

Timeline of the Allotment Movement

	Legislation	Britain	Birmingham
1750		In the 18th century demand begins for allotments to help the rural poor grow their own food. There is a growing need for gardens in urban areas as populations grow.	
1800	Select Vestry Act 1819 allows parishes to provide 20 acres of allotments for the poor but only 100 sites created		Birmingham responds to the demand for green space with 'guinea gardens', named after their annual rent of one guinea. First advertised in 1765, by 1820 there were sites across the city.
	Allotment Acts 1831 & 1832 Legislation in response to Swing Riots. As many as 100,000 allotments created by 1842.	Increased mechanisation of farming and worsening conditions for the rural poor led to the Swing Riots. Allotments proposed as a way of both feeding and occupying the rioters.	
1850			
	Allotment Act 1887 An additional 200,000 allotments created, to encourage labourers to stay in rural areas.	By 1873 there were 242,542 allotments, mostly in rural areas. However by the beginning of the 20th century continued mechanisation saw rural populations decline, but urban demand for allotments was growing.	
1900	Local Gov. Act 1894 Creation of district & parish councils, inc. power to obtain land for allotments.		
	Small Holding & Allotments Acts 1907-8 Local councils now duty bound to provide allotments when requested by 6 ratepayers. Power to compulsory purchase land if none available and more money for provision.	Up to C20th most allotments provision actually by private landlords (100,000 plots 1887-1900) as allotments could be profitable and improve soil. Despite 1907 & 1908 acts, many council sites were temporary, on spare land, due to cost of purchase.	By 1912 Birmingham was the largest local authority provider of allotments with 400 acres and 2361 plot holders. Many sites were acquired after the 1908 Act made more funds available.
1914	Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) Gave power to requisition land for allotments.	Despite DORA in 1917 there were 16,000 on allotment waiting lists. However by the end of the war there was 1 allotment for every 5 households - feeding 8 - 10 million.	Some requisitioned land was reclaimed for the war effort. A Small Arms Factory was built on B'ham allotments, plot holders given £6 compensation each.

1922

Allotment Acts 1922, 1925 and 1926
Legislation to protect allotments.
Statutory sites could not be sold without ministerial permission.
Improved security for tenants & compensation.

Post-war many allotment sites lost, often before end of food shortages, which got worse after 1919.

1928

Agricultural Land (Utilisation) Act 1931
Briefly used to lend government support to SOF scheme, withdrawn in 1932, despite helping 64,000 applicants. SOF then struggled to keep going with limited governm't support.

Importance of allotments grew again after 1928 crash. Society of Friends (SOF) scheme for the unemployed aims to feed families and keep men fit. Scheme declined in 1937 as economy recovered.

1942

Defence Regulation 62A
Gave power to requisition land for allotments.

'Dig for Victory' scheme drew on successes of WWI and SOF scheme. Growing food was of utmost importance.

By the end of the war there were 1.75 million allotments. Sadly like after WWI many were swiftly lost despite continued rationing and 'Dig for Plenty'

Inquiry begins 1965 due to concern about allotments. Thorpe report published 1969 with 54 recommendations but is largely ignored.

During late 50s and 60s as economic situation improved there was less demand for allotments. Many sites lost to development e.g. housing

In 1965 Birmingham had 10,931 plots but many were described in The Sunday Mercury as 'quite definitely idle'.

1970

In 1980 Margaret Thatcher tries to repeal Section 8 of the 1925 Act which protects statutory allotment sites, but fortunately is unsuccessful.

Allotments briefly increased in popularity around 1975 due to high inflation but then decline in 1980s and 90s. Long term future uncertain and many sites lost.

Although Birmingham plot holders had disagreed with some of Thorpe's ideas in 1969, including the loss of individual huts, he went on to create several successful model 'leisure garden' sites

2000

By 21st century allotments see a huge resurgence - helped by poor economy & sustainability awareness.