



A HISTORY OF HORSELL ALLOTMENTS

On 25th September 1917, a public meeting was held at the Horsell Parish Institute with a view to forming an Allotment Association outside the jurisdiction of the local Council. Originally called the Horsell Allotment Holders and Small Gardeners Association, a mandate was given to proceed and negotiations soon took place to acquire a lease over 5½ acres of land at Spong Field, Bullbeggars Lane from Horsell Park Estates, on an area roughly where Achilles Place now stands.

By December 1917 agreement had been reached, despite criticism from members that they had been slow, to rent the land for 7 years at £17 p.a. The land was divided into 43 plots of either 10 or 20 rods and allocated to members by ballot. The Association soon got into its stride and by April 1919 was awarding cups and medals for well-kept plots and replacing members who did not keep their plots to the high standard required.

Bulk supplies were delivered to Horsell Wharf on the Basingstoke Canal. 50 tons of manure from the army at Pirbright for £11.5s. and a barge load of lime for 15s. There is no record of how they were carted to the site some 300 yards away.

One of the most interesting things about the Association is the high number of long serving officers; we have had just 10 Presidents and 7 Secretaries. The first President, Mr Jennings, served from 1917 to 1940 whilst the longest serving Secretary was Mr Harries from 1963 to 1985. The longest serving Committee member however was Mr Tapper, Secretary from 1931 to 1943, Vice President from 1944 to 1954 and President from 1955 to 1961. Quite a record.

The Association is fortunate in that the minutes of every meeting since 1917 and all the account books and records dating back to the early days, still exist. These are now lodged in the safe keeping of the Surrey History Centre.

1920's -1950's

The 1st Annual Dinner was held at the Rendezvous Restaurant in 1920 but it does seem that the last Annual Dinner was in 1921. At this time the finances were reported to be in good order with a balance at the bank of £2.14s.3d. A new 21 year lease was signed in 1922 at a rate of £21 p.a. In this year, it was also agreed to provide water to the site by sinking a well. The members undertook this task and the bricks required were purchased in Guildford and delivered to Woking by rail at a total cost of £6.10s. A pump was purchased for £4.10s. and

was to remain in service for over 30 years. This year also saw members on a charabanc trip to Wisley Gardens — it rained all day but apparently everyone thoroughly enjoyed themselves. In 1923 it was recorded that members were warned about growing too many flowers and in that year drainage was installed across the site.

The years began to pass with all the plots let accompanied by long waiting lists. In 1939 it was reported that the Council wanted to turn the Allotments into a playing field, which was of course overtaken by the war. At some point after 1938 Woking Council turned a field, roughly where the sports pitches of Woking High School at Morton Road are now, into allotments. This was probably part of the dig for victory campaign. The last map the present author can find is early 1938 as none were produced during the war; no official records giving a more precise date have been found. The war seems to have had no adverse effect upon the members at the Bullbeggars site who carried on as usual, although it is noted that boxes of seed were received from America on two occasions and distributed by ballot to members. On the other hand, the allotment donated 200lbs of onions to the Red Cross each year to be sold to help prisoners of war. After the war the Morton Road allotments continued to be Council run until the land was acquired for the school.

While researching to update this history, the present author met with several locals who remembered another allotment where the playing field of Horsell Church of England school is now in Meadway Drive. Access to this site was apparently by a gate off the High Street behind where Crownwood now stands. Again no documents have been found that give any precise dates to this site, so it is likely that this too was part of the dig for victory campaign. Indeed, it appears from local knowledge that there were numerous little plots springing up on any piece of available land. Holyoake Crescent was mentioned as having such a plot and in Rosehill Avenue work on the houses was suspended during the war and one undeveloped corner plot was turned into a large veg patch. None of these were of course recorded. They just live on in the memories of those present at the time.

1960's – 1990's

At the beginning of the 1960's the Council moved the Morton Road allotments to a field adjacent to the Bullbeggars Lane site, so that now there was the privately-run site roughly where Achilles Place now stands, with a smaller Council run site next door roughly where Pine Close now is. This was very short lived because in 1964 the Council intimated that they wanted to build on this area with a compulsory purchase order being issued two years later. After a public inquiry instigated by, amongst others, the late Reg Gunner (a former long standing allotment holder) we were allocated land at our present site in 1967 and moved in at the end of March 1969. Both sites were amalgamated and came under the overall control of the Council who now owned the land. The allocation of plots at

the new site caused much concern amongst members and it was eventually decided that those who had been plot holders for over 20 years should have first choice. In the meantime, the 50th anniversary dinner had been held at a cost of 18s.6d. a head.

The 1970's saw a great surge in interest and by the end of the decade there were 70 people on the waiting list and a demand for the Council to provide a further site in Woking which they did at Westfield. Since that time there have been few ripples in the smooth running of the Association with all plots let and a constant waiting list, only once exceeding that of 1979. Plots are now mainly of 5 rod size with a few half that size.

1982 saw 74 members celebrating the 65th anniversary with a dinner at the Parish Hall.

2000 onwards

Since 2000, in agreement with Woking Council, we have been self-managed in that we receive no income or maintenance from the Council and are solely responsible for the administration and running of the site. The land however still belongs to the Council.

February 2004 saw a shake up in the organisation of the Association; the positions of President and Chairman were split. In the following year, for the first time, the Chairman was appointed at the AGM and not by the Committee. The President was made ex-officio, elected for a three-year term at the AGM and chaired the AGM. The name of the association was changed to Horsell Allotments.

In a sign of the times, new gates were installed at Bullbeggars in 2005 and for the first time, locked. In June 2006, Bullbeggars was proud to become the first and to date only, allotment site in Surrey to be invited to open for the National Gardens Scheme.

September 2007 saw many members and their other halves enjoy a BBQ at Bullbeggars to celebrate the 90th year of the Association.

Uncertain times to rival the period 1964-1966 returned in 2008. Bullbeggars has always been a popular site and in response to increasing waiting lists, an off-the-cuff remark from the present Chairman to Councillor Barker in early 2008, led to the Councillor initiating a search by Woking to find suitable land for another allotment site. The existing allotment sites were asked to distribute a questionnaire to those on their waiting list and it was also made available to the public. The result was that the area found to be in most need of another site was Horsell. However, while this search was going on, the Chairman was tipped off about a planned private meeting of the Council to discuss turning Bullbeggars

into an industrial site; with the allotments being re-located to a smaller site at Carthouse Lane. Within a day of receiving the tip off a vigorous campaign had begun within Horsell to save Bullbeggars. The Chairman was subsequently invited to a meeting at Woking Council to be informed that Bullbeggars would not be moved and furthermore that the new site would be at Carthouse Lane and it was requested that he and the Committee set it up and take over its running. In return for ceding some land, the Council also undertook to build toilets at Bullbeggars and install more secure gates at the front and side of the site, along with associated fencing. The waiting list at that point in Horsell stood at 30, but once news of the new site was made public it quickly grew to 80, exceeding that of 1979 and creating a new record in Woking.

The new site at Carthouse Lane, named Littlewicks, was opened by double Chelsea winner Cleve West on 6 June 2012 with an initial 80 plots, mostly of 5 rods. The site also included a separate area to use as a mini orchard and an apiary, which quickly grew to hold twelve bee hives to compliment the two already in existence at Bullbeggars. In the intervening time, to meet the demand extra half plots have been created. There are now 196 plots across both sites.

With the downturn in the economy and subsequent paring back of finances, it was not until 2017 that construction of the toilets at Bullbeggars could commence. Just in time for the members from both sites to join together at Bullbeggars in September 2017 for a BBQ to celebrate 100 years of the formation of the Association. A time capsule will be buried beneath the new building, containing photos and documents commemorating the centenary.

History has repeated itself to mirror the 1940's to 1960's. Once again Horsell has two thriving allotment sites, with a healthy bank balance, all plots let and a seemingly constant combined waiting list.

David Inns
Chairman
Horsell Allotment Association

Originally written by Stuart Ransom in 1997, updated by David Inns 2000-17.