**Allotments**

The origin of the allotment movement in Chinnor lies within the second allotment movement which started nationally in 1830, but has sustained its influence on Chinnor’s nutrition and health until the present day.

Jeremy Burchardt has suggested that allotment produce provided a greater contribution to living standards, and by implication, health, than previously appreciated, whilst Ashby suggested a figure of 20-25 % of the diet of many families was directly supplied by the garden or garden allotment.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The Chinnor allotments played a vital role in World War ll. In 1854 an enclosure award was made for the ‘labouring poor of Chinnor’. They were referred to as the ‘labouring poor’ because, although they were employed, their economic level was still very low.

Nine acres of land were allocated by the Enclosure Commissioners to be managed by the Church Wardens and Overseers of the Poor. This responsibility was later taken over by the Parish Council in 1917. The land is owned by the people of Chinnor and the term rent refers to the cost of upkeep of the plots. Under the *Land Settlement Facilities Act,* *1919* the land became ‘open to all.’ The rent charged was calculated by the value of wheat, barley and oats which could have been grown annually on the site before it was allocated.

From the names in the rent book and the complexity of Chinnor’s kinship network, it was difficult to assess how many families rented an allotment. For example, in in the first year 1898, there were listed 6 Hopkins, 6 Howletts, 7 Rogers, 10 Seymours, 4 Turners and 7 Witneys. Without a copy of the rules on how many plots could be allocated to one person or household in Chinnor it was difficult to determine the proportion of households who rented the plots, but from the census figures it could have been as high as one third of households.[[2]](#footnote-2) Burchardt gave the figure for the number of male agricultural workers in Oxfordshire aged ten and over per allotment in 1873 as 2.1.[[3]](#footnote-3)

During the period 88 – 98 a review of the number of plots in Chinnor varied

Table 1. Number of Allotment Plots, Chinnor 1900-1931.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Plots** | **Households** |
| 1900 | 95 | 264 |
| 1921 | 89 | 270 |
| 1931 | 98 | 339 |

Source: Chinnor Allotment Society Records.

Rents were initially, 4s. 6d. for 18 poles and 2s 3d. for nine poles.[[4]](#footnote-4) The rent was increased in 1920 to 5s 10d. for 18 poles and 2s 11d. for nine poles.

After the First World War many returning service men could not afford the rents so the 1927 War Memorial Committee waived the allotment ground rent charge to help Chinnor men who returned from the Great War.

Rules governing the cultivation of the allotments included owners not being allowed to work from 8 am to 6 pm to avoid interfering with their farm labouring work and not during the Sunday service, planting being done on Good Friday. Primary crops were root vegetables. The value of a potato crop is highlighted in a garden manual which states that in many allotments 50% of the crop was potatoes.[[5]](#footnote-5)

In 1919 nationally, allotment holders produced 350,000 green vegetables, 43,000 tons of onions 23,000 tons of beans and 750,000 tons of potatoes.[[6]](#footnote-6) From 1910 Chinnor hosted an annual flower and produce show which showcased flowers vegetables, eggs and honey as well as hosting a number of lively non-agricultural events and competitions and continues to this day.

1. Burchardt, *Allotment Movement,* p. 4, Ashby, *Allotments*, p. 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ashby, *Allotments:* p. 261 gives a list of the most frequent rules pertaining to renting an allotment. The same heavy moral tone associated with the feudal system (also noted in the Reading Room rules) could include: ‘*no drunkenness, no swearing, compulsory church and school attendance*.’ However, Ashby, contends that rules ‘*became obsolete and were not often adhered to very closely’*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Burchardt, *Allotment,* p. 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 51/2 yards = 1 perch, pole or rod, (the distance from the back of the plough to the horse’s nose), 4 poles (22 yards) = 1 chain, 10 chains or 40 poles =I furlong (the distance which could be ploughed by one ox without a rest), 8 furlongs = 1 mile. 1 acre, the area that could be ploughed by a team of eight oxen in one day. (Officially, 1, furlong x 4 poles). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Walter Wright, (ed) *Practical Gardening for Pleasure and Profit: vol 11 vegetables and their cultivation* (London, circa 1920), p. 39. See also Burchardt, *Allotments,* p. 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Wright, vol 1, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)