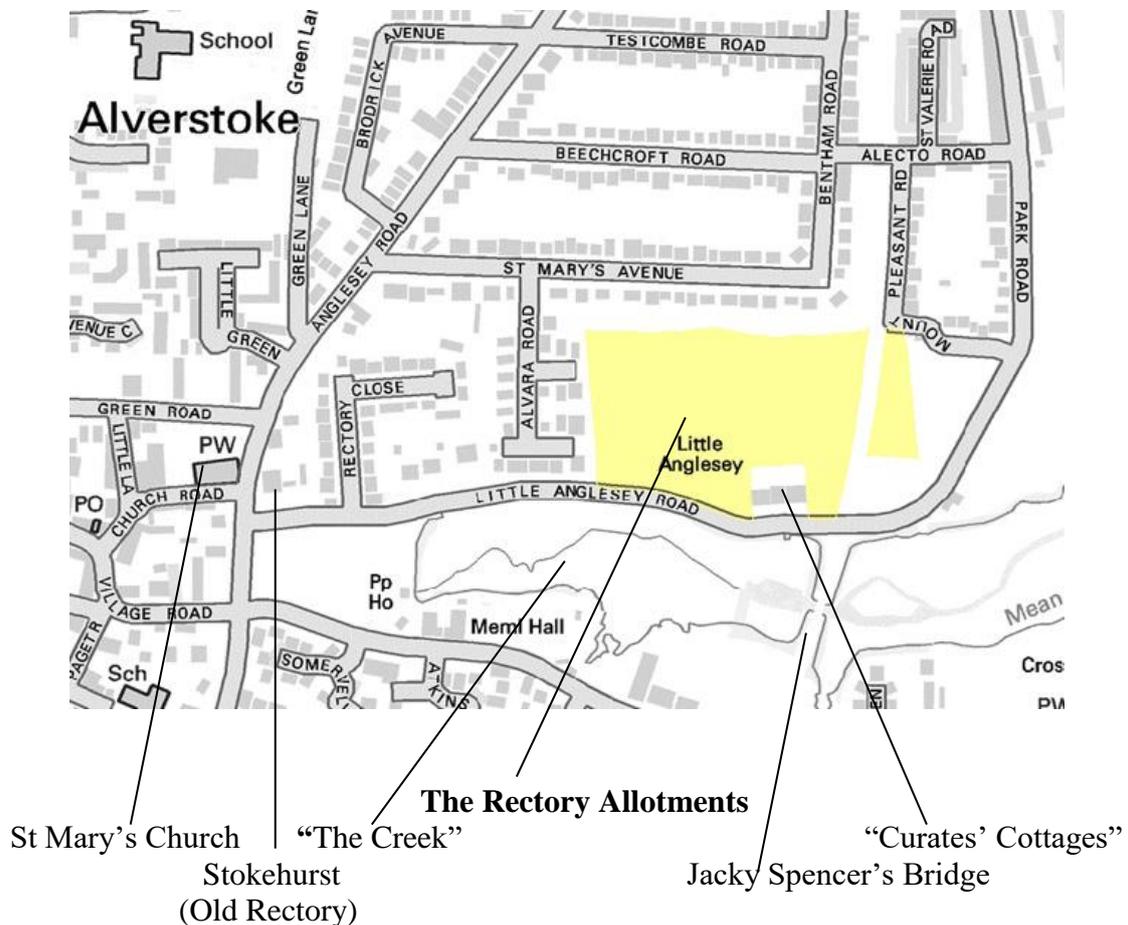


The Rectory Allotments

“There is nothing pleasanter than spading when the ground is soft and damp”. John Steinbeck

“A weed is a plant in the wrong place!” Anon



Alverstone 2010

A Refuge

Within the bounds of the Parish of St Mary's Alverstone in the Borough of Gosport, in the County of Hampshire, there lies a haven, a place of tranquillity and of contentment, a refuge, a retreat, a sanctuary.

Unlike those areas of our world where great endeavours often give rise to much noise and commotion, this is a place where prodigious effort is rewarded with a harvest achieved largely in silence. It is a silence, only interrupted by the rasping chatter of a rotovator, or, when the wind is in the West, by the reassuring sound of the bells of St Mary's, telling anyone who cares to listen that yet another quarter of an hour has passed; another fifteen minutes have gone forever. It is not a place of hustle or of any great hurry, more of a measured progress towards a, not entirely predictable, end.

This much loved sanctuary is known as the “Rectory Allotments”. They lie to the north of Stoke Lake (the “Creek”) and can be entered, either by way of a small gate off Little Anglesey Road some three hundred yards east of the Old Rectory, or, a similar distance further East, by an entrance, opposite Jackie Spencer's Bridge, of a sufficient size to allow a variety of conveyances to come and go.

Roots

In the year 948 AD a Charter was signed by Eadred, the then King of England. It became known as: "The Charter of Stoke" and it included the following passage:

"I, Eadred, Emperor of the English, Ruler and Governor of the rest of the tribes situated round about; being pleased with the devotion and skill and also the obedience of a certain thane of mine, called by name Aelfric, have deigned to bestow on him eleven measures (of land) in that place where, now, for a long time, the cultivators of that region have imposed the name 'Aet Stoke'".

A hide can be anything between 60 and 180 acres depending upon the type of soil, and so it was that between 660 and 1980 acres of land "at Stoke" were granted by King Eadred, the Grandson of King Alfred the Great, to Aelfric, his thane, or freeman, probably in return for military service.

The present-day village of Alverstoke is part of the land "at Stoke" bestowed on Aelfric.

A Lady

It has long been the custom of the allotment holders to talk darkly of a lady who gave them land so that they might grow vegetables to feed their families. This story is possibly well founded and, indeed, there was one such lady who made a most generous gift of land in the area.

Her name was the Lady Alwara.

The Saxon Chronicles of 1001 record that a certain Leofwine, the King's High Reeve, and others were killed by Danish Vikings at Dean in (or near) Hampshire. It is believed that Leofwine (Leowin) was Alwara's late husband.

John of Pontoise was Bishop of Winchester from (roughly) 1282 to 1303 and in his register an undated entry briefly records that Leowin's widow, Alwara, gave "Alverstoke" to St Swithun's Priory in return for the monks' prayers for her late husband's soul. This land was in Alwara's gift because it is believed that Leowin was the Grandson of Aelfric.

Alverstoke

The Parish of St Mary's, Alverstoke contains the village of Alverstoke, which was named after its generous benefactor as Alwarestoch in the 11th and 12th centuries, this developed into Alvarestoke in the 14th century, Aillwardstoke in the 15th century and then, happily for the present inhabitants, Alverstoke in the 16th century. Alverstoke is recorded in the Domesday Book in 1086 as Alwarestock.

Early in the 13th century an agreement was made between the monks of St Swithun and the inhabitants of the Manor of Alverstoke, by which the latter promised to pay for their lands and they were granted a number of privileges. The area thereby acquired the title of: "the Liberty of Alverstoke with Gosport", however Gosport is never described as a "Liberty" per se and was a separate Manor (within the Parish of Alverstoke) from its creation in about 1204.

In 1284, a critical year in the continuous dispute which had been maintained for some centuries between successive Bishops of Winchester and the monastery of St Swithun, the Manor of Alverstoke was transferred to the then Bishop in return for certain important concessions relating to the appointment of obedientiaris (the lesser officials of a monastery who were appointed by will of the monastery's Superior). In June 1284 the king confirmed to the Bishop a number of Manors, these included Alverstoke, which he had acquired from the Priory and this was confirmed in the following May.

Thereafter, the Bishops of Winchester retained the Manor until, under Oliver Cromwell, the Act of 1641 confiscated all Episcopal lands and the Manor of Alverstoke, together with its various attachments, was seized by the State.

At the restoration of the Monarchy, when Charles II acceded to the throne in 1660, the Bishops regained their lands, and the Manor of Alverstoke again became a possession of the See of Winchester. The Manor was then taken over by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners who thus became the Lords of the Manor (they still are!)

It is clear from the records of the period that the land on which the Rectory Allotments are now situated was owned by a John Hobbs in 1696 and by a John Eames when he died in 1726 leaving the then fields to his son John Junior.

In 1795 John Junior died and his daughter Dorothea inherited his estate which included "Stoke House" – a "Marine Villa" - and 27 acres of rich meadowland. In 1810 "Stoke House" and the estate were sold to Charles Augustus North – the wealthy Rector of Alverstoke who was not a typical vicar – his father was Brownlow North the Bishop of Winchester and his uncle, Lord North, had been Prime Minister – one of their illustrious ancestors was Samuel Pepys!

In 1825 Charles North died – at the age of 40 of "gout of the stomach" - and his widow – Rachel - then sold all the land and Stoke House at auction on 27th May 1829. The auction took place "near the Rectory" and was made up of eight Lots. Lot 3 comprised: "A valuable freehold close or parcel of rich arable land, containing about nine acres, customary measure, bounded on the east by Ewer Common, on the west by Lot 2, and on the south by Haslar Creek". Lot 2 consisted of "a rich plot of freehold meadow land..... containing about five acres...." which adjoined the "Marine Villa" and its grounds and buildings.

"Stoke House" has long since disappeared and the Rectory of those days is now "Stokehurst", however, the plot of 9 acres – Lot 3 in the auction - would have included what is now the Rectory Allotments – the area of which is almost 7 acres. It can be concluded that the difference of 2 acres would pretty well exactly fit the site of the 3 pairs of bow fronted cottages that make up "Little Anglesey".

It is known that Robert Cruickshank – the developer of "The Crescent" in Alverstoke - was the purchaser of Lot 3 in the Auction. Robert later sold most of the Plot - but not the Little Anglesey site – so that the Diocese of Winchester became its owner and the land, thereby, became "glebe" and so contributed to the Rector who, as the incumbent, was entitled to the tithe, or rent, from "glebe land". For the duration of his time as Rector, he, in effect "owned" the glebe land attached to his Parish Church. It is of note that Robert Cruickshank's father-in-law, Edward Barnard, was the Rector of St Mary's, Alverstoke at the time!



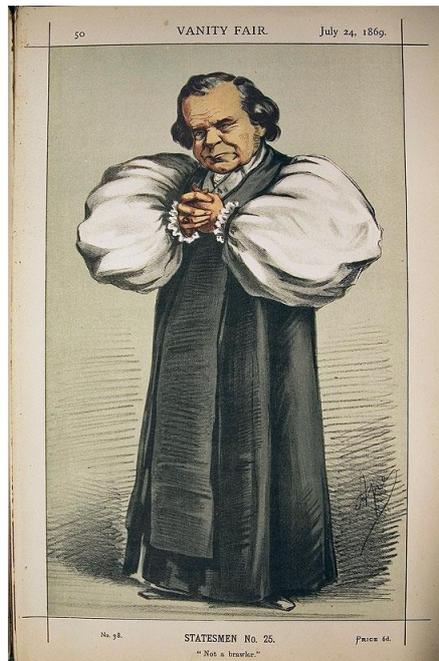
The Creek with St Mary's Church and the Tithe Barn
Martin Snape -1925

With the kind permission of Richard and Elaine Martin

Tithes

In 1836, an Act of Parliament was passed ordering the uniform “Commutation of the Tithes” in all Parishes in the Kingdom. This required the payment of cash instead of kind i.e. a one tenth cash donation only for the support of the priest, or clergy, which replaced the annual tithe of the agricultural output of the Parish. In England we still have some of the old Tithe Barns remaining – many of them much restored and now used for receptions and the like – these were the places where the tithes were paid to the local priest – usually after the harvest at Michaelmas. In Alverstoke an old Tithe Barn remained until 1949 when it was, sadly, demolished along with the pigsties opposite, to make room for the present Rectory Close houses off Little Anglesey Road.

Following the Act of 1836, maps were made of every parish which were divided into parcels of land according to the owner; a survey was conducted – known as a Terrier (from the French terre = land) - which not only detailed the owner, but also the acreage (measured in acres, roods and perches). We should note that, when measuring an area there are 4 roods to the acre; a perch is a unit of length equal to 5½ yards but in this context a perch is a measurement of area and should be read as a perch squared i.e. 5½ yards² = 30 square yards approximately! Again, in this context, when measuring an area, there are 40 perches per rood!!



Samuel Wilberforce – Rector St Mary’s Alverstoke 1841 - 1846

The 1841 Tithe Map of Alverstoke Parish and its Terriers was published by Lewis and Walker, Surveyors and Lithographers, Southampton, in 1841. It details the total acreage of Alverstoke Parish which, in 1841 was 4,077 acres and the Tithe Map shows the Rectory Allotment area as field number 810, owned by the Rector of St Mary’s, the Reverend Samuel Wilberforce (son of the famous William Wilberforce who was largely responsible for abolishing the slave trade); the Occupier was John Collis Langtry. It was an arable area of 6 acres 3 roods (1 rood = $\frac{1}{4}$ acre) which contributed to the Rector who, as the incumbent, was entitled to the tithe, or rent, from this glebe land – where the glebe was an area of land which was owned by the Church and, therefore, the Incumbent by right of his office. For the duration of his time as Rector, he, in effect “owned” the glebe land attached to his Parish Church. It is of passing interest to note that a Rector is an incumbent entitled to receive the tithes from all the land in his parish, a vicar is an incumbent who isn’t!!

After 1874

Scrutiny of the Ordnance Survey map of the area, revised in 1874 -75, shows no marking of allotments on field 641, the location of the present Rectory Allotments, however, in a planning application of 1885 it is of note that there is a reference to some allotments at Ewer Common when a Mr C.W. House complained to the local council's Sanitary Inspector about some “cesspits abutting on to allotment ground at Ewer Common”.

Road) and houses; presumably the complaint about the cesspits came to light when his builder or architect was surveying the site in preparation for these plans.

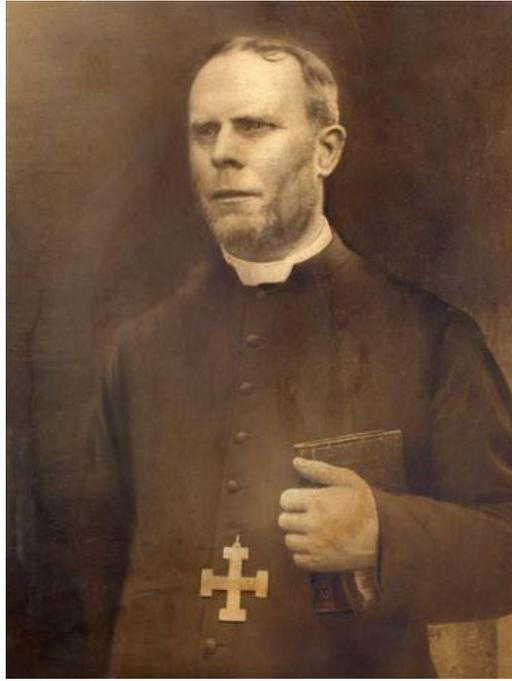
It is of particular note that in a St Mary's Parish magazine of May 1888 there is a record of the Cottagers Flower Show, where concern was expressed regarding "the approaching loss of allotment grounds owing to the increase in building in the Parish". These allotment grounds which were to be lost were, almost certainly, the allotments referred to in the planning application, just to the north of those we now know as the Ewer Common allotments (parcel 643), which lie to the east of the old railway line bordering the present Rectory Allotments.

Parcel 643 clearly has pathways marked out; this field is, of course, now the paddock but was formerly the eastern part of a larger field (number 808 on the 1840 tithe map), split by the building of the railway in the 1850s, which was part of the Glebe from at least 1696. One intriguing interpretation of these pathways might be that they were designed to allow access to the various plots if the land was laid out as allotments!

That said, it can be reasonably concluded that, had the Rectory Allotments existed on their present location - plot 641 - in May 1888, a large area of over 6 acres, there would not have been the shortage of allotment grounds in the area which was the cause of the concern expressed.

Alan Brodrick

We now come to the temporal roots of the Rectory Allotments; when did this area of glebe become allotments? Well, all the evidence points to Canon the Honourable Reverend Alan Brodrick as the man who was responsible. The fund for the addition of the present bell tower in St Mary's, the Parish Church, built to commemorate the end of the South African War and the coronation of Edward VII, was started during Canon Brodrick's incumbency and a Foundation Stone, set in the northern base of the bell tower, marks that moment. In addition, it was Alan Brodrick who gave the magnificent clock in the tower, which continues to chime every quarter of an hour, in memory of his son, Trevor, who died as a result of an accident in the hunting field in 1901.



**The Hon. Rev. Alan Brodrick
Rector of St Mary's Alverstoke 1888-1901**

Alan Brodrick was a wealthy man, he was the third son of the seventh Viscount Midleton, and he became the Rector of St Mary's in April 1888. Very quickly he became a member of the Alverstoke and Gosport Chrysanthemum Society – he almost certainly played an important role in the Society's foundation - so that he attended its 1st Annual Exhibition in the Thorngate Hall (then located on the site of the present Gosport Town Hall) in October 1888 as its President.

As has been explained, the Rector, by now, Alan Brodrick, as the incumbent of St Mary's, for the duration of his tenure “owned” the glebe area comprising our present Rectory Allotments - field number 810 in the 1841 Terrier. In 1841 this area was not marked as allotments, nor is it marked, as such, on the Ordnance Survey Map of 1874-75, in addition, we have the statement in the Parish Magazine of May 1888, however, on the Ordnance Survey map of 1898 the area is shown as plot 519 – it is marked “Allotment Gardens”!

It seems, therefore, most likely that, at some time between 1888 and 1898, the Rectory Allotments came into being.



St Mary's

Tithe Barn
(Demolished 1949)

Brodrick Hall Site
(Built 1908)

"The Creek"

Railway Viaduct
"Curate's Cottages"

The Rectory Allotments
Ordnance Survey Map 1898 (Survey conducted 1896)

The Plot Thickers

In the Portsmouth "News" of 25th March 1892, at a meeting of the Alverstoke and Gosport Chrysanthemum Society, held to prepare for its 5th Annual Exhibition – it is announced that Canon the Hon Alan Brodrick – the President - would be providing additional prizes for the tenants of the Rectory Allotments. It is of note that in the 4th Annual Exhibition of the Society in October 1891 there is no mention of the tenants of the Rectory Allotments among the prize winners recorded in the "News".



Emily Hester Brodrick

In the course of the 5th Annual Flower Show of the Alverstoke and Gosport Chrysanthemum Society in October 1892, it is considered to be especially significant that Mrs Brodrick in her speech made a point of declaring that: “she was glad that there was a good number of exhibits from the allotment grounds, in which she took a great interest...”. So, by this time, the Brodricks were clearly displaying a most positive and declared support for the tenants of the Rectory Allotments. Furthermore, when her husband, this incredibly active and excellent man, left Alverstoke to become the Master of St Cross, in Winchester, in 1901, he spent enormous sums on the surroundings of the St Cross grounds, notably its gardens – “he converted what was an untidy and unsightly piece of meadow land fronting the Master’s house, where pigs were most generally in occupation, into a charmingly designed and cultivated garden which became not only a delight to himself, but to every passer by”. We can conclude that the new Master loved his gardening and he loved his gardens.

Canon Alan Brodrick was evidently a man who also cared for the Labouring Classes; he was a man of sufficient wealth to give and not to count on any return from his giving; in short, he was a man who would give what was in his gift and as Rector of St Mary’s, this land, this field number 810, was definitely in his gift to make into allotments so that ordinary working men might grow vegetables to maintain themselves and their families.

And another point! It is of note that the Allotments Act 1887, an “Act to facilitate the provision of Allotments for the Labouring Classes”, required the then Sanitary Authorities to provide the necessary land on a representation by any six registered parliamentary electors, or ratepayers, resident in the Parish etc. Although the present Rectory Allotments’ site was glebe land, and therefore not under the jurisdiction of the local Sanitary Authority, it might well be that, in the prevailing vogue for land to be made available for the purpose defined in the Act of 1887, Canon Brodrick saw to

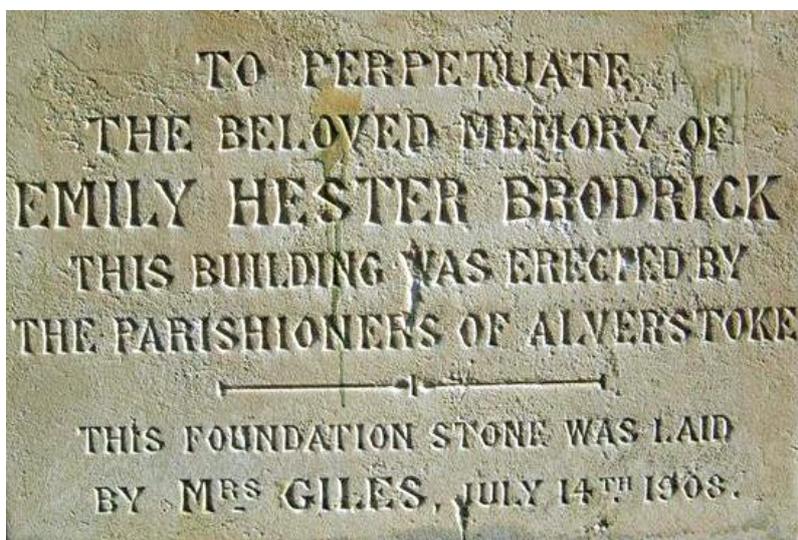
it that the Rectory Allotments were founded. It is this author's view that that is exactly what he did and he did it in early 1892 – in time for the allotment holders to grow the vegetables they were to enter in the October Show.

Another Lady

On the front wall of the Brodrick Hall there is a Foundation Stone. It marks the building of the Hall in 1908 in memory of Emily Hester Brodrick – known by the Alverstoke parishioners as Hester. It is considered remarkable that Hester Brodrick, who had left Alverstoke in 1901 to go to St Cross with her husband, the new Master, and who died in 1906, should have been so much loved that this Hall was built in her memory some 7 years after she had left the area. It was Hester, remember, who declared her “great interest” in the allotment grounds at that autumn meeting of the Alverstoke and Gosport Chrysanthemum Society in 1898. And so, when we recall that dark story about a lady who gave this land so that the people of Alverstoke might grow vegetables to feed their families, it seems unlikely that they are referring to the Lady Alwara of far distant Saxon times, rather, and almost in living memory, it was the much loved Hester Brodrick who “gave” them the land for their use as allotments – land which remains to this day as the Rectory Allotments.

Hester was that lady.

And how natural, and what a pleasure it would have been, for Canon and Mrs Brodrick to name their new “gift” to the people of Alverstoke: “The Rectory Allotments”!



Today

In 1927 the then very large Diocese of Winchester was divided into a number of smaller Dioceses, one of which was the Diocese of Portsmouth, and so field number 810 – the Rectory Allotments - is now owned by the Diocese of Portsmouth to whom the allotment holders pay their annual rent. The site presently contains 137 active plots – 39 are around 10 rods; 18 about 8 rods and 72 approximately 5 rods, where a rod is a pole is a perch! So, a rod is 5½ yards and a 5 rod allotment is an area of $5 \times 5\frac{1}{2} = 150$ approx. square yards.

In 1947, the then Rectory and the glebe to the east, north of “the Creek” as far as where the Rectory Allotments are now, was sold to the National Children’s Home. This has since, again, been sold and developed for housing, the land immediately to the east of the old Rectory in 1960, and a second development further east in 1975. However, the Rectory Allotments are now protected by the Gosport Borough Local Plan (Policy R/OS90), which applies to these allotments even though the land is owned by the Diocese of Portsmouth, so that “development proposals which result in the loss of allotment gardens will not be permitted unless it can be shown there is a continuing and significant lack of demand locally”. There is currently a considerable list of would be allotment holders for the Rectory Allotments and while this continues to be the case, then the land cannot be used for any other purpose.

From 1 April 1978 glebe ceased to belong to individual Incumbents (in order to pool resources) and, by virtue of Section 15 of the Endowments and Glebe Measure 1976, glebe became owned by the Diocesan Board of Finance of the Diocese to which the benefice owning the glebe belonged.

And so this land, these Rectory Allotments, endowed by the Lady Alwara all those years ago, and subsequently owned as glebe land by successive Rectors of St Mary’s, provided to the living of Samuel Wilberforce, of Alan Brodrick, of Guy Landon and, more recently, in living memory, of Bill Rees, who was the last Rector of St Mary’s to receive rent from the Rectory Allotments, which he was apparently very enthusiastic to collect, until the time when he retired in 1983!

Addendum

There is a strange and foreign language employed by gardeners and allotment holders: a language of chitted potatoes, of loams and composts and mulches, of corms and rhizomes and cultivars and tubers, of grafting and pleaching and pruning and layering.

No human ailment ever matched those to be found in the vegetable kingdom: the crown rot, black rot, bacterial rot and soil rot; the black leg fungus, drop fungus, anthracnose fungus and downy mildew fungus; the early blight, late blight, common blight, leaf blight and gummy stem blight; the Stewart’s wilt, bacterial wilt, fuserium wilt and verticillium wilt; the tobacco mosaic virus, cucumber virus, mosaic virus and tobacco streak virus. All of these can be considered to be deadly and each of them is guaranteed to drive our gentle allotment holder to a level of fury greater than which no woman scorned ever knew.

There are other forms of life, other than those who work their little plots of allotment land: wood pigeons observing all from the nearby tree tops, their beady eyes noting every seed as it is sown; their ever calculating brains watching every plant as it is interred, and judging with unerring accuracy the moment when their meal is ready, so that they can swoop down and devour all, as soon as their unintended benefactor’s back is turned.

There are badgers - which wait for the day before the corn is to be harvested when they sweep through the allotments feasting on the ripe cobs, leaving behind a trail of total devastation and the cultivator of the corn incoherent with rage when he discovers his loss.

There is the hated black fly – so small, so unforeseen and so ruinous to all brassicas and brussel sprouts. There are the caterpillars, and slugs, and snails, and grubs and bugs and so on, and on, and on! All of these are always very hungry; all have to be defended against by every means at the allotment holder's disposal.

But then – perhaps worst of all - there are the small boys – attracted, as by a magnet, to this forbidden and mysterious territory; not understanding why they should be excluded and why they shouldn't enjoy the harvest - like all the other little pests!



Harold Camp

People

There are those who have worked their allotment for many years; John W, who well remembers the great explosion when a depth charge ignited at Bedenham Pier in 1950 which he heard from the allotments, John with his cat Mouser drinking endless cups of tea from a thermos in his shed; John P and another John W, also Malcolm M all of them proud possessors of their allotments for many years, more recently Trev R, Ian B, Tony H and Richard S; each of them ready to pass the time of day with a friendly chat, and to repeat and improve on the stories of this, their allotment world. There was a time when, for over 20 years, Harold Camp – the father of our present St Mary's Church Administrator, Peter, – rode the paths of the Rectory Allotments on his bicycle and ruled the territory with a firm but fair hand, on behalf of the Rector, Bill Rees. Now, our leaders, since 1998, are Val and Ken Sommerford, they are wise in the ways of vegetables, and fruits, and herbs, and salads to a point of perfection, they allocate the, much sought after, plots, as the numbers allow, and they ensure that the supply of seed potatoes, and onions, and shallots, and a million other seeds is arranged at exactly the right moment in the allotment holder's year. Finally, there is Vince F – leader of the Great South Bank Clearance of early 2010. Vince's legacy will be enjoyed for many years to come when the trees, now planted, grow to maturity and the new hedging provides security to the allotment holders, it will also enhance the beauty of this, much loved, jewel of our Alverstoke village – known by all as: "The Creek".

Finale

So, here we have our Rectory Allotments – the agronomic progeny of Canon the Honourable Reverend Alan Brodrick and his wife, Hester, in the late 19th century – continuing, season by season, unchanged and unchanging – this haven, this place of tranquillity and of contentment, this refuge, this retreat, and this sanctuary.



“Curates’ Cottages”

Little Anglesey Road

Jacky Spencer’s Bridge

The Rectory Allotments 2010

RWT

Acknowledgements: Joan Russell, Christopher Donnithorne, Philip Eley, Peter Camp, Val and Ken Sommerford, Richard and Elaine Martin, David Rymell – Hampshire Records Office; Janet Jones, Adrian and Nicky Knight, Michael Rowsell, Erica Munro and Alison Firth – Gosport Discovery Centre; Alexandra Rowse – Gosport Borough Council, Ken Greenwood.

“A perennial - any plant which, had it lived, would have bloomed year after year”

4,100 words