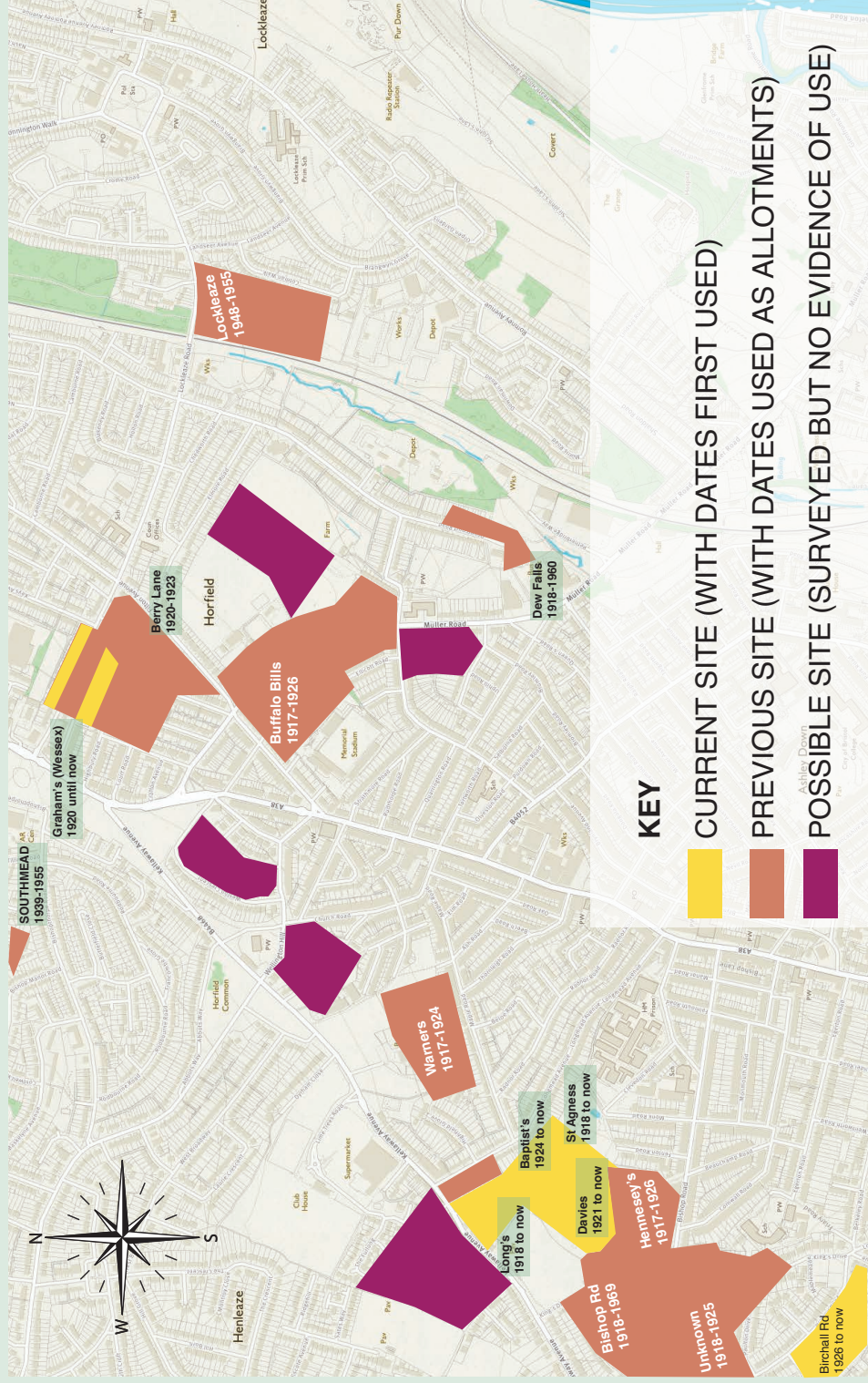
**Anon**

*I remember planting my spuds upside down in Year 1 and then stupidly telling someone.*

**Chris**



# HDAA allotment sites – past and present





Oakley Hall

HDAA bought Oakley Hall, Oak Road, for £620 and in 1931 it became the registered office. The Hall had meeting rooms, a rent office and a seed shop. It had a distinctive smell – a mix of seeds, compost and chemicals. But by the 1990s it had fallen into disrepair and it was sold for £51,000.

Potatoes were a staple food from the outset in WW1. This photo shows the harvest from an early year, probably 1921.



Later, the 1930s and 40s Potato Growing Competition produced huge crops – from just 12 seed potatoes one entrant grew 94 kgs of potatoes.

Campaigns and initiatives

In the 1930s the Government launched the Unemployed Assistance Scheme offering subsidies to promote the uptake of allotments, and HDAA helped hundreds of people.

World War Two and Dig for Victory

War was declared in September 1939. The Government launched the Dig for Victory campaign the next month to create 500,000 new allotments. Food rationing was introduced in 1940.

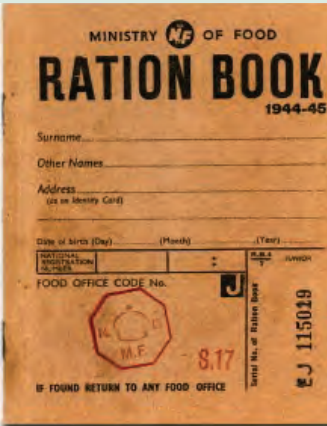
In 1939 the HDAA Committee reported “...the outbreak of war has somewhat darkened the prospect for the coming year.”

In 1940 plot holders were urged to grow more root crops – carrots, parsnips, swedes and potatoes – as these could be easily stored. Flower growing was frowned upon.

In 1943 plot–holders were reminded not to leave bonfires burning – a black–out was enforced to prevent lights guiding bombers to the city, but air raids were severe. A stray bomb landed on the Birchall Road allotments.

In 1944 HDAA received donations from the American War Relief Seed Fund.

Allotments helped with food supplies, but also contributed to a sense of purpose and commitment for people under threat of enemy bombing raids.



Did you know?

- Land all over Bristol was given over to allotments – parks, school grounds and playing fields – aerial photos from 1946 reveal the extent of these Dig for Victory Gardens.

Post–war food production

Food rationing continued until 1954. In 1953 the Association was awarded one of only 15 Certificates of Merit by the National Council for Domestic Food Production.

Flower and produce shows

- In the early 1920s the HDAA Committee established the Bristol Flower Show, which was held annually at Horfield Common. HDAA regularly exhibited at the shows, winning numerous prizes.



This photo from the 1940s shows HDAA’s secretary Bill Pain (2nd from right) holding the Challenge Shield. Some women did enter and win competitions as well.

Crime and Punishment

In the early days, theft of produce from allotments was treated very seriously.

In May 1919 Elizabeth Tursley was charged with the theft of two broccoli, worth 1 shilling (5p). She was arrested: the court fined her £5 or 26 days' imprisonment “to let it be known that the property on allotments was not protected except by the honour and honesty of the allotment holders”.



In August 1924 Walter Davis was charged with stealing marrows, “a very despicable offence”. Davis was sent to prison for two months' hard labour.

By contrast in the 1980–1990s a Probation Service community team were set to work, digging plots and doing maintenance, a form of restorative justice as an alternative to custodial sentences.

**Security fencing** was installed in the 1990s after relatives and friends of prisoners started using the allotments as a vantage point to get a glimpse of their loved ones over the prison wall – vegetables went missing and we suffered from vandalism.

Did you know?

- In 1923, 100 sheep escaped from The Downs and ate a lot of produce at Golden Hill allotments.

What we grow now

As well as all the basic vegetables, out plot holders now grow more exotic crops. The use of polytunnels has allowed a wider range of produce over a longer growing season – amongst them aubergines, chillies and cucumbers. Sunflowers are increasingly popular, providing a splash of colour, as well as food for wild birds.

Trends in allotments – rise and fall and rise

Our allotments started in WW1 as a response to a national crisis. They have provided support for the unemployed, and contributed to WW2 food production. But there have been periods of decline – the end of food rationing in 1954 marked an end to an austere time, and coincided with the growth in consumer, leisure, and supermarket cultures. Allotments and local food growing declined.



By 1990 occupancy fell near to 75% – below which we may have lost the sites, so active recruitment began.

Horfield Organic Community Orchard

In the late 1990s six plots over by Bishop Road School playing field had been abandoned, and in 1998 a dedicated group of enthusiasts saw an opportunity to renovate what had once been an orchard. After much hard graft the community orchard was born. It now boasts over 100 apple varieties – amongst the more unusual are Ashmead’s Kernel, and Adams Pearmain. Regular events include Apple Day (Autumn) and wassailing (January), accompanied by the local Pigsty Morris dancers.

Under new management

In 2002 HDAA became self–managing, at a time when interest in allotments surged because of concerns about the environment and good food, and inspired by various television shows.

Most noticeable has been the huge change in demographics – since the late 1990s we’ve seen an upsurge in families with young children tending allotments for food growing, and equally for outdoor exercise, health and well–being.

By 2010 the waiting list for plots had grown to 4–5 years, so we started offering half–plots, meaning that more people can take on a smaller plot, which is also more manageable for working families.

And we now have a mix of people from all over the world on our plots, working alongside those Bristol born and bred.

Golden Hill Community Garden

In 2007 one of our plot holders suffered a serious illness which left her with limited mobility. Her allotment was a lifeline to her, and this inspired her to think about an accessible community garden for well–being. A plan emerged to use the water–logged part of the Golden Hill site near the prison wall, and raised beds proved an ideal solution. Funding was secured from The Big Lottery Local Food Fund and work started In November 2011.

By 2017 the Community Garden was hosting 25 volunteers every week, and providing after school and holiday clubs, as well as popular toddler groups. There are 50 raised beds, a straw–bale building with wood–burner, a pizza oven and a compost loo. A solar panel pumps ground water to storage tanks at the top of the site.

The Community Garden is a very positive addition to HDAA, providing therapeutic gardening, bringing in new people and energy, and winning many friends in the local community. It has also won local gardening and volunteering awards.

Popular events held on the site include spring and autumn fairs, bonfire parties, Christmas Carols, and more recently apple juice and cider–making using surplus apples. These events attract up to 800 people and help forge support from our community as well as attracting new plot holders.



The man on the next plot had one arm, but managed to do all the digging etc.

Brian – St Agnes

Timeline of notable events in our history

<b>1916 &amp; -1917</b>	Inaugural meeting of HDAA – First sites established – HDAA Rulebook published
<b>1918</b>	Bishop Road School takes on 62 plots for pupils to work – St Agnes and Longs Fields leased as allotments – HDAA has 649 tenants across 54 acres
<b>1919</b>	HDAA write to City Council asking for more land -
<b>1920</b>	HDAA is the largest Allotment Association in Bristol with 1420 members across 85 Acres
<b>1921</b>	St. Agnes Field, Longis Field and Davies Field bought by Bristol CC and leased at £6 an acre – Mr Davies given notice to quit the field.
<b>1922</b>	HDAA now has 1550 members on 90 Acres
<b>1923</b>	HDAA win best managed plot in the City – Annual Flower Show set up on Horfield Common
<b>1927</b>	Agreement reached for the use of Graham’s Field (Wessex Avenue)
<b>1927</b>	Baptist Field acquired by exchanging with Mr Jennings a small parcel of land on Longmead Avenue – HDAA win 1st Prize for Collection of Vegetables in the Bristol Horticultural and Chrysanthemum Show
<b>1930</b>	Oakley Hall purchased
<b>1931</b>	Birchall Road allotments first used
<b>1936</b>	BCC completes purchase of Graham’s Field
<b>1938</b>	Bristol Education Department attempt to take over the Golden Hill site.
<b>1939-1945</b>	Dig for Victory campaign
<b>1943</b>	Stray bomb lands on Birchall Road Allotments



<b>1946</b>	HDAA win the Allotment Federation Challenge Shield.
<b>1946</b>	HDAA has 2114 members, 506 plots, on 31 Acres
<b>1953</b>	Birchall Road site secured by City Council – HDAA awarded a Certificate of Merit from National Council of Food Production
<b>1954</b>	Water installed on Golden Hill site
<b>1954 &amp; 1957</b>	HDAA again win the Allotment Federation Challenge Shield
<b>1967</b>	Exchange of land at the Golden Hill site for use as of Bishop Road School playing field – HDAA has 2847 members, 303 plots, on 22 Acres
<b>1970s</b>	Prison authorities try to acquire some of St Agnes Field
<b>1983</b>	HDAA use Community Service workers to clear Donkey Lane, hedge–cutting and laying chain link fence.
<b>1986</b>	Wessex Water install a large retention tank to hold flood water on Birchall Road Allotments
<b>1986 &amp; 1990</b>	Riots at Horfield Prison. Golden Hill site provides a vantage point to watch the rioters on the roof
<b>1993</b>	Oakley Hall is sold
<b>1990s</b>	Major renovation work on the plots and new gates & security fencing, hauling–ways and taps installed
<b>1998</b>	Horfield Organic Community Orchard established
<b>1990s</b>	HDAA agree a peppercorn rent for all its sites in return for self–managing the sites.
<b>2011</b>	Golden Hill Community Garden established
<b>2017</b>	100th anniversary and our community history project







We are grateful to the Heritage Lottery Fund, to staff at Bristol Records Office who provided access to 15 boxes of archive materials, but mostly to a keen band of volunteers for making this project so dynamic – Phil Hopkins, Lucy Vilarkin, Pete Clee, Stuart Farthing, Lia Leendertz.

### **Project Coordination:**

Jeremy Iles – Green Future Associates CIC –  
07950 266389

Janice Tye – [www.123design.co.uk](http://www.123design.co.uk)

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Contact – Horfield and District  
Allotment Association,  
c/o Pete Clee  
[peteclee@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:peteclee@blueyonder.co.uk)

*I remember Pip singing  
"Balehouse Rock" in the  
sunshine at the grand  
opening of the Bale House;  
**Lucy M–  
Community Garden***

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and awarded by the Heritage Lottery Fund



**LOTTERY FUNDED**

## The present and the future

We are very much rooted in the past – but what does the future hold? For now, HDAA is in a healthy position with full occupancy, a dynamic committee and very active members. The 100th anniversary project has brought people together and got them talking – and led to some great new initiatives like the community apple harvest. We all recognise the health and well-being benefits of allotments, and perhaps the need to preserve and pass on our growing skills as the production of home grown food may again rise in importance as we face uncertain times ahead.

This leaflet provides an overview – more information can be found on our website and in our more detailed booklet (Spring 2018).

*You simply cannot  
better the taste of a  
just-dug tattie or  
hand picked  
raspberry!*

**James – Golden Hill**

*One of the joys of the  
allotment is rubbing  
shoulders with and talking to  
others who share in the delight  
of our green oasis.*

**Jake – St Agnes**

*Runner beans are almost bomb-proof;  
rhubarb, raspberries and onions too.  
Beware the fecundity of courgettes. Carrots need  
ingenuity.*

*Slugs will always rule and tomato blight arrives  
on the wind like clockwork.*

*It is magic to sit in the shed and watch the  
flight of blackbirds, starlings, crows  
and pigeons.*

**Maggie**



Our allotments are a bit like a Beryl Cook painting: quite a few buxom women and too many men with beer guts.

The allotments are your playground, the light and the greenery are wonderful, the way that each allotment is different from the one next door.

**Anon – St Agnes**

In 2009, the snow came (see photo) and getting onto the plot was hazardous, as the plots and the paths between them were hidden by the snow.

**Andy – Davies field**

In honour of a longstanding gardener who was fondly remembered by all his neighbours I still have his trilby hat hanging in the shed.

**Rose – Davies Field**

