5 WHAT IS AN ALLOTMENT?

It is not easy to define what an allotment or “The Allotment” is.

There is the dictionary definition. An allotment is, according to the Concise Oxford English Dictionary, “a plot of land rented by an individual from a local authority for growing vegetables or flowers” (1). Of course not all allotments are rented from local authorities, however the majority are.

There is the legal definition. Section 22 of the Allotments Act 1922 has the following definition of “an allotment garden” as ‘an allotment not exceeding forty poles in extent which is mainly cultivated by the occupier for the production of vegetables and fruit crops for consumption by himself or his family’(2). A rod is an old but persistent measurement of just over 5 metres (a cricket pitch is 4 rods in length). A “full plot” in Reading is 10 square rods, 250 square metres approximately. My allotment is a half plot of 125 square metres.

More considered, Burchardt defines an allotment as “a plot of land, not attached to a house, in a field divided into similar plots, surrounded by a common external fence but without internal partitions.” (3). Although the definition must be treated in the context of the scope of the timeline for his book (1793-1873), I like this definition because the communality that it acknowledges is very apparent when you visit allotment sites, also the privacy and separation from the rest of the world. It is a sign of the times that some modern day allotments do have additional security around individual plots. As with many things on allotments though, a prevailing style for the site emerges which I do not believe arises solely out of necessity.

Then there is the practical definition, more of which in a later chapter – what can I do on my plot?


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