

ALLOTMENTS AT WAR : FIRST WORLD WAR

During the First World War, German submarines attacked merchant ships carrying food supplies to Britain. By 1917, the country was facing a critical food shortage.



In response, the government encouraged people to start growing their own food. This movement was known as the 'Garden Front'. King George V even turned the flower beds outside Buckingham Palace into vegetable patches.

The Garden Front was a success and the number of allotments and vegetable patches trebled from 450,000 to 1.5 million. However, in Surbiton, the Council was reluctant to allow its recreation grounds to be dug up and used as allotments. Instead, they tried to convince local landowners to give up parts of their lands, but many simply refused.

After the War, a national scheme was launched to give plots to returning soldiers. The economic depression of the 1920s hit hard. As a result, many people continued to rely on allotments as a stable food source in peacetime.



SECOND WORLD WAR

Sadly, it was not long before Europe was back on the brink of war. Plans were made for food rationing and the campaign to grow food at home started again. The government wanted to ensure potential recruits were healthy and the population at home was well fed.

The government gave permission for local councils to take over unoccupied land and open up temporary allotments wherever possible. This time, Surbiton jumped into action. A town meeting was held in September 1939 and the council agreed to search the Borough for possible new allotment sites immediately. Many residents were eager to offer up their land to help. For example, Miss

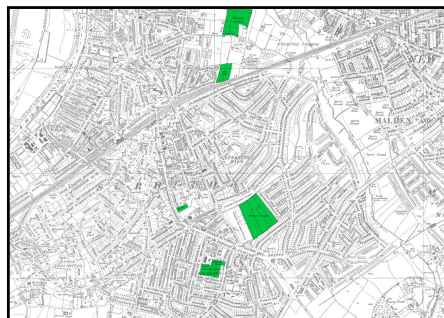
Wilson, who owned land behind Woodlands Road, stated *'I feel I should like to do something to help the Nation...'* The council also started targeting the gardens of unoccupied houses. By the end of the War the Borough had 1,689 allotment plots.



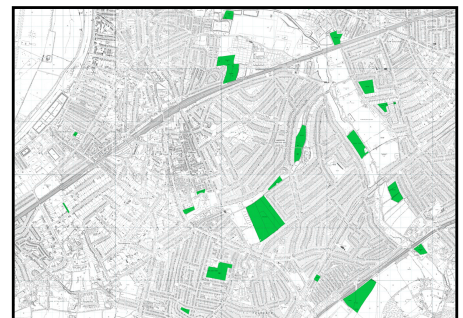
The government sought to encourage people to use these new allotments – as well as their own gardens – to grow vegetables to increase the food supply. The campaign became known as the 'dig for victory' campaign. Dig for Victory aimed to provide support for growers through official pamphlets, local talks and encouragement in newspapers.



Surrey Comet Newspaper in 1941



Allotments in Surbiton 1940



Allotments in Surbiton 1950



The Surbiton resident who made the biggest contribution was probably Mr Middleton of Princes Avenue. Middleton was a keen gardener and had trained at Kew Gardens. During The Second World War, he presented a BBC radio programme giving people tips on how best to grow their own vegetables. Listeners loved his informal presenting style, as he always spoke to them as if they were friends. The government approved and used him as the star in several official 'Dig for Victory' films.