

O.A.K.S. - Oakley Allotment Keepers

The allotments in Oakley started at least thirty years ago. The land is owned by the Malshanger Estate and is leased to the Parish Council, who then rents out each plot to the individual holders. There are thirty seven 5 rod allotments and sixteen smaller ones in an extension area.

There are allotment holders who have been there from day one and those who are just starting out. Over the past few years, growing your own has taken off everywhere, with many allotment associations now running waiting lists for many years. Young and old are donning their gardening gloves and digging in their heels for a lifetime of allotment gardening.

According to scientists from Essex and Westminster universities spending half an hour a week on an allotment results in an instant reduction in stress and fatigue, as well as boosting self-esteem, vigour and a general feeling of good health.

The allotment system we recognise today has its roots in the 19th century, when the rapid industrialisation of the country led to a national shortage of food. To solve this problem, which was exacerbated by the lack of a welfare state, the government set aside land for the labouring class to produce their own food.

In 1908 the Small Holdings and Allotments Act was implemented, which placed a duty on local councils to provide a sufficient amount of allotments for their constituents. In 1919, the Land Settlement Facilities Act was passed, making land available to everyone, not just the working poor, in order to assist the servicemen returning from the First World War.

The Allotments Act was passed in 1925, establishing statutory allotments that local authorities could not sell off or convert without ministerial consent, making the allotment a national institution that stands to this day.

So here is some advice if you want to join us.

- If you haven't already got an allotment and it appeals to you – put your name down now, by contacting our Parish Clerk Barbara Bedford, or filling in the online form. Please be advised there is a waiting list.
- Be prepared to work hard, but also be prepared to enjoy fresh air, the sound of birds singing, a connection with the land and strange conversations about blight and pruning and “how come yours are huge and mine are tiny?”
- Share it with a friend; it's more fun, less work, the yields tend to be higher the highs and lows are shared and it can be great planning what to grow together and trying out each other's favourite fruit, vegetables and flowers.