

Institution: University of Reading
Unit of Assessment: 30 History
Title of case study: Breaking new ground in allotment history
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Allotments are a subject of wide ranging historical interest and significance, now boosted by a renewed enthusiasm for their use in current times of economic difficulty and environmental awareness. Research by Jeremy Burchardt, University of Reading, into the history of allotments, in itself offering a ground-breaking academic perspective on a marginalised 'popular' history subject, led a number of individuals and organisations from outside academic life to take up work on the history of allotments. Most notably, it prompted the Family and Community Historical Research Society (FACHRS) to launch a major nationwide project, resulting in a book (<i>Breaking New Ground</i>) jointly edited by Burchardt, and an accompanying database. Together these resources have provided an extensive reference source for further investigations by individuals and groups of local historians and allotment associations. With the interest in the general and specific histories of allotments continuing, Burchardt's work and that emanating from it has provided a rich resource and starting point for numerous further enquiries.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Between 1992 and 2002, Jeremy Burchardt (Lecturer, 1997-) undertook research into the Allotment Movement in England, 1793-1873. The research resulted in a book of the same name (2002) and comprised the first serious investigation of a previously neglected topic. Burchardt's book played a central role in the rehabilitation of allotments, building on the sociological work of David Crouch and Colin Ward (1988). Through in-depth study of 19th century gardening and land-related periodicals, newspapers and official papers, and the construction of a database of 1,973 allotment sites with extant data, Burchardt demonstrated that in rural southern England, allotment provision had been a critical counterweight to declining living standards in the first half of the 19th century as a result of high population growth, changing agricultural practices, enclosure and the decline of rural industries. This was the first substantial scholarly account and systematic analysis of the early 19th century allotment movement, providing new data on its chronology and on the number, geographical distribution, size, rents, cultivation and yields of allotments and their effect on living standards. The research demonstrated how the movement brought the culture of the rural labouring poor more closely into line with the mainstream values of respectable mid-Victorian England, and cast new light on central aspects of 19th century social and economic history. The book 'rescue[d] allotments from their positions at the margins of historical inquiry' (<i>Landscape History</i>). It opened to scrutiny a facet of 19th century life with much wider repercussions for the understanding of rural and social history in the period as well as specifically for the history of the allotment movement and made 'a compelling case for locating allotments at the heart of the narrative of mid-nineteenth century social progress and stability' (<i>Agricultural History Review</i>).</p>
<p>3. References to the research</p> <p>Burchardt, J. Rural Social Relations, 1830-50: Opposition to Allotments for Labourers, <i>Agricultural History Review</i>, 45 (2), 1997, 165-75; URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/40275163</p> <p>Burchardt, J. Land and the Laborer: Potato grounds and Allotments in Nineteenth-century Southern England. <i>Agricultural History</i>, 74 (2), 2000, 667-684; URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3745216</p> <p>Burchardt, J. Land, Labour and Politics: Parliament and Allotment Provision, 1830-70. In: Wordie, J.R. (ed.), <i>Agriculture and Politics in England, 1815-1939</i>. London: Macmillan, 2000, 98-127; DOI: 10.1057/9780230514775</p> <p>Burchardt, J. and Cooper, J., eds, <i>Breaking new ground: nineteenth century allotments from local sources</i>, FACHRS Publications, Milton Keynes, 2010, ix + 272 pp</p> <p>Burchardt, J. <i>The allotment movement in England, 1793-1873</i>, Royal Historical Society/Boydell and Brewer, Woodbridge, 2002, xii + 287 pp. Reprinted in paperback, 2011</p>

Internal peer review has shown that the publications are of at least 2* quality

4. Details of the impact

Burchardt's research had taken a 'popular' topic into the academic world for serious scholarly analysis. As a result, his 2002 book struck a chord with a wider audience at a time of revived interest in allotments and in a historical issue close to people's sense of identity and everyday lives. The publishers regarded it as a model of how to reach out beyond academia while retaining academic rigour. It achieved a wide public readership and has consistently generated dialogue with a broad public before and throughout the REF period. Indeed, demand for greater access to the publication by a non-academic audience led to the release of a paperback edition in 2011. For most of the second half of the 20th century, allotments were marginal in every sense. Their numbers were in decline, economists and policy makers regarded them as a wasteful use of high-value urban land, while architects, planners and some sections of the public saw them as an untidy eyesore. Although they were still valued by hundreds of thousands of mainly working-class families across the country, these people lacked voice, leadership and recognition.

Primary impacts

The main impact arising from this research and publication happened in two phases. Firstly, the research led to a nationwide project led by amateur historians inspired by Burchardt's work, and to a related book and database. These resources were in turn a vehicle for a second phase of impact. In 2003 a group of amateur historians in the FACHRS requested Burchardt's help with a volunteer-led investigation into the history of allotments. The project ran from 2003 until 2010, with the aim of extending Burchardt's research into areas of more explicit popular interest and use, to deepen and broaden understanding of allotment history through detailed local history research and to foster awareness of allotments as a part of the heritage of local communities.

Complementing the broad national framework provided by *The Allotment Movement in England*, the project investigated the history of thousands of local allotment sites and established detailed contextual information about allotment holders. A team of over 30 volunteers collected data on a systematic, county-by-county basis, with the aim of identifying as many allotments as possible and recording key information such as parish, county, date of record, date site established, name and status of landlord, number of plots, acreage and rent. As academic advisor, Burchardt liaised with the volunteers, assisting with interim reports and newsletters, giving talks, and both directing and supporting lines of enquiry. For example, he asked the researchers to look particularly carefully for tenant lists and other documents that shed light on the attributes of 19th century allotment holders, to gain a better understanding of who rented allotments and why and to reconnect allotment history with local communities and heritage.

The Allotment Movement in England provided not only the initial inspiration for the FACHRS project but also its intellectual underpinning. The project adopted the same time span (1793-1873) in order that its findings should complement the earlier work and used the arguments developed in Burchardt's book as an interpretative framework. This approach helped elucidate aspects which the FACHRS volunteers might otherwise have found baffling or discouraging – the role of national organisations such as the Labourer's Friend, the significance of spade husbandry, or the causes and nature of opposition to allotments, for example. Most of the questions the FACHRS researchers set out to answer also derived from *The Allotment Movement in England* and its core methodology (e.g. the standardisation of allotment site data drawn from numerous sources) was directly adopted to ensure consistency and complementarity between the two projects.

The project culminated in 2010 with the publication of *Breaking New Ground*, jointly edited by Burchardt and Cooper. The book reveals that allotments were numerous and widespread, cherished not only by agricultural labourers, but also by tradesmen, artisans and industrial workers; they were not just, as professional historians had hitherto assumed, a means of alleviating poverty, but a central institution of Victorian village life. It also brings little-explored aspects of allotment history under the spotlight, including the moral dimension of allotment rules, the complex links between allotments and popular protest, the interventions of paternalistic employers and the people's desire for allotments to replace lost rights of common. In the words of the preface, the framework presented by Burchardt's own research and subsequently by the FACHRS has 'fostered a comparative approach, sustained and extended the enthusiasm and expertise of the participants, and resulted in valuable collective contributions to important historical themes'. Thus,

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contributors to the research and the writing of *Breaking New Ground* in their turn made a serious contribution to an under-researched historical subject. The publishers believed the book would 'surely encourage more existing and budding historians to continue to grow their own history, with the valuable help and encouragement of scholars like Jeremy Burchardt and Jacqueline Cooper' and this has clearly proven to be the case.

The book was accompanied by a database, by far the most comprehensive yet published, containing records of over 3,000 allotment sites and nearly 1,000 allotment tenants. This resource gives local, family and community historians a starting point for further investigation and allows them to place their own findings in a comparative context. Collectively, these resources – for which Burchardt's original research was the cornerstone – have opened up a view on the history of allotments from the local rather than national perspective and therefore complement his work to create a rich picture of interest to audiences within and beyond academia.

Both *The Allotment Movement in England* and *Breaking New Ground* have engendered further public interest, including requests for and donations of further information, demonstrating the continued vitality of interest in this history among allotment holders and providers. They have also provided an unprecedented resource for research into aspects of allotment history and other individual and social histories of which allotments were a part.

Secondary impacts

In addition to these major impacts, the broader public impact deriving from Burchardt's original research can be described under three headings:

(i) *Fostering public knowledge of, interest in and research into the history of allotments*

Following the publication of his book, Burchardt began to receive requests for information and advice from members of the public across the UK. These were further stimulated by the publication of *Breaking New Ground* in 2010. Well over a hundred inquiries have been received and answered since 2008 (as well as many before the REF period) and talks given to many local history societies, allotment associations and gardening clubs. Such contacts often encouraged individuals to undertake research into the history of their local allotments and sometimes allotment and gardening history in a wider sense, making use of sources (e.g. the Labourer's Friend Magazine; local newspapers) and methods (e.g. linking tenant lists with the census) pioneered by Burchardt. A number of books published by non-academics on the history of allotments and gardening in recent years have made major use of Burchardt's work, including Twigs Ways' *Allotments* (Shire Library, 2008) and Margaret Wiles' *Working-class Gardening in Nineteenth-Century England* (Yale, forthcoming). Sometimes the impact of Burchardt's research was more personal, connecting individuals with hitherto unknown aspects of their family history, as in the case of a descendant of James Orange (a pioneering advocate of allotments in the mid-nineteenth century), who wrote to Burchardt in July 2008 that she had 'never heard of James Orange before reading your book, so thanks for introducing me to this interesting relative'.

(ii) *Raising awareness of allotments as heritage*

Prior to the publication of *The Allotment Movement in England*, there was little awareness of allotments as a part of local heritage. By giving allotments an in-depth historical grounding, Burchardt's work played an important role in the emergence of allotments as heritage in the early 21st century, as at Great Somerford in Wiltshire, perhaps the oldest surviving allotment site. Burchardt had drawn attention to this previously little-known site, emphasising its historic significance and the pioneering work of the man who created them, Revd Stephen Demainbray. Burchardt also gave a talk about Great Somerford and allotments in Wiltshire to the Wiltshire Local History Forum in 2005. The book and the talk helped to raise local awareness of the county's allotment heritage and, in particular, the role of Great Somerford and of Demainbray. This led Jill Shearer, a local allotment holder, to write a popular history of the Somerford allotments, *The Poor Man's Best Friend* (2009) drawing both on *The Allotment Movement in England* and on subsequent input from Burchardt. New commemorative signs were put up in the village and the bicentenary of the allotments the same year attracted considerable media attention, including articles in the Daily Telegraph, Sun, Metro, and Gardeners World and a special programme of BBC Gardeners Question Time broadcast from nearby Malmesbury on 29 June 2010.

As a result of greater awareness of the history of allotments and town gardens, they are

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increasingly being listed by English Heritage, a recent example being at Bagthorpe Gardens, Hucknall Road, Nottingham (2012). Discussions drawing on evidence presented in Burchardt's publications have led senior landscape advisors at English Heritage to conclude that allotments deserve greater protection and should be included within the next National Heritage Protection Plan. Local authorities are also showing increasing sensitivity to allotments heritage (e.g. Wandsworth Borough Council contacted Burchardt for advice in March 2013, leading them to promote allotment heritage locally).

Burchardt has been frequently contacted by journalists seeking advice about allotment history. Examples include BBC Radio 4's 'Laurence Llewellyn Bowen's Escape to the Countryside' (interviewed February 2010) and BBC1's 'Britain and the First World War' (consulted September 2012). The broadening understanding that allotments are an important part of popular heritage has also led artists to engage with allotments; among those who have drawn on Burchardt's work are Maggie Durkin (Exeter) and Kate Corder (Reading). In Corder's case, the research enabled her to situate her practice-based allotment art project, motivated by environmental concerns, in the context of the long history of self-sufficiency and sustainable local food production on allotments.

(iii) Safeguarding allotments from development

Rising interest in allotment history and heritage has coincided with a period in which allotment land is under acute threat of development for housing and other uses. On the basis of his work, several sites at risk of development have consulted Burchardt, including Kings Hill (West Malling, Kent), St Stephen's (Bath), Skimmingdish (Oxon), Chinnor (Bucks) and, most recently, Waterman's Allotments (Henley-on-Thames, October 2012). In four of these five cases, the allotments were, at the time of writing, retained. Arguments drawn from the two books and the FAHCRS database contributed to the success of the allotment associations in question in defending their land, through helping to establish the date of origin, original purpose or legal status of the sites.

In summary, Burchardt's research on allotments has had a wide, varied and ongoing public impact. It has fostered awareness and understanding of allotments as a facet of community heritage, enabled and encouraged local historians to research allotments, and helped to protect allotment land from being built over. These impacts allow Burchardt's work to speak directly to the concerns and interests of the wider public, while retaining its scholarly integrity.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Corroborating letters have been received from the individuals below and are available upon request.

Editorial Director, Boydell and Brewer Ltd (Underlines positive reception of *The Allotment Movement in England*, its impact on a wider public audience beyond the academy and publisher's view that the book was an exemplary success from a marketing perspective.)

Former Co-ordinator, Allotment Project, Family and Community Historical Research Society (Demonstrates the key role of *The Allotment Movement in England* in the FACHRS Allotments Project. Shows Dr Burchardt's research provided the conceptual framework and methodological underpinning for the project.)

Secretary, Aldeburgh Allotments and Gardening Association (Demonstrates influence of *Breaking New Ground* on allotment holders and confirms positive impact of talk given to Aldeburgh Gardening Club.)

Senior Landscape Advisor, English Heritage (Highlights that Dr Burchardt's research convinced a senior landscape advisor at English Heritage that Great Somerford and other historic allotment sites were worthy of registration/protection and that allotments should be included in the next National Heritage Protection Plan.)

Strategy and Information Officer, Parks Development Team, Wandsworth Borough Council (Shows that *The Allotment Movement in England* influenced local government officials.)