

A Brief History of the Stoke Road Allotments

The conversion from feudal strip farming, in which every family tilled and harvested their own strips, to enclosed fields for sheep and some arable crops began under Cromwell's politics, c1650 (that was when the Blisworth *Plowman* family was installed) and continued with another burst of conversion through 1750 to 1820. Farmers were "awarded" with official farming land in 1808. All along since any enclosure, farmers were few; perhaps 10 to 20, and they provided employment to villagers in shepherding, ploughing and harvesting. The villagers were probably paid in both food and money. The worst of the poverty from this favouring of competent farmers occurred in the period from 1750 onwards and that was *probably* when Grafton set up the 10-acre allotments, organised either by the church or the Vestry Meetings. This was on the old manorial warren that the King had granted to Thomas Wake in 1315.

Common land was gated and was strictly for animals let free to graze. The common land that remained by c1750 was the area to the east, covering Thorpewood Farm and the site of the big quarry. It too was eventually set to fields and no doubt the process provided some employment in ploughing, clearing and hedge-laying.

The 1838 Grafton survey map takes a snapshot at the end of the farming conversion process. Before that however, the excavations for the canal through 1795 – 1805 wreaked havoc near the allotments and took away "The Green" which was a triangular patch of grass with a stream running through. Tethered animals would have been allowed on this grass, as would a gaggle or two of geese. It was not gated so it was not really common land in the old fashioned definition – maybe it was used recreationally and maybe for fairs (we have no record) and so was "A Common" in a more modern definition.

In 1860 an entrepreneur named Mr. G E Bevan came up with the idea of a slanted railway to get ironstone down to the canal. The horse railway that connected this access to various fields, including the warren, ran straight across the allotments and all the way out to our present football fields. The gullets created for extracting ironstone were let from the Vestry Meetings (later the Parish Council) in terms of just their width and length. In the process of mining, the gullets migrated across the fields. The rent stayed the same but the land that was left behind became just unproductive topsoil so that the allotments in the north half of the field, about 6 acres, were turned into topsoil while the area we now use was thankfully never mined.

The entrepreneur transferred his mining rights in 1901 to a Mr. Phipps, of brewery and alehouse ownership fame, and he continued the mining until c1914 when the mines fell into total disuse. After the 1914 – 18 war the Grafton Estate was in crisis from death duties and in 1919 Mr Phipps took the opportunity to buy the field. The other fields were returned to Home Farm at some point and that farm was sold to Mr Asplin. I believed the later Deed of Transfer of the allotment field to one of the three, Richards Thomas and/or Baldwin, was in 1948, and it was that iron company that later saw an opportunity to utilise the poor ground for a housing estate – Greenside (named by George) built in the late 1950s by the Acme Company.